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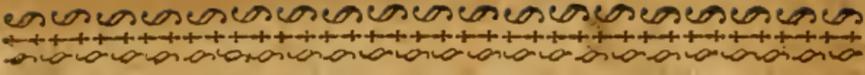
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DEDICATION.



TO THE PEOPLE of my Pastoral Charge—
The following discourses are most affectionately dedicated. I account it a happiness to contribute to your establishment in the truth—to unfold to you the great principles, duties, and Institutions of the Christian Religion—to defend them against such as may rise up and deny them—and to lead you and your children in the right way of the Lord.

I CAN bear you witness, that when these discourses were delivered, you afforded an uncommon attention. You have been very solicitous to have them made public, for your own instruction and benefit; and for the use and benefit of your children, when you shall be gathered to the great Congregation of the dead. They contain not the DISPUTED PECULIARITIES of a party, but the grand principles and truths of our common Christianity, held sacred by our CHURCHES in this Land, and by THE WHOLE PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN WORLD, as appears clearly from all THEIR PUBLIC CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS OF TRUTH.

THEY are published, as you will easily recollect, nearly word for word, as they were delivered. *Particular reasons* have induced me to

do this. In one discourse only is there a deviation from the original form ; *that* on the Apostle's caution *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines*, or the danger of instability, and pernicious tendency of error. What was merely local is omitted, but the sentiments in substance are carefully retained.

MANY learned and judicious Characters, both of the Clergy and Laity, have urged to the publication of THESE DISCOURSES, as being *peculiarly* adapted to the day in which we live, and the state of Religion in our nation : as *calculated* for, and greatly *needed* in Christian Families ; there being no such series of discourses to be found in any Volume already published. The design of them is to convince such as need conviction—to reclaim such as may be wandering into error—to confirm the wavering—to console the Christian,—and to exhibit to all ; some of the important, essential practical principles of pure and undefiled Religion.—It is only necessary to add—My prayer to God is, that they may, by his divine blessing, be the means of preventing the spread of error and irreligion, and of reviving the decaying interest of piety and holiness, which can only be revived and supported by a more strict and conscientious regard to

ALL DIVINE INSTITUTIONS.

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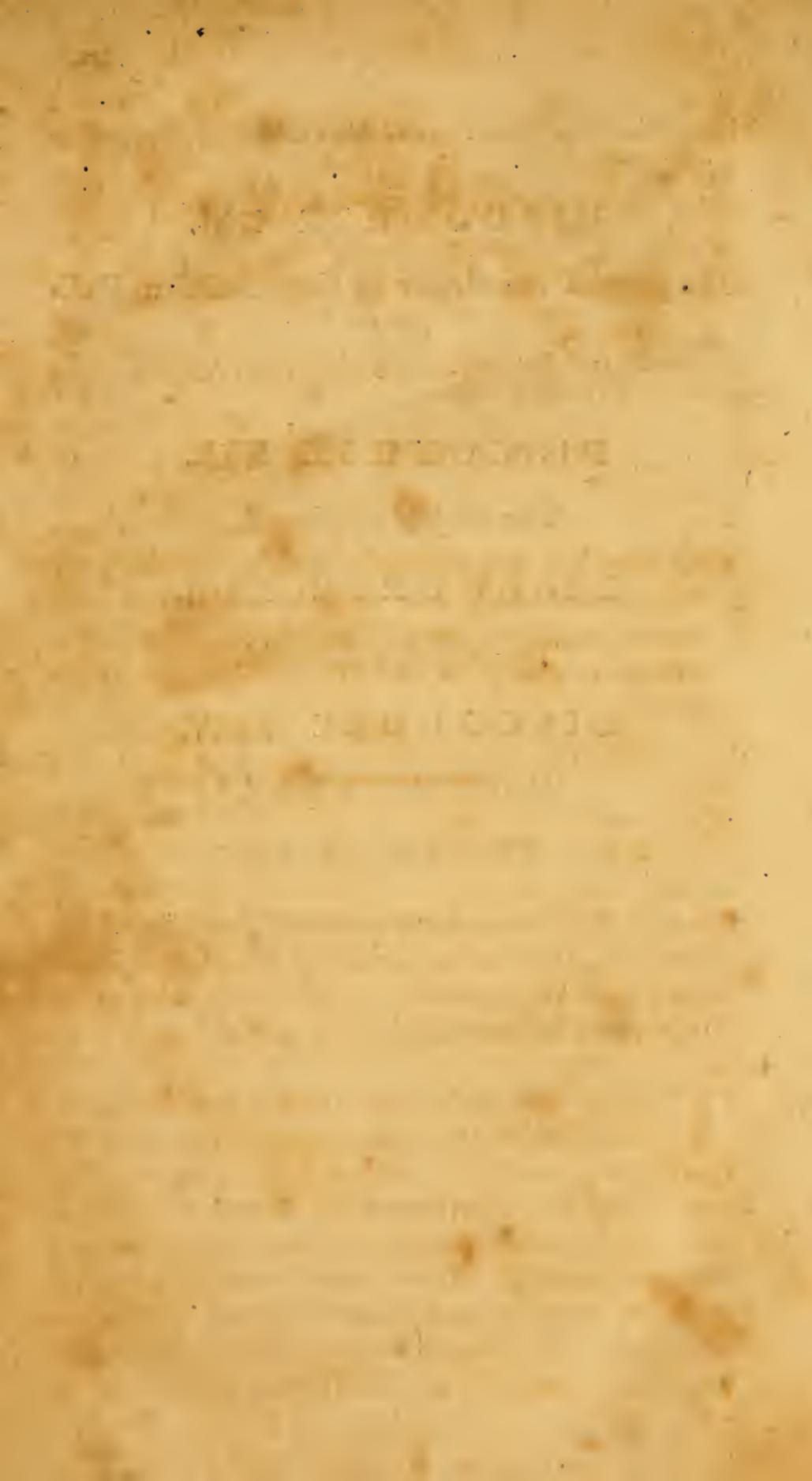
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DISCOURSE I.

That man has no principle within himself, by whatever name it may be called, which is adequate to all the purposes of his Salvation, or a sufficient guide in matters of faith and practice.

EPHES. II. 12.

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

THESSE words describe the state of the Ephesian Christians, who, before the glorious Gospel was preached among, and, through efficacious grace, embraced by them, were Gentiles. Like other pagan nations, they were professed Idolaters. They were worshippers, we are told, of the great Goddess Diana. *But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice, about the space of two hours cried out, Great is*

Diana of the Ephesians.—And when the town-clerk had appeased the people, he said, ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great Goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? But they were not further removed from the true knowledge of the only right object of all religious homage and praise, or more depraved in heart, than the heathen world, at large. They were, says the Apostle, *dead in trespasses and sins.* This was their state before renewing grace had quickened them, and made them alive to God and virtue, to holiness and happiness. What is here affirmed of them, no one will dispute, is equally applicable to, and equally true of all mankind, in all ages and nations, before enlightened by a divine revelation and sanctified by the power of divine grace. For all the human race, throughout the world, are alike in this respect, as destitute by nature of the principles of holiness. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—one and another. They are all, before interested in a Redeemer and sprinkled with his precious blood, without hope and without God in the world. They are *aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the Covenants of promise.* As long as they are without Christ, they have no part nor lot in salvation. For without him, the great evangelical maxim is, there is no salvation. His name is the only one given under heaven among men, whereby we can attain to felicity, be pardoned as to our sins, or justified as to our persons. No man can come to the father without him. *Whosoever denieth the son, the same hath not the father: but he that acknowledgeth the son, hath the Father also.*—

WHAT is intended, in the subsequent discourse, is to prove that the world of mankind, merely by their own reason and wisdom, cannot attain to a saving knowledge of God: or that man has no principle within himself, antecedent to divine grace operating on the heart, which is adequate to all the purposes of his salvation, by whatever name it may be called.—

THAT we may do justice, as far as we are able, to this great and important subject, we will attempt to show—

I. How far, the light of reason, without a celestial guide, can go, in things of a religious and moral nature.—And—

II. POINT out its insufficiency, in those respects, which are not only very important, but altogether necessary.—

I. THE first thing proposed, is to attempt to show how far the light of reason, without a divine Revelation, can go, in things of a religious and moral nature. If the state and character of mankind, in regard to Religion, shall, in what may be now offered, be placed in a new, or at least different light from what they are usually, when the great and utter depravation of the human heart is intended to be described, it is hoped it will not be less useful. Certainly an attempt to investigate such a subject as is now before us is worthy of peculiar attention. The proper study of mankind is man. Among all the enquiries, in which the wise and reflecting have engaged, that of discovering how far reason, of itself, without any supernatural assistances, can carry us, in regard to the concerns of our true

and spiritual happiness, must be deemed one of the most highly interesting.—

WHILE mankind are without Christ, they are *aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the Covenants of promise*; they are strangers to all saving blessings, and have no interest in them. They have no good grounds upon which to expect the favour of the supreme being, the pardon of Sin in this, or happiness in another world. If without hope, they are in a lost and perishing situation. They have nothing within them, let it be called by whatever name it may, which can ensure this eternal peace and salvation. To assert or pretend that they have any principle of real holiness, however small a spark it may be considered, is to assert that they have some hope from what is within themselves,—Some ground to hope for life eternal: then, this being the case, they are not aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel or strangers from the Covenants of promise. For, if while without Christ, they are all, without exception, aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the Covenants of promise, they must be *without hope*, or in a lost and desperate state. To be *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the Covenants of promise* is, according to the very meaning of the expressions, and the opinion of expositors, to have no lot or part, more or less, in any assignable degree, in the peculiar blessings and spiritual privileges of God's own people and servants. Before renewed by saving grace, all men, without one exception, are *without Christ*. They are without hope. And to be without hope in and from ourselves, is to be in a lost and desperate state in and of ourselves. It is added,

they are also, *without God in the world*. And to be *without God in the world*, is to be without an interest in his special favour—without a saving knowledge of him—and of course, without any title to his kingdom when they shall be removed from time into Eternity. To be *without Christ in the world*, is to have no interest in the saving blessings of his Gospel and purchase. The severest critic cannot charge me with having extended, beyond just bounds, the meaning of the text.

THIS, then, is the real state of all mankind, wherever they may dwell, or to whatever nation they may belong, or whatever notions to the contrary, they may imbibe, while un sanctified by efficacious grace, *aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*.—A more wretched and forlorn condition can hardly be imagined. They are dead in trespasses and sins. They are destitute of the principles of true holiness, or the power of spiritual life.—Like the inanimate lifeless body—held in the sleep of death, they are without any motions of spiritual life towards God or heavenly glories.—If they had any measure or degree of a really holy temper, or spiritual life, it would, we may fairly presume, never be lost, or extinguished, but be preserved until the day of Christ, when all will be rewarded according to their character and works.

PERHAPS, no one doctrine is so much, and so often insisted upon, in sacred Writ, as the perishing condition of sinners. And, there is no one, most certainly, that has been so much de-

nied, or that is so humiliating. It directly militates against our natural pride, and those high notions of our dignity, of which we are so apt to boast.—A patient and candid hearing is therefore requested.—There can be but two notions of our state before renewed by saving grace: *one* is that we have no really holy principle of spiritual life, in any degree, however small; and the *other* that we have. All the various ideas and ways of representing our condition before regeneration, which have been adopted by different writers or sects, are resolvable into one, or the other of these. And, that the scripture is most clear and abundant, in the proof, that we are altogether destitute, as we are by nature, of the true principles of holiness or of spiritual life, no one who impartially weighs what it offers, can, it is conceived, call in question. No words are more full than these, *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

THE reason why any reject altogether the Gospel, or reproach it as a mere fiction, is because they believe that the light of natural reason or conscience is entirely adequate to the purposes of discovering our duty, in its full extent, and guiding us safe to happiness.—And the reason, also, why others, who profess to believe it, have swerved so far from its pure doctrines, is a disbelief of the lost condition of man, or his being wholly under the power and dominion of sin.—Though it be acknowledged, that the world of mankind cannot, by mere natural reason and wisdom, attain to a true and saving knowledge

of God ; yet it may be very useful to enquire how far the light of nature can go.—And, we readily allow, that the light of nature and common reason may teach us some things concerning the being of God. That he doth exist, the whole universe is a clear demonstration. Sun, moon and stars declare that the hand which made them is divine. Every thing around us, and above us lead us to the Creator. The dawning and dying light equally proclaim the divine existence. Let a man but reason on the nature of cause and effect, and he cannot withhold his assent from this proposition, there doth exist some great intelligent cause of all things, both in the natural and moral world. Indeed, after opening our eyes on the beauties of Creation, it is an infinitely greater absurdity not to believe in the divine existence, than not to believe our own. In reason's ear, all nature from the highest to the lowest, cries aloud that there is a God. *Because 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.*—The Psalmist hath a most lofty and sublime passage to the same effect: *The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament sheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their light is gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.* It seems impossible for any, in the exercise of reason, to deny the being of a God ; and of course, none can have any valid

excuse for refusing to admit this first principle of all religion. The very frame of our bodies—the structure of the human mind—the curious and exquisite formation of every animal or insect cannot fail to convince us, that there doth exist an Almighty Creator. *Every house is built by some man, but he that built all things is God.* The worlds rolling on high—the wonderful revolution—the grandeur,—the distance,—the size of the heavenly bodies—the beautifully variegated canopy of heaven, which cannot but please and astonish us, when we open our eyes to behold it, prove, beyond all contradiction, that there is a God. The light of reason is sufficient to teach us, then, the divine existence. Accordingly we find that God never sent a messenger to declare or reveal this to us; or would have a miracle wrought to establish it.—*And there is none but the fool in his heart can say there is no God.* If any men claiming to be philosophers have been found to be speculative atheists, it is owing to their having perverted reason, by their sophistical arguments, and metaphysical reveries. If barbarous nations and tribes of men have been discovered, in remote parts of the world, where it appeared that they had no idea, at all, of a supreme being, it is to be ascribed not to the insufficiency of nature's light, but to their stupid inattention to that light.

2. THE light of reason is sufficient to give all mankind some knowledge of *some* of the attributes of the divine nature. The heathen world may know from the things that are, the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Deity. If natural reason can discover the being of God, by its

own researches, it can also, discover some of the attributes of his being; such as his Almighty power, infinite wisdom and boundless goodness. The very idea of a divine existence implies, a glorious existence—a necessary and eternal existence. It seems to be a clear dictate of reason that if he exist at all, he must exist, in such a manner, as no other being doth or can, by an absolute necessity of nature: that he must be omnipresent—or every where, at one and the same time: be excluded from, and confined to no space. Reason teaches that he inhabits the infinitude of space.—If he be the first cause and Maker of all things, HE must be independent, al sufficient and uncontrollable; he must be infinitely the greatest of all beings. Plato, a heathen philosopher who has uttered more wise and just sayings about the nature of the Supreme Being than any one of the antient sages, speaking of the divine omnipresence, or ubiquity of the Godhead, says, he is, “a Circle whose centre is every where, and whose circumference is no where.” That he must be omniscient, or possessed of infinite knowledge, is a necessary consequence of his omnipresence.—And reason is likewise able to prove his Eternity. For if he made all things, he must be before all, and above all,—that is, must be eternal. Hence we find the greatest Lights in the pagan world, when they are speaking of their celestial Divinities, use the epithets *eternal—immortal—omnipotent*. This is a full proof that reason teaches man, if duly improved, that eternity, almighty power, and wisdom were some of the perfections of God. And the incomprehensibility of these attributes is no evidence that reason does not discover them

to be perfections of the divine existence. Far exalted, indeed, above all finite comprehension is the self-existent—necessarily existent—independent—all-sufficient—omnipresent God. All nature is but a temple made by him, and filled with his presence. Heaven is his throne, and the earth his footstool. His power is infinite. Wherever we turn our eyes, we cannot help beholding the displays of it. The heavens declare its glory. All things, in Creation and Providence, speak forth its greatness.—Enough may be seen, in the occurrences of human life, to satisfy all men, even where the light of the Gospel has never shined, that the Deity bears long with his creatures; and that he rules, in his divine greatness and majesty, among the nations. They cannot, if they only exercise, in a proper manner their rational faculties, but know, that he is their preserver, and the benefactor of the world, who dispenses his favors, with a liberal hand, to all men. Accordingly the Apostle Paul, when the Priests of Jupiter, at the City of Lystra, would have done sacrifice, or paid divine honours to him and Barnabas, as DIVINITIES, supposing that the Gods were come down in the likeness of men, bid them desist, and told them who alone was the PROPER OBJECT of religious homage; and, that, in the course of his Providence, he had given sufficient tokens of his preserving care and bounty: saying, *sirs, why do you these things? we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God which made heaven, and earth, and the Sea, and all things that are therein. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without a*

witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

3. THE light of reason, and conscience, which last, all mankind have, and which, also, is essential to moral agency and accountableness to God, farther teaches all men that *worship* and *obedience* are due from the Creature to the Creator. Every rational creature, throughout all worlds, is indispensibly bound by the very laws of his existence, to pay reverence and honour, worship and fear, gratitude and obedience to the author of the Universe. If reason can only once discover that there doth exist an almighty, first, intelligent Cause of all things—and that he is possessed of such attributes as wisdom, goodness, omnipresence and omniscience, its voice will call all men to pay divine honours to this great, eternal, almighty Being. It will inform us, that such perfections as inhere in his nature, necessarily claim from all men, homage and submission. Had we no divine revelation, or suppose God never gave one to man, at all, but had left him to the mere light of his own mind to find out the paths of duty and of felicity, we should be indispensibly obliged to pay honor and homage to the ruler of the world. If we can prove that he made us, and is the Creator of all things, we can, also, prove that we ought to fear, reverence and worship him. That the Maker of the world, the Father of our spirits and former of our bodies, deserves our grateful acknowledgements and devout adorations, is one of the most obvious dictates of reason. Before we can deny this, we must have perverted our reason, or shut our

eyes upon a very plain truth. We can prove, from reason, the obligation to pay divine honours to God, as clearly as we can the duty of justice between man and man—the offices of humanity—and kindness—or any part of morality. And, by similar arguments. Our obligations to moral Virtue—to do justly and and love mercy, to speak the truth and to relieve distress, result from the relation we stand in, towards each other. Man bears such a relation to man that he is bound to be just, faithful, tender-hearted:—to mitigate the grief which he beholds, if in his power, and to advance the welfare of society. We are all brethren. We had our beings from one divine Author. We participate of the same common nature. We are exposed to the same calamities, and are Candidates for an endless existence, beyond the grave. We are, therefore, bound, by our very make and station, in the universe of the Almighty, to certain moral duties to each other. These moral duties cannot be omitted or violated without high criminality. Our obligations to pay divine homage to God, in the same manner, result from the relations in which we, as rational Creatures, stand, towards him, the greatest and best of all beings. He is our Creator—our Preserver—our Benefactor. He is the sovereign Lord, legislator, all-wise disposer, and proprietor of the world. *The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.* As HE bears such relations, reason, by its own exertions, without any foreign assistance, teaches all men to revere—to trust in—and to pay divine worship to him. To render unto God the things that belong to him, is as much an exercise of justice, as to render un-

to man the things that belong to him. A system of morals which excludes the worship of the Deity, or the duties which we owe him, is as essentially defective and as repugnant to reason, as if it excluded all the duties of the social life, or which man owes to man.—Agreeably to this, we find all the pagan world, who admitted the being of a God, paying divine honours, of some kind, to their fancied Divinities. Their mistaking in the OBJECT of worship and the MANNER, does not weaken the force of the argument. It only proves the absolute need of a divine Revelation to instruct us, in the alone proper object of all religious adoration and praise, the one living and true God, and the manner in which we may acceptably serve him. Almost all the writers of pagan antiquity, who have come down to us, and have not been buried in the rubbish of time, in some part of their writings, either speak of, or recommend worship to their Gods—or the divinities acknowledged, in the respective Countries where they lived. This all know who have read them. I shall mention but one particular instance, and that is of a Prince famed for his greatness and amiable virtues; Xenophon informs us, that what Cyrus the *great* preferred before all other things was the worship of the Gods. Upon this, therefore, he thought himself obliged to bestow his first and principal care. He began by establishing a number of Magi, to sing daily a morning service of praise to the honour of the Gods, and to offer sacrifices, which was daily practised among the Persians to succeeding ages.—

That natural reason, or the very nature of things, points out the obligations of divine hom-

age, is plain from the appeal made by the supreme Being, in the following words; *a son honoureth his father, and a servant his master, If then I be a Father, where is mine honour? And if I be a Master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts.*—The anxious enquiry of the awakened conscience is, *wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oyl? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* The solicitude is not whether the rational creature ought to worship and serve the Deity; but how he is acceptably to worship and serve him; in what manner he will be worshipped. And, here, as will be soon proved, natural reason fails us. It cannot teach us the way, in which we are to worship and serve God.

4. The light of reason and the conscience of mankind, moreover, give *some* faint and glimmering prospect of a future state. Conscience and reason are different faculties and powers. Conscience is that moral reflecting power in the soul, that respects right and wrong, good and evil; or it is the moral sense; or a sense of right and wrong. That all mankind have this sense, unless by a long course of sinning and perverse reasoning, they have stupified it, no one ever did deny, or dispute; or can dispute, when he either inspects the operations of his own mind, or recollects that Christ is represented as the *true Light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* He, as Creator, has given to every man

the light of reason and conscience; otherwise man could not be a moral agent, or accountable creature, any more than the brutal world. And, that the heathen have this light of Conscience, the Apostle to the Romans expressly declares. *And when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the works of the law written in their hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* All men have, and must have a Conscience; a sense of right and wrong in moral things; an accuser when they do evil, and an excuser when they do well.—*If thou do well, shalt thou not be accepted? Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* Now this Conscience points out an hereafter to man. There is some thing in the Soul that always looks forward to another state of existence, and upward to a superior power, conscious of his avenging arm when we do evil, knowingly and habitually—feeling that all its exercises and most secret movements are open to an omniscient eye: That there will be an hereafter, a world of retribution is the voice of nature.—

THE light of reason, or the knowledge, which we may attain by the exercise of our reasoning faculties, gives all men some feeble and distant glimmerings of another life, after this, where the good will be rewarded, and the wicked punished. Man seems to wish to exist longer, and still longer. He cherishes the fond desire of immortality. He shrinks back from the bare thought of annihilation. NOT TO BE is an idea

indescribably painful. But, without a divine revelation, reason only, as it were, casts a wishful glance over into another world.—It is matter of fact, that the wisest and best among the learned Greeks and Romans rather hoped, than believed, that there will be a future state—Cicero, the prince of Roman Eloquence, who was at once an orator, a moralist, a philosopher, and theologian, in one of his learned works, sums up all that the most celebrated philosophers of his own time, and earlier days, had said or written on the grand subject of the immortality of the soul. He, in a lengthy dialogue, ingeniously exhibits all that the philosophers had said for, or against it. And, he closes all, with this remarkable saying, “that he rather hoped than believed, that there was another state of being after this.”—Reason, then, only conjectures about an Eternity. But the immortality of the soul is necessary to all religion. To talk of religion, if we be not to exist hereafter—if we be to fall into nothing at death, and shall sleep eternally in the grave, is the greatest absurdity.—Reason, then, leaves us much in the dark, on a point so important, as that of a future state. What folly and madness, then, to prefer the boasted oracles of reason to the clear light of divine revelation!—We stand in perishing need of a safer guide, in our voyage through this tempestuous Sea of life. And to refuse a perfect directory, the Chart of life, is like the mad seaman, who should venture to traverse the wide extended ocean without a Compass by which to steer his course. While making our voyage through life, we do not sail on a pacific Ocean. We need all the help therefore we can procure. And hap-

py, if we may but reach the haven of eternal rest! In our enquiries on this subject, whether there be any principle in man, by whatever name it may be called, which is adequate to all the purposes of his salvation, or a sufficient guide in matters of faith and practice, we will give all the credit to the reason and conscience of mankind, which can be given, consistently with fact, and the page of history. The light of reason can no further go, than I have conceded, it is apprehended. And, that it *did* no further go, in matters of religion, among the most learned and civilized heathen nations, I appeal to all, who have ever read their history. What the light of reason is able to do, ON MORAL SUBJECTS, will be stated, in the progress of our argument, in its proper place.—

WE proceed—as was proposed—

II. To point out the insufficiency of reason, in things of a moral and religious nature, in those respects, which are not only important, but necessary.—And, here, it will appear that mankind, while *without Christ, are without hope and without God in the world*, with an evidence, I trust, convincing to every candid and honest enquirer after truth and duty.—And,

I. THE light of nature and highest wisdom of mankind, cannot attain to such a clear knowledge of God as is necessary to salvation. What God is, and who they are that have true conformity to, and communion with him, are questions of the greatest importance in Religion. And, they are questions which have been as little understood, and perhaps as much misapprehended,

by mankind, in general, as almost any which have been discussed. Though, as St. Paul observes, the invisible things of God be clearly displayed by, and to be understood from the visible Creation; so that those are without excuse, who have not the knowledge of God from the light of nature alone, yet the heathen, after all their laborious researches, have not obtained this knowledge. Upon a fair trial of human reason, in matters of religion, under the greatest improvements of natural and moral philosophy, *the world by wisdom knew not God.* So far from it, that the most learned nations, and the greatest adepts in the sublime mysteries of divinity, in the pagan world, have been so *vain in their imaginations*, as we are told, and *their foolish hearts were so darkened*, that they have represented and worshipped, the glorious incorruptible God, by images made like to corruptible man, and to the meanest and most despicable creatures, in the animal kingdom. They have attributed to what they worshipped as God, all the weaknesses and vices of fallen and depraved man—PRIDE—ENVY—CRUELTY—REVENGE—and, even, INTEMPERANCE, and LEWDNESS.

NOT only among the heathen, but even in the most enlightened parts of the christian world, there ever have been, and still are, in many, very gross misapprehensions concerning the divine character, as well as concerning the nature of true religion.—How grossly ignorant the most enlightened of the heathen were with regard to God, and how much they were plunged into strange and absurd idolatries and pollutions, we read, in the following passage of inspired truth.

Professing themselves wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Not only the common people, the vulgar, but their wisest men—their orators, philosophers and legislators did this.—They were even worse, than the vulgar. Does this look like reason's being a sufficient guide in matters of religion, or man's having any principle within him by whatever name it may be called, which is able to lead him to the saving knowledge of God? In order to know God, so as to be saved, we must know him as he is; the one only living and true God. None but he himself can tell us what he is. This he hath most plainly done in his holy word. The scriptures, which were spoken and penned by the special influence and inspiration of the holy Ghost, declare to us **WHAT** and **WHO** God is. We only know him, in a saving manner, when we know him, as glorious in holiness, wonderful in works, and fearful in praises:—as the greatest, the wisest and best of all beings;—as a sin-hating, and, at the same time, sin-pardoning God;—as infinitely gracious and merciful. We must see him as infinitely excellent and transcendently glorious, as infinitely amiable and worthy of all possible praise and adoration. He is goodness and benevolence itself. He is possessed of all natural and moral perfections.—*And, Jesus said, why callest thou me good? there is none good, but one that is God.* He is a being of impartial, universal and infinite benevolence. Reason cannot tell us what the true moral character of God is.—This revelation alone teaches us. And we cannot be happy with, unless we

know the true God—and how he will be worshipped—how he can, and will accept of us—how we may live to his divine approbation. The light of reason cannot lead us into this true and saving knowledge of God. It is above all that reason ever did, or can do. Says Paul to the learned Athenian philosphers and judges—*for as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an Altar with this inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, him therefore whom ye ignorantly worship declare I unto you.* Christ, as the great teacher come from God, alone gives us the saving knowledge of the supreme Jehovah. *Whosoever denieth the son, the same bath not the father : All things, says he, are delivered unto me of my father ; and no man knoweth the son but the father, neither knoweth any man the father, save the son, and he to whomsoever the son will reveal him.* The gospel or christianity alone gives us a saving knowledge of the one only living and true God.—The divine character is to be known only from a divine revelation. If it could be discovered without a divine revelation, or by the highest efforts of reason—how could a divine revelation be absolutely necessary?—The essential glories therefore, and perfections of the Deity cannot be discovered by natural reason :—those glories and perfections which make him what he is, or constitute his infinite moral amiableness and transcendant excellence, and worthiness to receive from all intelligent creatures all the services, which they are capable of rendering unto him. He is light, all beauty and glory, and in him is no darkness at all. But the human mind is darkened by sin. The depravity of the heart brings on blindness of mind to the spiritual beauty and glory of the

divine character.—*Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts.* What absurd and essentially erroneous apprehensions of the nature and perfections of the God of Israel had the Syrians, in the following proposal of theirs ! *And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, their Gods, are the Gods of the hills ; therefore were they stronger than we : but let us fight against them in the plain and surely we shall be stronger than they.* These heathen knew as much about the true God, as heathen in general. They supposed the God of Israel was only a local and tutelary divinity, who had taken the people of Israel under his peculiar patronage. But the Jehovah of the Jews was altogether different from any of the Idol-gods of the Gentiles.—And he must, by his own revelation, inform us of his real character and essential moral glories.

2. OUR rational powers and conscience, under the highest cultivation, unassisted by a divine revelation, cannot inform us what *kind* of worship and obedience is to be paid to the true God. One of the disciples of Socrates, that great light of the pagan world, desired information from his Master concerning some difficulties attending prayer ; and above all, particular requests made to God, which have proved injurious to the petitioners when granted. The philosopher owned himself utterly unable to satisfy the disciple upon this head, and concludes with these remarkable words, “ We must continue in our ignorance, till it shall please God to send a person into the world to give us full informa-

tion concerning our duty." The light of mere reason, as proved in another part of this discourse, teaches all men, over the whole face of the globe, provided they duly hearkened to it, and cultivated it, that they ought to honour and worship the divine Being. But it cannot tell *what sort* of homage he will accept, or how we are to worship him. He alone can satisfy us, on this most material point—a point of supreme importance. He must tell us, in what way, we are to pay divine honours to his glorious Majesty. He dwells not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped by men's hands as though he needed any thing from us. For he can neither be enriched by our services, nor impoverished by the want of them.—With regard to the worship of the heathren, St. Paul has these remarkable words; *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.* All their rites and forms of worship were absurd, unworthy of the divine nature, and disgraceful to ours. It may be proper here, to mention some striking instances of strange and cruel methods of worship, as a specimen of man's natural ignorance of the *right* way of honouring and serving God. The Idol Baal, in scripture mentioned so often, was worshipped by acts of cruelty, which the foolish worshippers inflicted upon themselves. So desirous of ease are mankind, and so averse to pain that we should rationally conclude, that no methods of tormenting themselves could be introduced into their religious worship of their Idols. But the deluded Idolaters, in paying their homage to Baal, cut and wounded their own

flesh—gashed and mangled themselves to please their Idol *And they cried aloud, and cut themselves, AFTER THEIR MANNER, with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out upon them.*—The Idol Moloch was worshipped by acts of the strangest and most unnatural cruelty.—Parents sacrificed their children to this Idol ; and, it has been very common for parents to appease the anger of their fancied Gods, by sacrificing their tender offspring.—How contrary to reason—to nature ! The image of Moloch was made of brass, in a hideous shape, and het red hot ; and the devoted victim—the innocent child was brought by its own parents, and thrown naked into this burning brass, and burnt to death,—and no regard paid to its piteous cries. The Carthaginians were wont, as we are told in history, to sacrifice their children, when public calamities visited their state, to placate the resentments of their gods. And, their custom was to select, out of all, the fairest and most promising—such as were best beloved, and to offer them up in sacrifice : *to give up the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul.* Many nations have, and do to this day, worship their Idols, by acts of extreme cruelty—by consuming themselves in the fire. Modes of worship have been adopted, which are contrary to all the tender affections of human nature. And, no nation, people, or tribe ever yet could be found, in all the world, by voyages or travels, that ever had any rational or decent rites of worship, where the gospel never shined, whether in Europe, Asia, Africa or America. The most civilized and learned heathen nations were as absurd—as extravagant—as ridiculous, in their

idolatries, as the rude and savage. And it is confidently affirmed by some modern travellers, that many tribes of men, in the interior parts of extensive countries, have no word in their languages, for either a God, or any worship. Whether this be so or not, we cannot absolutely determine :—it rests upon the credibility of the reporters. What can, therefore, be more contrary to fact, than to pretend that man has any principle in himself, which can be a safe guide in matters of Religion ?



DISCOURSE II.

That man has no principle within himself, by whatever name it may be called, which is adequate to all the purposes of his salvation, or a sufficient guide in matters of faith and practice.

EPHESIANS ii. 12.

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the Covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

THE true character and state of mankind before savingly interested in the gospel are not generally acknowledged, or believed, in the world, to this day. Many thousand years have they had, to find out their own state and Character in respect to their Maker and things of a moral and religious nature; and they are now, as much as ever, divided in opinion, and are as far from an union of sentiment, on so important, and one would imagine, plain a point. An impartial inspection into the human heart and extensive view of the history of the world and moral things, we should conceive, would bring them all to one and the same conclusion, and to an

exact uniformity of opinion concerning the state and character of mankind.

WHETHER man be fallen or not, is now, in reality, the dispute. Such as reject with scorn, all idea of a revealed Religion as an impossibility in its own nature, (and some are absurd enough to reject it on this ground) affirm that the light of reason is entirely sufficient for all the purposes of discovering to us, the whole of our duty as rational creatures and to ensure infallibly our happiness here and hereafter; if there be an hereafter. These say that we are now just as we always were: that man never fell or apostatized from his Maker: of course, that he is under no worse circumstances, nor labours under any evils, under which he did not labour when he came forth from the hands of creative wisdom, goodness, and power. And, therefore, that he has an INWARD LIGHT sufficient for all the purposes of his salvation—a sufficient guide in all things of a moral and religious nature. The consequence is, that a divine revelation is wholly unnecessary. If wholly unnecessary, we may be certain, that a wise and good Being, who perfectly knows all things, would not vouchsafe to give one.—For he does nothing in vain.—

OTHERS, who admit a divine Revelation, believe that man is not so fallen from God, but that he has a degree, though small, of real moral goodness or holiness, which being duly nourished and attended to, will issue in life eternal. But the Apostle, in the words now read, says that all men are, before the Gospel be preached unto and embraced by them, *without hope and without God in the world.*—And, what was in-

tended, in discoursing upon those words, was to prove that mankind, merely, by their own reason and wisdom, cannot attain to a saving knowledge of God, or, in themselves, are in a helpless and hopeless state—Two things were proposed to be largely considered,

I. How far the light of reason, unassisted, can go in things of a religious and moral nature.—

II. AND, to point out its insufficiency, in those respects, which are not only very important, but altogether necessary.—

THE first of these has already been discussed.—And we entered, in the preceding discourse, upon the second—and illustrated the insufficiency of the mere light of reason—1st. In regard to the essential glories and excellencies of the divine nature and character—and 2nd. in regard to the right way of worshipping and serving God.

WE now pass—to observe—

3. THE light of mere reason, or conscience of mankind is wholly insufficient to discover to us *whether God will accept of us, at all; and if he will, upon what terms.* It can tell us that he is the Maker of all things, the Preserver of all things, the governor of all things; but can give us no instruction upon what terms he will receive us into his favour and friendship, or whether he will do it, at all. When we ponder deep on moral and religious subjects, we cannot but be conscious of many imperfections and Sins? We feel that there is a power on high whom we have offended. We dread his anger. When another world is seriously contemplated, we dare not ap-

pear in it without some firm hope. An invisible God—an incensed Judge is an alarming thought. The anxious enquiry is wherewith shall we come before him—and bow ourselves before a holy and pure God. Mere reason cannot satisfy the enquiry. It knows not how we may come before him, or with what sacrifices he will be pleased. Being truly humbled and deeply grieved for our offences seems the most natural way of hoping for pardon and acceptance. But, whether a holy and righteous sovereign, on our repentance, can forgive us consistently with his glories, or the safety of his Universe, reason cannot inform us. To cast ourselves upon his infinite clemency is what reason would advise. But, whether this would be safe or not, is a grand uncertainty. Without a revelation, therefore, we do not know whether we may be pardoned—or if we may, how it may be consistently done; or how we may be recovered from the evils, which all men feel, and of which the world is full. Reason can see the disease, under which all men labour, but can prescribe no method of cure. All the wise men of the heathen world for thousands of years together, have tried to discover a method of escape from the evils, which all felt, and of which they justly complained. But all in vain.—An infinitely wise God gave human nature a fair trial—all advantages—and time long enough to satisfy all reasonable men, how far it could go. Look round the world, at this day, and what success has boasted and almost idolized reason had in things of a moral and religious concern, among pagan nations?—Look back on past ages, and where alas! is the man—or the body of men that have found reason a sufficient guide?

Even, in the countries blessed with the Gospel, what delusion, what Error, what superstition!—Without a divine Revelation all is darkness, in a moral view:—all is helpless and hopeless:—there is no pardon;—there is no salvation. Reason could never show one sin forgiven or lead a step beyond the grave—or have any idea of the resurrection of the body.

ALL mankind are, therefore, in themselves, without hope and without God in the world. Under all the pressures of adversity, or dismal pains and calamities of life, separate from revealed Religion, there is no relief for them. All would be darkness,—mystery—and despair. They could not conjecture for what the world was made—for what it is preserved—why they were made rational creatures—What design is aimed at, in the government of the world—or what the real and true character of the Maker of it is—or what will be the end of the whole.

4. THE reason and conscience of mankind do not *clearly* discover a future state, nor place before them rewards and motives sufficiently strong and powerful to induce them, amid the attractions, temptations and vanities of this world, to act with a wise reference to another.

CONSCIENCE is God's monitor, reprover or counsellor within the soul. In many important cases, it dictates what ought to be done, and what ought not to be done in regard to our behaviour towards our fellow men, and towards ourselves as connected in society. It shows us plainly what moral ties, in a multitude of instances, which cannot now be enumerated, bind

us. When we do wrong, it punishes us by severe remonstrances and upbraidings. When we do well, it testifies in our behalf, and administers rich consolation by self-approving reflections. It, consequently, serves as a natural law to all men. It is the Deity's law written or imprinted on all minds. From its present severe reproofs for vicious, and pleasing joys, for virtuous and upright conduct, we may gather, fairly, that there will be a future reckoning—a day of judgment—a world to come—a place to remunerate the just, and to inflict punishments on the incorrigible. At least, we may conclude all this to be highly probable. Conscience, then, points us to a future state as a probability. Accordingly the most, though not all of heathen nations and tribes have had some faint and confused idea of another life after death. Some wavering belief of it. They conjectured that there might be, or would be a future existence. The rational and sober livers among them hoped there would be another life. But no nation, not favoured with revealed light, ever entertained any tolerably consistent or rational notions about it, either of the rewards to be conferred upon the good, or the evils to be endured by the wicked.—With their Poets and Orators all was fable and fiction. They described, with much ornament of language, their ELYSIAN FIELDS—and represented, in a terrifying manner, their FURIES.----

FEW, indeed, if any, had a just idea that one holy, righteous and good Being made and presided over the whole universe. Some have doubted whether ever one of the heathen philosophers really believed, unless he had seen the Old or

New Testament, the unity of the Godhead. Socrates is represented by some as dying a Martyr to this belief—but, in his last moments, he ordered sacrifice to be offered to the idol-gods of his country—thereby giving his dying testimony to polytheism. However this may be, it is certain to a demonstration that the heathen have universally been polytheists or have admitted a plurality of Gods. They had their great and their household or domestic divinities—their terrestrial and celestial divinities, more than thirty thousand in all. Almost every thing in nature, as well as the sun, moon and stars, was worshipped—such as groves of trees, fountains of water, rivers, various plants and insects. *As concerning, therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifices to Idols, we know that an Idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called Gods whether in heaven or in earth (as there be Gods many and Lords many) but to us there is but one God the father of whom are all things and we by him.*

THE right way to know what reason can do, in things moral and religious, is to see what it actually hath done, in past ages, among the most learned and polished nations. They had great men—learned men—philosophers---poets--statesmen---and orators: especially the Romans and Greeks. They were opulent, and had many schools of wise men. These cultivated science, and spared no pains in their researches, to discover truth. They did all that reason could do, when learning is most liberally encouraged and happily flourishes, as to a discovery of a future

world—and what rewards await the virtuous, and what punishments will be the portion of the wicked. After all, their notions were ridiculous, childish, self-repugnant, and contradictory.

It is true, they had some judicious, weighty, moral, sayings; for in this argument, I would allow them as much as can be allowed them, consistently with fact. But no system of heathen morals proposed any thing, as motives drawn from another world of any force to induce people to act with any due reference to it—or to prepare for a happy immortality. Reason, consequently, doth not, properly speaking, look into another world. It merely conjectures about it.—The Gospel, or a divine revelation only fully discloses an Eternity to man.—It lays before him Immortality: an Immortality of blessedness, when life is no more, if it have been improved in a pious and virtuous manner.—It denounces on the wicked everlasting misery. *But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.*—We can now look through all the wastes and glooms of death and the grave to a resurrection of the body—to a judgment-seat—to an endless existence after death—to eternal rewards for the pious—and everlasting woe to the despisers of God and Virtue. By the Gospel, therefore, we have hope, pleasing enrapturing hope—we have light, like the glorious luminary of the sky in his meridian altitude—we have life, spiritual and divine—we have the saving knowledge of God—we have a fulness of felicity opened before us, and promised to us, upon our repentance, faith, and new obedience.

5. Reason and conscience are unable to renew and change our hard hearts, or to give us a true and real sight of the excellency of spiritual and divine things. To subdue the obduracy of the heart, to slay the enmity there is in us against the law, character, and perfections of God, is beyond all that reason and conscience can effect. The powers of reason can tell us of our dark, blinded corrupt state. Men of science and liberal enquiry, in all ages, and among all people, have seen, confessed, and bewailed the imperfections and frailties, the infirmities and exceeding depravation of human nature; like a magnificent pile of buildings in ruin---or a fertile and luxuriant soil overrun with noxious plants. It was impossible for candid and inquisitive men among heathen tribes not to have discovered the perverseness and vices of human nature, in general, they are so plain; though they called some things Virtues which were not---and some things Vices which were not. But reason never could suggest, or give a hint of any plan of restoration to a right temper or a holy and innocent condition. There is nothing---no principle in man---no light---or quality that can sanctify, purify, and regenerate the soul. But an inward renovation is absolutely necessary to moral happiness, to become like God, to be either conformed to his perfections, or fitted to enjoy his presence in heaven. The wisest and best heathen confessed it was not in man to heal the moral disorders of his nature, or to rectify the temper, so great was its obliquity; and affirmed that a superior power was needed to effect this, and to make us meet to enjoy forever the favour and friendship of the Creator of the Universe. They felt that a reve-

lation was *necessary* to lead and direct men how to live, so as to be hereafter blessed, and never once thought of disputing the possibility of such a thing. And nothing, in that Revelation which we enjoy, is plainer than the doctrine of efficacious grace, or more insisted upon than the need of a divine power to sanctify, purify, and change our disordered and depraved nature. Divine influence is essentially requisite, to renew us and to implant within the soul the principle of holiness. *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God : for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.---But the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.---No man can come unto me, except the father, which hath sent me, draw him ; and I will raise him up at the last day.---Not that we are of ourselves sufficient to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.---Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God that giveth the increase.---Yea they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.*

MEN do not chuse piety and virtue from any principle within themselves. They chuse their own evil practices which lead to ruin. They actually hate God and holiness, truth and religion, or their conduct would not be such as we see it is, when we carefully examine it. They are not willing to be, and to do, as they ought. They will not, though urged by the weight of the most powerful arguments and all the ardor of impportunity, live up to the light which they have ; or wisely and diligently improve the talents with which they are entrusted. They hide, like the

slothful servant, their talent in a napkin. They have no disposition to improve it. They resemble the prodigal son, in the parable, wasting their substance in riotous living. All men have a propensity to wander from the truth. They do not, and never did, duly and faithfully, improve the light of reason, or those notices of God—of virtue—of the moral law which they had, or now have. All, of course, who shall finally perish, will be self-condemned. They will never have it in their power to say that their Maker has been, either unjust or hard with them; or to reply as the slothful servant did, *Lord I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth; lo! there thou hast that is thine.*

In the sixth and last place, reason and conscience are insufficient to give us a full and complete system of morality, or moral truths. Let the system of morality taught and believed by the best and wisest of heathen nations, be candidly examined and critically inspected, and it will appear a maimed and imperfect, a broken and defective system. They had endless contentions about what they termed the CHIEF GOOD, that is, the real duty and happiness of man. One of their most eminent moralists reckons up more than one hundred different and contradictory opinions on this subject. Some placed it in self-indulgence: some in riches—some in insensibility—and all in that which never can render us blessed, and in which it can never be found.—Had any one leisure, and could summon up a

sufficient stock of patience to collect from all the heathen writers on moral subjects, their various and self-contradictory rules of moral living, we should see how utterly unable *mere* reason is to form a complete system of moral virtue.

It would be great injustice to the subject before us, not to remark here, that some of the greatest moralists among the Greeks and Romans, had seen the writings of Moses, or the New-Testament, and had gleaned from them, a great proportion of the moral lessons which they delivered. Many of them, which is indeed much to their honour, travelled into the famous countries of Asia, where mankind were *first planted* by the adorable Creator, and where communications from the Almighty were first made to man, and they returned home to their own countries, enriched with the learning of others. But with all these advantages none of them, Socrates, Plato, or Seneca, who were universally known to be most renowned for moral sayings, formed any thing like a full and perfect system. They leave out many important virtues. They admit many odious and horrible vices; such as self-murder, cruelty, incest, and revenge.----And they place all the virtues on a wrong foundation, and persuade to the practice of them from improper and weak, or sinister and wicked motives. Even the celebrated Cato, who gave forth many moral maxims---who was called honest, just, inflexible in integrity---who was said by his cotemporaries to be possessed of a stern virtue, put an end to his own life, because he could not bear to be a witness of the corruption and degeneracy of the age, in which he lived.----Few crimes

perpetrated by man can be more heinous than self-murder. There is something terrifying in the extreme to think of ushering ourselves, uncalled, unbidden into the presence of the Deity and into the invisible world. Many nations now in the world where the Gospel was never known or christian doctrines propagated, have no idea at all of the Creator of the universe, or immortality of the soul, or pious duties, or fear of, or love to God.---The heathen tribes of this Land, as those tell us who have had the best opportunities of information, where no European has disseminated any seeds of religious belief, have no idea who made them—or who made the world—or of duty to God. In the interior parts of Africa, a late traveller there, asserts, that various tribes, visited by him, as far as he could learn, had no idea at all of any God or religion, or even words to express any worship to be paid to any power above them. But admit this to be a mistake, still truth compels us to believe them extremely ignorant on moral and religious subjects. They have however as bright faculties and powers of mind as the nations who have the Gospel. The immense difference is to be ascribed principally to that very Christianity, which is, alas! so much neglected by us.—

If we would know what light there is in man---what light all men have--or what help all need, we must see what nations, which never enjoyed any divine Revelation, have known---done---and believed as to God, Piety, and Morality. Superficial reasoners, men who indeed pretend to reason and philosophy---and reject the Gospel, and

tell us of the sufficiency of nature's light---of reason and conscience---or any other principle, lose, and bewilder themselves by not fairly looking into the history of the heathen nations and their moral writings, and seeing what their ideas, notions, and improvements have been, and still are. Their history, in truth, is but one continued narrative of ignorance---idolatry---vices---unnatural lusts---wars---bloodshed---barbarity--and misery; and their moral writings, so far as they have reached our times, contain no just or full system of morality at all. If a man were to conform himself to the whole of their rules of moral living, and understood them all, his life would be a scene of inconsistency and error, vice and folly; and his end self-murder. Our modern scepticks, it must be carefully remembered, collect all their ideas of morality and of God, if any just ones they have, and so far as any of their ideas be just, from that very Religion which they reject. They are, therefore, like a wayward and perverse Child that disowns its parent, merely because he wishes him to be good and happy—to be and do right; and takes the indispensibly necessary measures for this purpose.—And if, among the haters of Religion, any be found at this day who have adopted the Atheists Creed, under the splendid name of philosophy—it is a most striking proof of what is the subject of this discourse.—Upon the whole, we may come to this conclusion, that all the conduct of man, since the day he was expelled from the earthly paradise for his Apostacy, proves clearly, even to a demonstration, that there is no light in him, or guide to duty and happiness, which may be depended upon—or which is safe for him to trust

to—or sufficient to lead him to GOD and GLO-
 RY. Without Christ and the Gospel, all is dark-
 ness—confusion, and despair. There is no
 hope, no help, no salvation, no true system even
 of morality, if we deny a Saviour and his Gospel.
 See what the pagan world is from the holy Apo-
 stle Paul. He will tell you the truth. He will
 not deceive you by misrepresentation.—But how
 can I read! How can you hear without confu-
 sion!—I shudder at their awful and horrible vi-
 ces, and utter depravation of heart, and morals:
*Professing themselves wise, they became fools. And
 changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an
 image made like to corruptible man, and to birds,
 and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Where-
 fore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through
 the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own
 bodies with themselves. Who changed the truth
 of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the
 creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for-
 ever, amen. For this cause God gave them up to
 vile affections: for even their women did change
 the natural use into that which is against nature.
 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use
 of the woman, burned in their lusts one towards
 another, men with men, working that which is un-
 seemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence
 of their error which was meet, and even as they
 did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God
 gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those
 things which are not convenient—being filled with
 all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covet-
 ousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate,
 deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of
 God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil*

things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.—Here is a true account of the polished heathen of the antient Roman Empire: of their philosophers as well as of the vulgar. More ignorant and Savage nations and tribes are, if possible, still more vile.—What, then, is human nature? What is man's true state or character before renewed by divine grace?—What! is he as holy and innocent as Adam was when he was first formed? Is he, in his mind, fair and unspotted, as a clean sheet of paper?—Has he a light in himself sufficient to all the ends of spiritual life on earth, and eternal life in heaven! See what mankind are without the Gospel,—*Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.*

I THINK it proper, here, to subjoin a few passages of Scripture, out of many, which declare that mankind are corrupted and depraved—or that they have no principle within them, sufficient to enable them to attain to eternal life without the powerful operations of divine grace.—How full to this purpose are those words Gen. 6. 5. *And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil from his youth.*—The Psalmist David fully testifies what man is when he puts himself forward as an example. *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.*—*Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my Mother conceive me.*—The prophet Jeremiah speaks of man's depraved state in very strong terms.—*The heart is deceitful a-*

bove all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? It follows, *I the Lord search the heart*, to give to every man according to his works. *If the heart be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*, is it, at the same time possessed of any degree of a holy principle—or has it any light to guide it to heaven, or to be a sufficient directory in matters of faith and practice?—How the Apostle Paul viewed man as he is in himself, appears from the long quotation above made from him; and also from the following words—*What then are we better than they? no, in no wise, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one.*—And again, *Now we know that what things soever the law saith: it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God—for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.* The same inspired teacher leads the mind to the source of all, the sin of the first man, who stood as a public head for all his posterity. *Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*—Again, *you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*—Our blessed Lord himself says, *he came to seek and save that which was lost.* If we be not lost we need no Saviour, or atonement, or help.—It appears, then, with an evidence exceedingly strong, that all have sinned and come short of the glory God—and that man, in a natural state, is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. He has no principle in himself, by whatever name it may be called, which can, being duly exercised,

form him for the service of God on earth, or his immediate presence in heaven.

WHAT remains is to add a few reflections by way of improvement.

I. AND what hath been said teacheth us the importance of realizing the misery and ruin of the condition of all men, as they are born into the world. A want of a belief, or due sense of this, leads to a denial of the Gospel—to a rejection of the propitiatory sacrifice of the Redeemer—to almost every heresy and error. Men cannot bear to admit so mortifying a truth as that of their ruined and fallen, guilty and miserable state. Pride rises up, and repudiates the unpleasing doctrine. One says we are not depraved: another affirms which indeed is the same thing, that we have a light of our own adequate to all the purposes of our salvation:—a third contends that there is a portion of real saving grace in every human heart. All these, in effect, disown the scripture doctrine of the text, the utterly ruined and perishing condition of man in himself. The truth endeavoured to be established in the above discourses, is that the light of reason or highest wisdom of mankind is insufficient to teach us the true and saving knowledge of God. It is of the utmost moment to realize this. *The world by wisdom knew not God.---Where there is no vision the people perish: but he that keepeth the law happy is he.---To open their eyes, is the design of the Gospel, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me. Understand ye brutish among the*

people! and ye fools when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? he that chastiseth the heathen, shall he not correct? he that teacheth knowledge, shall he not know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity.---I know you, says our Saviour, that the love of God is not in you.---

Can any one who seriously believes the scriptures, hold that man has any principle, let it be termed how it may, that can be adequate to all the ends of spiritual life here, and eternal life hereafter?---- That there is in fact no saving knowledge of God out of Christ, is plain from Acts iv. 12.---*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.* He that hath not the son, hath not the father. Deny Christ and reject his Gospel, and you reject life. Misery is, then, inevitable. You must realize that you are, in yourselves, lost and guilty,----wretched and undone,----hopeless and perishing.

2. WE infer from the foregoing subject the infinite grace and condescension of the Deity in making a *revelation* of his will, and of the *way of salvation* to mankind. He was under no obligation to do it. It would not have been either cruel, or hard, or unrighteous in him, to have withheld all pity from them, and to have let them die in their sins. Most justly might a holy and sovereign God have given them all over to the fatal effects of their own folly. It is no injustice or partiality in him to take one and leave another, because he is not obliged to have mercy on any one. If he reveal his will to any nation

or people : or if he sanctify, pardon and save one individual, it is all of free grace. All the glory is his, when he sheweth mercy : all the shame and guilt of sin, if we die in our iniquities, are ours.—*Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound : they will walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.*

IF the great Lord of heaven and earth give his Gospel to one nation and not to another :— or if he pardon, renew and save one individual and not another : if he bestow upon one ten, upon another five, upon another one talent only : if he impart to one a disposition to improve, by his power and spirit, and not to another—does he do any wrong ?—May he not do what he will with his own ? Who can find fault ? If all have forfeited every claim to mercy, who can complain of either cruelty or injustice on the part of heaven, if it be withheld ? Where shall the vile monster, the impious wretch be found who will rise up and impeach the holiness, wisdom and benevolence of God, because he is a sovereign ?—Let such if any there be come forward and make good their charge, for their controversy is with the Almighty. By him we are told that we are vile, guilty, perishing, and ill-deserving sinners, that there is no principle in us, while unrenewed, that is sufficient, duly cultivated, to our salvation. Such as affirm that there is, must dispute it out, with him whose is the Universe, whose is the power and glory. That he should condescend to reveal his will to us—to open a plan of life, of restoration to his favour, and to holiness, and happiness, is admirable-grace, is such a display of compassion as may well excite within us, every grateful sentiment.

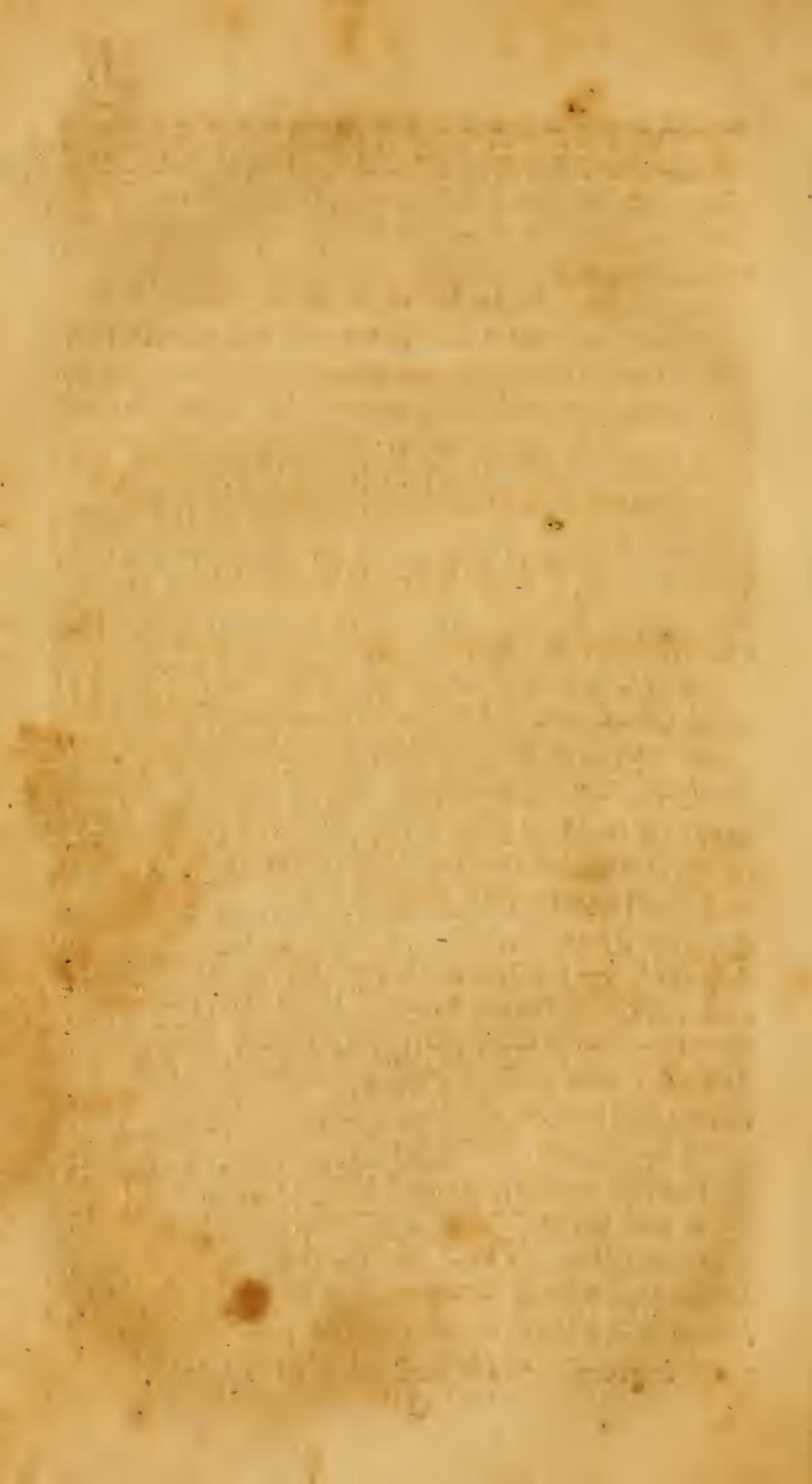
3. WE, therefore, further infer from the foregoing subject, the duty of gratitude that we enjoy the light and advantages of a divine Revelation. This light is rich and glorious: those advantages are many and precious. How affecting is the idea of the perishing state of man!----How is *the gold become dim and the most fine gold changed!*----Who but must weep over the situation of the heathen, that are without hope and without God in the world:----who are in darkness:----who are worshipping dumb Idols: who are bowing down to stocks and stones:----who have Gods many and lords many: who believe in polytheism, and have changed the truth of God into a lie:---who pay honours divine to the sun, moon and stars.---They do not know that there is but one God----or how to serve him, or that he can, and will pardon them. To them all is darkness and mystery. No ray of revealed light reaches them, and they have no rational view of moral and divine things.---Who made us to differ? Who ordered our birth and education in a land of Gospel light and liberty---a land of civil and religious freedom, while such an handful only of the human race either know or enjoy the rights of man?---We know, or may know, duly using our reason and the light of the Gospel, the way of truth. We know that there is but one God, one Mediator, one salvation, one way to life eternal.---Happy are ye in knowing the Gospel of the grace of God---in having the holy scriptures in a language which you understand! Happy are ye in having the privilege of public worship!---*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. Praise ye the*

Lord.----At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.—Why art thou, O America, so highly exalted—so eminently distinguished by all the light and privileges of the Gospel, and civil freedom!—How unnatural, how barbarous any of thy citizens, if they despise these :—if they exert any power to take from thee, thy glory—thy beauty—thy praise, the Gospel of the grace of God : or to oppose or corrupt it ; or if they refuse to be thankful for it !—O for a note of praise sublime to ascend from every American tongue and fervour of gratitude to go up from every American heart to the throne of the Universe—that we have all the LIGHT, PRIVILEGES, and ORDINANCES of the christian religion :----delightful, pleasing, divine Religion, pure and undefiled !----May all our hearts welcome thee to our choice---and, then, we are happy. Thou art the glory of any land, the guide of the youth, the support of age, the solace of all thy friends !——Happy is that people whose God is the Lord !

4. WE infer from this subject, the absolute need of the divine teachings in order to be saved. We are not of ourselves sufficient to change our own corrupt hearts. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God who giveth the increase. Means are to be employed—divine grace is to be sought importunately and perseveringly---the ministrations of the Gospel are to be attended upon diligently, carefully, and heedfully. But the power of God must call and quicken, sanctify and save the soul. Listen not then, for a moment, to such as tell you, that you have a treasure in yourselves, if you will attend

to it, in a proper manner, which is sufficient to all the ends of a holy life, and future blessedness.---Such only deceive themselves. They do but dream in Religion. They are sadly ignorant of the first principles of the Oracles of God.--

IN the fifth and last place, we infer from this subject the obligation upon us to improve faithfully the light and advantages of a divine Revelation. We are peculiarly distinguished on account of our religious privileges. We enjoy the benefit of the outward ministrations of the sanctuary. Gospel truths, and ordinances are dispensed to us. The doors of God's house are always open to us. We have the holy Sabbath. On the part of God, what could have been done more for his Vineyard than has been done? Now all these advantages we are to improve, with faithfulness and diligence: Let us never despise them, let *others* say or do what they may, or speak ever so hard things of the Gospel, or its institutions. Profane and irreligious men will scoff at all serious piety. Let us never be seduced by the artifices of such, as lie in wait to deceive; or be ashamed of the Gospel of the Son of God; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. If we abuse the light which we enjoy, and misimprove our religious opportunities and advantages, our guilt will be exceedingly aggravated, and our final ruin, if we perish, proportionably dreadful. *For that servant which knew his Lords will and prepared not himself, nor did according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes.---For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*



DISCOURSE III.

The ways in which the holy Scriptures are perverted by unlearned and unstable men.

2 P E T E R, III. 16. 17.

As also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

THE holy scriptures, though by divine grace able to make us wise unto salvation, are almost wholly disused by multitudes, who nevertheless would wish to be thought friends to the religion and morals which are taught in them. They even lie by, in many houses covered with dust, as if of no consequence in the direction of human life, and unworthy of a careful attention or serious perusal. Their purity, their beauty, their sublimity, which some of the best and greatest characters that ever adorned human nature, have not only admired, but extolled, are overlooked, either through a want of discernment to acknow-

ledge, or of taste to relish their merit.—Some read them only from custom or for amusement.----Others read them merely to cavil at, reproach, and pervert them. Others, again, search them, not to be guided by the light which they shall exhibit, but to support or confirm the opinions, which they have previously imbibed, and are resolved not to relinquish. Hence not only different, but contradictory principles are pretended to be drawn from them.

LIKE all other things of importance and worth, they are liable to be abused and misapplied. It is however no valid, nor, indeed, plausible objection against their divinity, or usefulness, that they are capable of being misconstrued and misunderstood. If it please the majesty of heaven and earth to speak to man, at all concerning his duty and happiness as a moral agent, he must speak to him in man's language. But all human language is imperfect, capable of being perverted and wrongly construed----of course, the holy scriptures are so. In truth, every thing done by man is imperfect. He lives in an imperfect world. His language, when most refined, is imperfect.----It would therefore, bespeak a high degree of folly and inconsideration either to disesteem, or to think meanly of the holy scriptures, because they have been misimproved and profaned. And, it is equally disgraceful to reason and repugnant to philosophy to look upon them as fabulous, or to imagine that no certain and fixed system of doctrines is contained in them, merely because different sects of Christians have understood them differently, and drawn from them, not only different, but contradictory tenets.

THE serious mind will most sincerely regret, what cannot but be acknowledged, that they have been so often and so grossly perverted. The candid and honest will not be prejudiced against them, or neglect, most diligently to attend to them, though they have been so much misapplied and misunderstood.

To guard, therefore, against the danger and commonness of wresting and perverting the word of God to our destruction is a subject highly important and interesting in itself; at all times proper; but at this day, it is apprehended, to be peculiarly seasonable. It is a subject seldom discussed, but if properly managed may be eminently useful to all christian families and individuals. It may be made very subservient to advance the cause of rational religion, and to prevent the mind from what is visionary and fanciful in matters of infinite concern.

THE time and attention of the hearer will consequently be well employed, if his mind may be deeply impressed with the importance of rightly understanding the scriptures and with the greatness of the danger of wresting them to his own destruction, as is often done by unlearned and unstable men: and the pains and anxiety of the speaker will be amply rewarded, if he may but bring any assistance to, or suggest what may prevent any one, if it be, even, but one, from wresting them to his own destruction. For the salvation of one soul is of more worth than the material world, and the loss of one, or his final destruction is greater than words can describe. *For what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul.----*

THESE considerations have induced me to make choice of the passage now read, as the subject of discourse at this time. It contains the danger and commonness of the sin of perverting and abusing the scripture to our destruction. It stands connected with the foregoing verses in this manner. St. Peter had been describing, with great force and solemn grandeur, the end of the world---the dissolution of the system of creation---and the coming of the son of man to judge the Universe. He speaks of the heavens passing away with a great noise---the Elements melting with fervent heat---the Earth and all its works being consumed in one universal conflagration---the day of judgment---the perdition of ungodly men---the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness---the perfection of felicity for the pious and virtuous. In the text he informs us, that St. Paul, his brother in the kingdom and patience of Christ, had, in all his holy Epistles to the Churches, spoken of these grand and solemn subjects; and that some things contained in his Epistles were difficult to be understood---that is, required attention and care not to misapprehend him. He does not mean that St. Paul was an obscure or unintelligible writer. This would have been a high impeachment and reproach. It would have been at the same time altogether unjust. For he is a nervous and plain writer. He is a strong and close reasoner. And his writings will be admired as long as there shall be either genius or piety in the world. The difficulty then of understanding some things penned by him, under divine inspiring influence, is not owing to any deficiency in perspicuity and clearness of style, but to the

spiritual nature and grandeur of the subjects, of which he treated.----After this sublime description of the end of all things, St. Peter, in the two verses immediately preceding the text, addresses a most judicious and pertinent exhortation to the Christians, to whom he wrote, in these words: *Wherefore, behold, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blemish. And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our brother Paul also, according unto the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures unto their own destruction. Ye therefore beloved, seeing ye knew these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.* The Apostle was extremely solicitous lest the Christians to whom he directs this catholic or general Epistle, should be seduced from steadfastness, and fall into the errors and delusions of wicked men, who were active in attempts to lead away others from the truth. Men who have embraced errors, are always busy in strengthening their party, by propagating their pernicious principles, and profelyting others to them. And upright and honest Christians are in danger always, from the artifice and subtle devices of such, as lie in wait to deceive. They should, therefore, always be upon their guard lest they be seduced, and fall from their steadfastness. The *unlearned* and *unstable*, who pervert scripture are people who are illiterate—of small reading and observation—who are given

to change, are frequently altering their principles, laying aside the opinions which they once entertained, and to which they were affectionately attached, and taking up new ones. Such people as have not capacity and stability to weigh the reasons of any opinion, but believe as accident—passions, or prejudices dictate—as they chance to read, or hear. One Commentator thinks that the Greek word translated *unlearned*, may mean *unteachable*. But I do not find that it is ever so used in any Greek author. Besides, if it were, it could not be the meaning of it here. *Unlearned* then, *here* means people of small reading—of little reflection and observation—especially of little knowledge in divinity—and of much conceit. And ignorance is usually confident and impudent. Such wrest and pervert scripture to their own destruction. They cannot, meekly and quietly, receive instruction from the knowing and learned: but undertake to interpret and explain for themselves and others. Being perverse and self-willed, they turn a deaf ear to what is offered by the wise and judicious. They lean to their own understandings. Such self *conceited* and *ignorant* people; and withal, *unstable*, turn the scripture to a wrong and false meaning—make it speak what it was never intended to speak; and going by their false and erroneous interpretations, are plunged into fatal errors—and ruined forever—go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand—are left of God, in his sovereign pleasure, a prey to their own chosen blindness, and perish eternally in their heresies and delusions. Happy those who keep clear of such perverters of scripture! —To wrest the word of God to our own de-

struction, is to misinterpret and misconstrue it to such a degree—as to deduce from it fatal errors—or essentially false principles, and to live and practise according to such misinterpretations and misconstructions. The end of all this, is final ruin—or misery in a future world. How affecting the idea, that the scriptures, which were given to man for his only INFALLIBLE GUIDE through a world of sorrow and tears, and to meeten him for a full and perfect blessedness in heaven, should by a corrupt and perverse mind, be turned to his destruction! But alas! so they often are—have been in past ages, and will be in future.

AFTER thus introducing and opening the words selected for present meditation, it is proposed, in dependence on divine strength, to enumerate and explain the various ways, in which *unlearned* and *unstable men* pervert the scriptures to their own destruction.

THEY were given to us on purpose to teach and instruct us in the right way of worshipping and serving God in time, and preparing us for the glorious services and employments of the heavenly state. Our best good, here and hereafter, are aimed at, in that Revelation of the divine will, which we enjoy. Indeed our felicity, in subordination to the divine honour, is consulted in that manner, in which it ought to be, according to reason, and the nature of man, both in Creation and Providence, as well as in the sacred Volume. On the part of the Maker of all things there is no want either of wisdom to contrive our happiness, of grace to prepare us for

it, or of goodness to effect it. Consequently, if we, at last, fail of life, the fault is alone imputable to ourselves. We are left to act out our own hearts, in regard to things divine: whether we will chuse the way of life or of death. Hence it comes to pass, that the scriptures are wrested or turned to our own destruction. That which was ordained for our good, is, by the amazing corruption and depravity of our hearts, turned into poison, misapprehended and misapplied. It may here be remarked, as worthy of special attention, that the reason why the word of God, in the writings of the old and New Testament, is so frequently and so grossly perverted, is not because these writings are not wisely composed and properly expressed; for they are plain—perspicuous—beautiful—and sublime to admiration; but because of the perverseness, wilful blindness, and vile prejudices of mankind. Had we a good and honest heart, or a single eye to the truth, we should not fall into any fatal or essential errors. Much of the corruption of human nature, therefore, is to be seen, in the strange and absurd constructions put upon particular passages of sacred Writ. And what is very surprising is, that all profess to be faithful and impartial; and the most through self-flattery and self-blindness, actually fancy themselves to be in the right. *This is the condemnation that light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than the light—the light of truth, or of true doctrines.* People will not seek or come to the light of divine truth, because their deeds are evil. While un sanctified, they hate God. They hate his truth. They hate his ways. They delight not in the pure and strict principles of Religion. Hence all the

Corruptions and Abuses of Christianity in former and later days; and perversion and misunderstanding of scripture.

I. AND one way in which primitive Christianity is corrupted, and the holy scriptures perverted and wrested to people's destruction is by refusing to take the words in their well known and established signification, and wishing to shape them to pre-concieved opinions. As they were written for our instruction and guidance in all things relating to faith and practice, so we are to abide by the common and obvious import of the words used. The only proper and just way of discovering the real and true meaning of scripture-words, is to see how they are generally used by the inspired writers. The most of the words, have a fixed signification, as much as any words can have. Those, whose import it is hard to discover, are few in number, and relate to certain customs or rites of the antient nations, now in the lapse of centuries, unknown. And, none of these phrases necessarily obscure by reason of customs now unknown, contain essential doctrines. The things necessary to be believed in order to obtain salvation are few, and so obvious that none can dispute or mistake them, but those who chuse to do it. If any rule of interpreting scripture be so just, at first view, as to be incontrovertible, it is this, that it is to be its own expositor—it is to be interpreted by itself—passages not so plain or clear, by those which are as plain as words can be—things not necessary or essential, by those which are necessary and essential. Do we wish to know the true meaning and spirit of scripture, we are to ob-

serve carefully how the words used, upon which we may be contemplating, are generally used in other parts of scripture; what the common known import of the words is; and also how the sacred writers generally use them. They are likewise to be understood according to the analogy of faith, or the system of truths most evidently taught us in divine Revelation. The figurative and metaphorical language is to be conceived of from plain and unfigurative. And both according to the subject treated.—When we open the sacred Volume, we should be willing to be guided altogether by what it contains. It contains what we are to believe concerning God, and the duty required of us. We should not aim to make it speak according to ideas and opinions on religious subjects, which we have previously formed—or bend it from its easy natural sense, to conform to certain favourite authors uninspired, whom we passionately admire. If we will arbitrarily, or at our pleasure, take scripture and compel it to accord to our tenets or principles, already imbibed, whether from accident or reflection, or from corrupt writers; being, mean while, resolved to get passages of scripture to favour or support them, whether wrongly or rightly applied, we are certainly guilty of the sin of wresting it to our spiritual hurt, or even final destruction. Because, in this way we shall never fail to misuse it. We shall make it say any thing, we please to admit—or to deny any thing we wish to have it deny. It can, of course, be no rule of life to us, or standard of faith. One man will make it say one thing, and another, a directly opposite thing. Hence, it hath been unjustly charged with con-

tradicting itself, by infidel Cavillers.—Also, serious and honest minds, but not of extensive information, or accuracy of judgment, have often been bewildered and confounded by opposite and contradictory interpretations. Were men to pervert any good writer on common subjects, or any antient Clasfical author, as they do the word of God, they would be justly chargeable either with incapacity or disingenuity: they would be complained of for the want of fairness, or be accused of willful perversion. No person who pretends to own the truth of scripture can be honest in his enquiries after duty from it, who is not disposed heartily to take it just as it is, without compelling it to speak a language wholly foreign from its most obvious meaning. In general, it has one plain, fixed meaning. And this would be as easily comprehended, were we honest to ourselves, and diligent in our search into it, as the meaning of any plain good writer. To suppose otherwise would be not only to asperse the SACRED ORACLES, but to impeach the divine wisdom and goodness. Because, for the same reason that God, infinite in mercy and benevolence, would give to a world lying in sin and wickedness, a revelation of his will at all, he would give one that could be easily understood where there were good and upright intentions in studying it.

2. ANOTHER way in which unlearned and unstable men wrest the holy scriptures to their destruction is by taking them unconnectedly and detachedly. If we pay no attention to the particular subject, on which the inspired penman is discoursing, it is not to be expected that the true

sense will be obtained. For there is an order and a connexion in every good writer. He speaks according to his subject, and if we would not mistake him, it is incumbent upon us to attend carefully and critically to it. It is impossible for us to keep from misunderstanding an Author, if we overlook his subject or general scope and design. Each writers stile or manner is peculiar to himself. And this is as true of the inspired writers, as of uninspired. The supernatural aids, with which the former were blessed by the immediate influence of the holy Ghost, did not destroy or take away this peculiarity. St. Paul's manner and diction for example are very different from St. John's, as every one who has any knowledge of language, must own.

THE occasion, likewise, as well as the subject, upon which the sacred penman is speaking, must be duly noticed. If we be doubtful about the real and true meaning of any passage of scripture, we must observe the persons or characters of whom, or to whom the words in question are spoken. Overlooking these, is a fruitful source of perverting scripture. If we will take scripture expressions in a detached manner regardless of the connexion, we can prove any thing and every thing we wish to prove, or support any scheme of principles, in religion, however absurd and irrational, even though blasphemous. In this way, usually, all erroneous persons, who adopt and zealously endeavor to propagate heretical principles, and divisive practices, conduct. They never hearken to the connexion or to the analogy of faith, but recite, at random, texts which in sound seem to accord with their

singular notions. They never stop to examine, with coolness and candor, what may be offered against them, like rational men, impartially desirous of finding the truth, whether it shall make for or against them. This is an extremely common way of abusing and misapplying scripture. How frequently do *unlearned* and *unstable* men practise it to their own destruction! And how often, too, do artful and designing men practise it, who know better, and who know that they are endeavouring to impose on the world! Many, no doubt, read and study the Oracles of God, on purpose either to misrepresent or ridicule them. To affirm this, is neither, it is apprehended, uncharitable or uncandid. For were not this actually the case, how is it possible, that there should be so many strange, absurd, and wild schemes of religion—such irrational and blasphemous principles—such gross corruptions of christianity. Many heresies, in the various ages of the world, and various christian countries, have sprung up to the disgrace of reason and religion:—dangerous and fatal heresies—and all from this fruitful source, MISUNDERSTANDING and MISSAPPLYING particular passages of scripture detached from the general connexion, which may seem in the sound, or at first hearing, to support the tenets, which, the abettors of such tenets, adduce them to support. Some may be plausible. And when much art, sophistry, and false reasoning are used, may deceive even such persons as are, in a measure, upon their guard.

ALL errors and false systems of doctrine not only originate from an abuse and perversion of

scripture, but clearly argue the great degeneracy and corruption of human nature. Were not man a depraved creature, or were he as he was, when first formed in Paradise, he would never wander into erroneous principles. He would never be attached to them. He would never disgrace himself by unwearied efforts to proselyte others to them. Persons who have embraced errors like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, are restless and uneasy. They have *committed* themselves to the business of faction; and are zealous to diffuse the poison of their errors, as extensively as possible. Long since did our Lord make the remark; and every age and every country have verified it. *Wo unto you Scribes, Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of Hell than yourselves.*

It is to the benevolent mind, painful to recollect, that erronists of every description, are more active and laborious to disseminate their mischievous opinions, than the lovers of truth are, the true principles. One cause no doubt is that false principles are pleasing to depraved nature. But the truth, in things moral and divine, though approved of by natural conscience and reason, is never approved of by the un sanctified heart. To receive the truth in the love of it, is the mark of a gracious state. It is one of the most amiable tempers which man ever exercises.—It is also melancholy to think, that persons who have embraced error, are far more anxious to gain proselytes to their FALSE CREED, than to promote peace, charity and holy living. They

tithe *annise* and *mint*, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. They are not contented to enjoy their own singularity of opinion and practice, and the right of private judgment; but, like insurgents in civil government, go about to bring others over to their party.—Hence unhappy differences in the church.—Hence hard speeches and reviling of others.—Hence strange abuse and perversion of scripture.

3. A THIRD way, in which unlearned and unstable men wrest the scripture to their own destruction, is by false glosses, strained, and fanciful comments, and indulging prejudice while it is read or heard. It would be tedious and endless to go over, even in imagination, with the strange and unnatural comments often put upon plain passages of inspired truth—or the parables used by our Lord—or the transactions recorded in scripture. Some glosses are put upon them, which a sober and thinking mind would conceive impossible to enter the fancy of man. I shall take leave to mention one, out of innumerable others which might be mentioned with equal propriety.—The transfiguration of our Saviour on Mount Tabor, has been cited, and commented upon, to prove that there are no Gospel-ordinances in the New-Testament-dispensation.—A man must have a surprising talent at discovering an *occult* meaning in scripture to draw an argument against the *plain* and *express* Institutions of the Gospel, from that glorious transaction. Perhaps we cannot find among any disputers, such instances of evading, perverting, and twisting plain and obvious points,

as among the different sectaries of Religion. Truth, amid such collisions and opposition, may eventually shine forth with a superior splendor.—It is therefore some consolation to reflect that the Christian Religion may be, in the end, advantaged, by the errors and divisions, which a holy Providence suffers to take place. They never can avail to destroy the cause, which they now dishonour. While we see, to our great grief, errors and delusion spreading, our minds ought to be deeply affected with the impression that we do not love, naturally, the great truths and doctrines of the Gospel. Mankind are exceedingly averse, naturally, from the soul-emptying—soul-humbling--Christ-exalting doctrines of God's word. And consequently, the scriptures are not read or heard with that honest intention to be led into all truth and duty, with which they ought to be. We often, hence, see them misunderstood and misapplied to the ruin of such, as thus wrest them.

4. A FARTHER way, in which the word of God is wrested from its proper meaning by *unlearned and unstable men*, is their refusing, thro' pride and self-conceit the necessary helps to understand them rightly. They look only on one side.—They read only on one side. Tradition, love of novelty or affectation, lead them astray. They may have so high an esteem of some ONE LEADER of a Sect—or inticing author—or may so bias their minds by envy, or prejudice, as will end in mis-understanding the word of God.—We should always suspect our own impartiality and honest views. We should ask ourselves such questions as these, “Am I willing to know the truth? Do I entertain no prejudices, un-

“founded and unreasonable, against such and
 “such doctrines or modes of worship? Do not
 “corrupt and selfish passions warp my judgment?
 “Is not my admiration of such a way—or such
 “an author—or regard to such a man, the cause
 “of my imbibing the principles, I have imbib-
 “ed? Do I make use of all the helps in my
 “power to search out the true meaning of God’s
 “holy word? Do I repair to his house—to the
 “authorised guides in his Church, for advice,
 “light, and counsel? Am I afraid of delusion—
 “of my own heart, and of temptations?”

He who does not make use of all the assistan-
 ces, to which, in the course of divine Provi-
 dence, he hath access, in order to understand the
 right way of serving and glorifying God, is to be
 credited in no professions of impartiality or integ-
 rity, which he may make.—

5. ANOTHER way, in which unlearned and
 unstable men pervert the holy scriptures, is read-
 ing them with a light, trifling and unserious
 mind, and refusing to seek to God for his grace
 and spirit to purge away our darkness and prej-
 udices, our evil affections and vain imaginations.
 A trifling and light temper of mind is a very im-
 proper one to read the word of God—or to hear
 it with. If we be unserious when we read, it
 is not likely that we shall get any good from it.
 Our desire, when we either read or hear the
 word, should be to be spiritually benefited—to
 get heavenly light and instruction. We are to
 be guided and directed entirely by holy scripture,
 and to receive it just as it is. It should be pray-
 erfully read. Our supplication should ascend to
 the fountain of grace and mercy, wisdom and

goodness, that he would illuminate our darkened understandings—confirm our wavering hearts—establish our faith—undeceive us, if deceived—correct our errors, if erroneous—remove our prejudices against the great and essential doctrines of Christianity, if we be actuated by any—increase our regard to his own word—convince us of sin—save us from the seduction of false principles, the fascinating power of heresy—and direct our hearts into his love, and a patient waiting for Christ. Most devoutly, and importunately, and perseveringly should we seek the purifying efficacy of grace divine, to save us from all delusion, and to prevent our placing religion in rites and forms, or outward observances, that we may not, being *led away with the error of the wicked fall from our own steadfastness.*

6. ANOTHER way, and the last that will be now illustrated, in which unlearned and unstable men pervert or wrest the scriptures, is in holding that they cannot be rightly understood, without the same immediate inspiration of the holy Ghost which indited them. *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of Man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the holy Ghost.* The question is not, whether a renewed heart be of great importance in gaining a true knowledge of the holy scriptures, and give a more lively, solemn and affecting impression of the truths, duties, and doctrines of the Bible? for this is readily acknowledged. But whether it can be understood, in its great principles and doctrines, duties and ordinances, by man, without the *immediate inspiration* of the spirit of God. If it cannot, it can do him no good, while *uninspired.* And when *inspired* he

will need no written word. If God have given to us a revelation of his will, he intended it should do us good, and be our *sole guide* in matters of faith and practice. But it can do us no good, if we cannot understand it. If unregenerated persons cannot understand the truths, duties doctrines and ordinances which it contains, it cannot be the mean of convincing them—reproving them—instructing them and warning them. And if we say, they cannot understand it, because it hath a *hidden* and *mystical* meaning: We really make it of no worth. We highly impeach it. The *spiritual* meaning of scripture is its *true* meaning. The most *pious* mind can only understand it, in its true sense. Surely we cannot be so rash as to say, that it is an *unintelligible book*—like an *enigma*. And to say, that it has, beyond the real true meaning—a hidden and mystical one, is not only to say a very unreasonable thing, but is to make scripture dependent on man's fancy for its meaning. To do this, is to set the scripture aside altogether, and in effect to deny it. If none but Saints, or true believers in Christ can understand it, this consequence will follow, it must be, to all the rest of the world, USELESS.—And to pretend to any light or guide superior in us, to the word of God, is to renounce it, in truth or in reality.—The fact is, that the scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the rule, by which to try all suggestions and impulses:—the only standard. All our hopes, all our joys, all our doctrines, all our discipline, and all our practices are to be tried by them. By them to stand or fall.—This is not intended to disparage the work and office of the holy Ghost in his awakening—sanctifying and indwelling influence on the soul. The holy spirit must sanctify and regenerate us.

We wholly depend on the SOVEREIGN grace of God to save us. In ourselves we are helpless and hopeless. His word is to teach us. His spirit to sanctify us. And his son to redeem us. *By grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.—*

GUIDED by these sentiments, you will come to a right understanding of holy scripture, and feel the danger of perverting it; you will easily distinguish between truth and error.—Let the plain sense of scripture, not the suggestions of fancy, or supposed extraordinary impulses on the soul, or opinions of men, be your directory.—Search the Oracles of the one living and true God, with humility and integrity, with a desire to understand them—and a resolution to live up to their divine precepts—earnestly seeking to the throne of grace for divine light and teachings. Thus, may you hope that your diligent endeavours to know the right way of the Lord, will be crowned with happy success. *For the meek he will guide in judgment.—The meek he will teach his way. AMEN.*



DISCOURSE IV.

Stated prayer a duty binding on all men.

A C T S ii. 21.

And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.

THESSE words are a quotation from the prophet Joel. And the whole quotation is the text, from which St. Peter preached that powerful Sermon, which was the mean of converting three thousand hearers.—He very pertinently applies the passage from that prophet to the remarkable day and time, in which he speaks; being the day of Pentecost, when the Apostles, who were all in one place, of one accord, were endowed with miraculous gifts, and qualified to carry the good news of the gospel, according to their commission, over all the earth. And the words of the text inform us, in a very concise manner, what we are to do, in order to be saved. The condition of salvation, proposed in them, is as easy as it can be made, consistently with the honour of the law, attributes, and government of God. For he, being infinitely wise and gracious, never requires of any of his rational creatures either what is hard and cruel, or unjust and

improper. As he hath been pleased to make us rational creatures and moral agents, so he ever more treats us as rational creatures. In all his laws, commandments, calls, precepts, and requisitions we are considered as being what we are. He never did, and never will, do any thing incompatible either with wisdom and justice, or benevolence and goodness. Indeed, were we to sit down, and in cool and dispassionate reasoning, to propose or desire our own terms of happiness, could we desire or wish for easier, than what are contained in the text. *And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.*—Is it so indeed?—May we be saved, if we will but accept of salvation, if we desire, or ask for it?—We certainly may. And it is a glorious truth.—It is a pleasing doctrine. It is a delightful thought.—Call not the Religion of the Gospel, therefore, unreasonable. Object no longer to its offers. No more consider it as requiring impossibilities of man. It is the perfection of beauty. It is reason itself:—divine in its nature:—rich in its promises:—plain in its essential precepts:—and heavenly in its tendency.—

IN the sequel, we will consider the condition, upon which Salvation is offered to us, in the text: or show that stated prayer is a duty binding on all men.

THE condition upon which Salvation is offered to us, in these words now under consideration, is *calling upon the name of the Lord.* *And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.* Calling upon

the name of the Lord is, then, the necessary condition of our being saved. How, therefore, the interesting enquiry is, are we to call upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved—or to be intitled to the promised blessing of the text?—The *name of the Lord* here, and in a great variety of other places of holy Writ, means the attributes of the Supreme Being, his nature, and perfections; or God himself, the only proper object of religious fear and adoration. And *calling upon him* for help and deliverance, in our troubles and distress, and looking to him for temporal and spiritual blessings, for all needed good for time and Eternity, is repairing to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need, or that we may procure a supply of spiritual provision to aid us, in our journey through life, and to prepare us for everlasting rest. *Let us therefore,* says the Apostle, *come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* Calling upon the name of the Lord is the usual scripture-phrase for STATEDLY looking to him as the fountain of light, of goodness, of wisdom, of mercy, and of power, by PRAYER, that we may obtain all the blessings, whether pertaining to the present or future world, which our circumstances and condition may render necessary. And we are to do this, in all the ways of his appointment, and which reason suggests as proper, whether public, social, or private. I say, which reason suggests as proper: for reason is given to us, to be diligently improved in the things of Religion, as well as of the world, in the concerns of our souls, as well as in our temporal interests, and much more so, as our spirit-

ual concerns are infinitely more important than our temporal. To set aside reason in our enquiries after truth and duty, would be no less absurd, than to reject the light of divine revelation itself. Reason is a mortal foe to enthusiastic and visionary schemes of religion. And to deny its use or office in things of a spiritual nature, is not only highly absurd, but introductory to fatal delusions. He who will have nothing to do with reason in religion, is just prepared to admit any extravagance or error, whatever in doctrine and worship.—Reason and scripture never contradict each other. And with respect to the *stated* duty of prayer as binding on all men, they are perfectly united. Reason pleads for it. Scripture demands it. And that *stated prayer* hath a happy influence on every christian grace—on every christian temper—and on the whole of Religion has been generally allowed.

CALLING upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved, includes the following things; sincerity,—devout affection,—constancy, or on all stated seasons,—perseverance,—penitence,—and correspondent practice. The manner in which the duty is to be performed is of the greatest moment. The temper of heart, with which we come before God, is a capital part of the duty.—*Sincerity*, therefore, is implied in *calling upon the name of the Lord* so as to be saved. This stands in opposition to all hypocrisy, or mere formality. No doubt, many have no more than the mere form; and while pious words and expressions are uttered, and with seeming reverence and devotion, the heart bears no part in the whole, but is wandering with the fool's eyes to

the ends of the earth ; goes after its covetousness ; indulges vain thoughts ; or is unaffected and indevout. The most suitable, pertinent, and happily chosen words may be used, where there is no correspondence of affection. Such merely external performances, or bare lip-service can never ascend with approbation to a holy and omniscient God, who searches the heart and tries the reins of the children of men. External acts of piety, without any devotion of the heart, can be considered in no other light than as hypocrisy and form ; and hypocrisy and outward show of religion are most severely reprehended by our Lord, in the words of the prophet Isaiah. *Ye hypocrites well did Esaias prophecy of you, saying this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouths, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* Drawing nigh to God as his people, and honouring him with our mouths, while the heart is far from him, cannot be pleasing to him. There must be the fervour and friendship of an upright heart. St. James, likewise, directs us, in our approaches to a holy God, to avoid all hypocrisy and insincerity, or heart-iniquity. *Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands ye sinners and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.* We must not be double-minded, having one mind for God, and one for the world. Our aim must be to glorify God. Our warmest affections must centre in him, who deserves all love and praise, both of angels and men. We are told, in a most beautiful and affecting manner, by our Lord himself, in his conference with the woman of Samaria, of the absolute necessity

of sincerity or devotion of heart in all our addresses to the throne of grace, whether public, social, or private.—*But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers, shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* All right and acceptable worship is in spirit and in truth. To worship God in spirit and in truth is to worship him in a spiritual manner. And a spiritual worship is a sincere, holy, and devout worship. To worship God in spirit and in truth, is to worship him by the gracious aids of his spirit, and with a sincere upright heart, or with a devout temper of mind. To suppose that the only true and spiritual worship of the Deity, is in the hidden recesses of the soul, is not only a gross perversion of our Saviour's words, but to reject all worship of him altogether. To affirm that all true worship is to be performed in the secrecy and retirement or silence of the soul is to exclude all idea of worship, to contradict the whole current of scripture, and to deny that man is what he is, composed of body and soul, a material and immaterial part.—*Calling upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved is therefore worshipping him in spirit and in truth, that is, with sincerity and uprightness of heart, or a devout frame of mind.* All our religious duties, indeed, in order to meet with the divine acceptance and approbation, must flow from sincerity of heart.—

AGAIN, calling upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved, is to worship him with affection and reverence. When we draw near to God, his

dread should fall on us and his excellency make us afraid. All right homage paid to him, is accompanied with reverence and Godly fear. The affections of the soul must correspond with the solemnity and importance of the duty performed. When we commune with God in prayer, we should stand in awe and sin not. In our petitions, supplications, confessions of sin, thankful acknowledgment of mercies, and adorations we ought to feel the deepest reverence and warmth, or fervour of affection. The attention should be composed, the thoughts collected, the affections engaged, and the whole soul solemnized. The words spoken are to be accompanied with devout exercises.—All the divine glories are to be revered. High, exalted and reverential thoughts of the Majesty of heaven and Earth, the great object of adoration and religious praise, are to be entertained. Before him angels bow. The homage of the heavenly world is paid with all lowliness and reverence. The blessed inhabitants, thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand, all stand before the throne, and in all the ardour, purity and sublimity of heavenly worship, cry holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. *Who should not fear thee, O Lord, for thou only art HOLY* is the language of celestial adoration. How can that mind, which has a proper sense of the infinite greatness and infinite Majesty of God, help being filled with the highest reverence? He is the king immortal, eternal, invisible. He dwells in light unapproachable and full of glory. He is the blessed and only Potentate, gracious, merciful, slow unto anger, long-suffering—forgiving iniquity transgression and sin, but will by no

means clear the guilty. The heavenly arches resound with his praises. The temple of the universe is filled with his presence. All nature exhibits his glory. This is that which he hath said, he will be had *in reverence by all them that draw near to him : and will be sanctified by all the people.* If the affections of the heart do not go up to heaven, with our petitions and supplications, they will be all in vain. *Let us,* says the prophet Jeremiah in his lamentations, *lift up our hearts, with our hands, unto God in the heavens.* There must be the internal homage of the heart, as well as external. Both are necessary. Both must go together.—Again—says the Apostle Paul, *I will therefore that men pray every where lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.* *Holy hands* and *without wrath and doubting* imply the affections and reverence of the heart :—having no malice or bitter passions towards fellow worshippers.—We are directed, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in this manner, *Let us have grace whereby we may serve God, with reverence and godly fear.* Deep reverence and pious fear are requisite in all our addresses to a prayer hearing God. We are, moreover farther commanded not to be *slothful in business ; but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*—Fervour and warmth of affection should attend, therefore, all supplications to the throne of grace. A really pious and devout heart is the chief ingredient in all acceptable worship.

ANOTHER particular necessarily implied, in *calling upon the name* of the Lord so as to be saved, is *constancy*, or doing it on all *stated* seasons and proper occasions. He who objects a-

gainst the *stated* worship of God on proper seasons, really discards all worship. The rule of worship is the divine word, and not any supposed internal impulse on the soul. We cannot know HOW or WHEN to worship God, but by his word. And internal, separate from external homage, is not sufficient. The whole man must bow before the God of the whole earth. To present ourselves *statedly* before him, is only to offer him that homage which reason and nature demand. As the good man is said to be sanctified throughout in soul, in spirit and in body; so it is but fit, in the very reason and nature of things, that he should render unto God homage in all these respects. There must be outward reverence and composure, and proper expressions of the inward fervors of the mind. We are to give to others proofs that we worship God. We are to glorify him by social and public prayer. All creation as it were, the heavens over our heads, and the earth on which we dwell, *silently* worship its glorious author. By man the praises of creation should be rendered *vocal*. As a Priest in the temple of the Universe, he is to present prayer and praises to the almighty Architect. Shall he be dumb in praising his God, like the *mute fish* that can only mean his praise? What was the faculty of speech, which so distinguishes man from all the brutal world, given to us for? Why were we made with social powers? was it not, that we might *jointly* honor, by prayer, the Maker of our frame? If so, there must be STATED SEASONS for such divine and heavenly employment. Every work and purpose under the sun must have a *stated* season. And the more important the work, the greater the

need of a fixed season, in which to perform it. If God is to be served at all, there must of necessity be certain *fixed seasons* in which to serve him. He would not command us to serve him, and allow no fixed time for his service. He is the God of order and not of confusion. He will have every thing done decently and in order. So important and heavenly an employment as that of worshipping and serving him, above all things, must have *stated* seasons. To deny any *stated* seasons of worship, is to rebel against reason, scripture, and common sense. Every body, of common sense, knows that if an important work be assigned us to perform, there must be a proper time fixed upon in which to perform it. We are not to consult our own feelings or inclinations, as to the seasons of worship, but when the *hour* of prayer comes, that is, the *stated* and fit seasons, we must engage in it, and prepare our hearts to seek the Lord; depending on the assistances of divine grace; knowing that the preparation of the heart and answer of the tongue in man, are both from the Lord. The great original law of worship, is *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*. All intelligent creatures are bound, by the most powerful of all ties, to do this. All men, wherever they dwell, are obligated by Creation, to serve the Creator in all the ways, in which they are capable. Preservation in being lays also a solemn bond upon them. The relation of creatures to a Creator does the same. All the glorious excellencies of the divine character make it an indispensable duty to pay him honour divine. Indeed, the adorable attributes of God

bind us to worship and serve him. And it is as plain, as any point in moral duty, that there must of necessity be *stated* seasons, therefore, of worship. Under the law, by God's own appointment, were the *morning* and *evening* sacrifices. Nature herself fixes upon these seasons. The sun in the firmament teaches us the same lesson. The pleasing succession of day and night points out the *seasons* for family and secret worship. And the Institution of a christian sabbath, specifies the *stated* periods of public worship.

BESIDES these *stated* seasons appointed and determined by nature and scripture, there are other fit and proper occasions, as Providence may order and overrule things, by either favors or frowns, whether public or private, personal or relative. Upon all *fit* occasions, as well as *fixed* and *stated* seasons, our prayers are to ascend to the Almighty ruler of the Universe.—We are to acknowledge him, in all our ways. But we cannot acknowledge him as a prayer-hearing God, without actually praying to him, in all his appointed ways. We are to own him, as a prayer-hearing God, as well as an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, merciful, glorious, holy, and bountiful God. And no man can devise any way of acknowledging him as a prayer-hearing God, but by actually applying to him, *statedly*, in prayer. That he is a prayer-hearing God, we are expressly assured, in these remarkable words: *O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee all flesh shall come.*

It may be, further, observed that *stated* seasons of calling upon the name of the Lord, are essential parts of the duty of worshipping and owning

him. Without *stated* seasons the duty will die away, and wither, like a plant when the root is materially injured. If man have no *stated* seasons to worship God, he will either wholly omit, or infrequently practise the important duty, indeed, one of the most important, of human life and of all Religion, or he will negligently or carelessly perform it. In the very reason and nature of the case, there must be, therefore, *stated* seasons of worship, *stated* seasons for public worship, *stated* seasons for family worship, and *stated* seasons for secret worship. To have no *stated* seasons, will, in the end, be to reject the duty altogether. In regard to the support of animal life, though the appetites of hunger and thirst be given as directories, still mankind in general have found it necessary, to prevent intemperance and to preserve health to have *stated* seasons for partaking of food. But in regard to the spiritual life, the preservation of religion in the soul, how much more necessary to have *stated* seasons for the performance of prayer, which is essential not only to the flourishing state of religion in the soul and in the world, but to its very existence. Such alas! is the deplorable corruption of our nature, that if we will only worship God, when our inclinations direct, or some supposed internal whispering in the recesses of the soul, that we shall SOON FORGET all our obligations to him, who is our Maker, Preserver, and bountiful Benefactor. He who denies the *stated* seasons of worship cannot be considered, in any other light, than the enemy of all religious adoration and homage.

THERE must, also, be *perseverance* in calling upon the name of the Lord, as well as *stated*

seasons, in order to be saved. Perseverance is necessary in order to be successful. It demonstrates sincerity. It evinces engagedness. As to worldly good, perseverance and patience will work wonders. The diligent hand maketh rich. What wise and great achievements have ever been accomplished without perseverance. Would we succeed in our wishes to obtain and secure temporal felicity we must hold on our way. In religion the direction is to go on from strength to strength, to add one degree of grace to another, to be faithful unto the death, would we receive a crown of life. And perseverance in calling upon the name of the Lord alone proves our being in earnest.

To perform the duty only for a short space or infrequently, to begin the practice of it, and then omit it is a fatal symptom of hypocrisy. Hypocrites never persevere in calling upon God, in a serious and devout manner. It is the observation of an eminent divine, "that Apostacy begins in the omission of prayer." As the source of all irreligion and wickedness is forgetfulness of God, and not setting him before us; so the first sign of a man's being disposed to religion and the service of God is betaking himself to prayer; *behold he prayeth*. And as a religious concern first shows itself in prayer, so the first symptom of declension, the first step to Apostacy is the neglect or careless performance of it. Speaking of the hypocrite, it is said, in the book of Job, *Will he always call upon God?* As much as if it had been said, it is a mark of the hypocrite that he will not continue to call upon God. He will omit it. He will pretend excuses for the

neglect of it. He will profess to disbelieve the obligation of *stated* worship. Or he will attend only to the duty, in times of trouble and affliction, or under some awakening Providences.

WE are commanded to persevere in the duty. *And he spake a parable to this end that men ought always to pray and not to faint.* Men are never to relinquish the practice of devotional duties, under any temptation or pretext. They are to be continued as long as life continues. While life and breath last, our prayers or devotional exercises are to be attended upon, at the *stated* seasons. The Apostle speaks of rejoicing in hope, being patient in tribulation, *continuing instant in prayer.* *To be instant in prayer* is to attend upon it, in all proper ways, and upon all fit occasions, and also to be fervent in it. And *to continue instant in it* is to persevere in the practice of devotional duties as long as it shall please God to prolong our probationary existence. He who relinquishes or infrequently attends upon prayer is either in a delusion, or in an unconverted state, whatever may be his pretext. A really good man who has experienced a work of renewing grace on his heart, cannot long deny or omit *stated* devotional exercises. For prayer is the very breath of the new Creature. It is recorded of St. Paul as soon as he was converted, *Behold he prayeth.* This is equally true of all regenerated persons. They will be punctual and constant in their addresses to heaven, at the *stated* seasons. You cannot keep them from the throne of grace. They would not be hired to keep from it, for immense

treasures, or even worlds. The holy heart will no more drop the duty of calling upon the name of the Lord *STATEDLY* than it will cease breathing. It is a delusion to relinquish so important a duty as *stated* prayer, in its various forms, because we may have heretofore been insincere or indevout, careless or formal in it. That spirit, which leads any to undervalue or to neglect prayer—to deny or turn away from the due seasons or methods of it, is not from heaven, but is the spirit of error and impiety. Only hear how plain the scripture is on this point. *Pray*, says the Apostle to the Christians at Thessalonica, *without ceasing*: that is, continue and persevere to the end of life, in calling upon the name of the Lord: ever maintain a devotional frame of mind: pray on all proper occasions and fit and *stated* seasons. Again—says he, *pray with all manner of prayer*. This, in all reason, must include every kind of prayer, public, social and secret. What, can we comply with this express command, and yet neglect family-worship in our houses—or public *stated* worship on the Lord's day—or religious retirement? No words can enjoin *stated* family worship, if these do not. He who can deny family religion or prayer, in the face of this passage of inspired truth, must have a wonderful talent at perverting scripture, and wilfully close his eyes upon a light, which nothing, but high criminal prejudice, can prevent our discerning.—The happy influence of calling upon the name of the Lord, *statedly*, morning and evening, in our dwellings is indeed very great. “While a desire of imitation is confessedly a strong principle of action, one bright domestic pattern, in a person of superior character and authority, in calling

his family to devotion, every morning and evening, will have more effect upon all beneath, and about him, than a thousand dry instructions."— I shall here take leave to repeat some weighty and judicious sentences from an excellent and pious Author. " If, says he, you neglect the duty of family prayer it will encourage and authorize their neglect. They may omit it in their families; and their Children's, Children may omit it; so that perhaps before the end of the world, there may be hundreds, and even thousands, descended from you, who have in effect learnt irreligion and impiety in your houses, and from your example; or at least have never learnt religion there. Yea, perhaps, Christ when he cometh to judgment, may find some of your descendants among the wicked, who shall be *burnt up as stubble*; and their wickedness and misery may be traced up as high as your neglect of family worship, and be in some degree, charged to your account. Now, can you say this is not probable? And if it be probable, is it not very shocking? You had a thousand times better have your families beggars, than leave them enemies to God and strangers to prayer. Whereas by a faithful care in this duty, you may leave a sweet favour behind you; a *praying seed*, that shall be the support of religion in every future age, and your joy and crown of rejoicing at the appearance of Jesus Christ. I firmly believe, there will not be a heavier article in any man's charge at the great Day, than this, that he *cut off the entail of religion in his family*; suffered it to die in his hands, after it had been conveyed down to him by his pious ancestors; and left an ungodly Seed to be the reproach of Christiani-

ty, and spread impiety and irreligion through all succeeding generations to the end of the world." But the careless omission, in point of heinous guilt, is not to be compared to the wilful denial of family-worship. What can we think of those, who upon a pretended internal impulse or principle, deny and vilify the duty, and exert all their efforts to induce families to discontinue the practice of it? They are given up to strong delusion to believe a lie. What a bitter enemy to religion is that man who denies it to be duty, and refuses to call upon *the name* of the Lord in his dwelling! Even were the evidence of the duty of family worship, much weaker than it is, we should suppose every good man would *statedly* perform it; because such a high privilege, and happiness.—Calling upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved, is doing it perseveringly—in all the ways appointed, in God's holy word, in public—in the family—and in secret.

It may be, added, with evident propriety, that *calling upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved*, implies doing it, penitently, believingly, and through the mediation and atonement of the son of God. Without true penitence, or godly sorrow, without a Gospel faith—without offering all our desires and requests to heaven in the name of Christ, we cannot be saved. What are the sacrifices of God—such sacrifices as he will be well-pleased with and own! The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, he will not despise.—To whom does he look with a propitious smile? To the humble,—the penitent—the believing—the poor and contrite in spirit. We are to seek the Lord

while he may be found—to call on him while he is near. We are to ask in faith. We must go to a prayer-hearing God in a believing manner.—We are to seek for needed blessings, both temporal and spiritual, in the name of Christ. *And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the father by him.* All our prayers—petitions for mercy—confessions of sin—and thanksgiving must be in his name, on his account, and through his sacrifice and mediation. Our father who is in heaven, can hear us only through him. The prayers of faith will be heard—and when heard, answered in that time and way, which, upon the whole, shall be best, most for the divine glory and our good. In all our wants and distresses divine favourable interpositions may be hoped for, if sought in faith. Our Lord himself says, *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name believing, ye shall receive*—receive in such a manner—and such measures—and at such times, as infinite wisdom sees meet; if not the very identical or individual mercy sought, still what, all things considered, is best. Christ, farther, informs us in regard to the duty of prayer in these most encouraging words, *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the son.*—Again, *If ye shall ask any thing, in my name, I will do it*: that is, all your prayers shall have a gracious audience and acceptance. That shall be done for you, by a wise and merciful God, which shall be most for his glory and your good, though, at present, painful to you, or even ever so contrary to your wishes or hopes.—

To call upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved is then to call on him, in deep repentance—unfeigned Gospel-faith—and through the merits, righteousness, and mediation of his ever-well beloved son.—

FINALLY, *calling upon the name of the Lord so as to be saved* is to walk and conduct agreeably to our prayers. He who goes to the throne of grace in a right manner, and so as to be accepted by a gracious and holy God, will live and converse, in a virtuous, prudent, and meek way: that his practice and prayers may not contradict each other. No one can be sincere or in earnest in his devotional exercises, who does not aim to live accordingly. To pray fervently for the pardon of sin, and not to be sorry for our offences is absurd. To implore of God his grace to sanctify us, and not to use all the means of sanctification, is to trifle. To ask for his restraining power to preserve us from vice and temptation, and at the same time, to indulge ourselves in sin, and go in the way of temptations is hypocrisy. To implore the gracious aids of the holy Ghost to purify our souls, to enlighten our understandings—to subdue our stubborn wills—to enable us to cultivate the benevolence, meekness, and humility—the peaceableness, forgiving, condescending temper of Christianity, and not, at the same time; endeavour to act up to those glorious principles, is to show that we are but feigned petitioners for the blessings we devoutly crave. It is essential to all acceptable prayers, that we live according to them. To supplicate the throne of grace to have all sin subdued in us, and

not to take all possible care to avoid all the occasions and ways of sin is but mockery. When we seek to God for his grace and power to convince us—to sanctify us—to reclaim us from our sinful wanderings—to guard us from false principles—to remove prejudice from us—to build us up in holiness and faith unto his heavenly kingdom—to enable us to do all his will, to submit to his government—to comport with his Providential dispensations, we are to improve all our best endeavours to live and act accordingly. Can he be pleased with any prayers, unless the deportment and conduct be answerable, in the supplicants? The prayer of the upright is God's delight. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to him. If we love vice, and live in the commission of known iniquity, our prayers, however many we make, or however long, or seemingly devout, cannot be pleasing to a holy and sin-hating God. The Psalmist says, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.* Such as are impenitent—unbelieving—profane and vicious God will not own and graciously hear, though they offer many and long prayers to him. We must act agreeably to our petitions for mercy, if we would be saved. None can be saved, who will not stately call upon the name of the Lord, as they are able: and, at the same time, practise according to their prayers. An unholy person cannot be saved while such. A prayerless person cannot be saved as such. To omit stately prayer, in its various forms, ALLOWEDLY, is to bar against ourselves, the gates of heavenly blessedness. It is to thrust ourselves out of the kingdom of glory. It is to plunge ourselves into misery. That our hearts and

practice must correspond with our prayers, in order to meet with the divine acceptance, or be graciously answered, is plain from the following passages of Scripture.—*And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.*—*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the Sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*—*Now we know that God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth.*—*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*—*Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*—*The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.*—*Lord thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.* Many more texts, which speak the same language, might easily be collected. But these are deemed amply sufficient to convince every mind which can be convinced at all, that our hearts and lives must correspond with our prayers—must be of the same tenour or the latter will not be heard, or the blessings implored, be granted, or the mercies sought, be imparted.—Thus have I considered the condition of salvation, specified in the text, *calling upon the name of the Lord*; or that stated prayer is a duty binding on all men.

CALLING upon the name of the Lord is the common language of scripture for addressees to the mercy-seat of God by prayer, in all its forms, public, social, or secret. One must be included as well as the other. All must be equally included. For if we may lawfully shut out one, we may the others, with as much propriety. When such general expressions are employed, in the sacred writings, the only just and true way of interpreting them, is to extend them to all the parts or branches of the duty enjoined;—and *farther*, none can rationally hope to enjoy the blessings promised, unless they perform, in its true meaning and spirit, the condition upon which the blessings or good promised, are suspended. Thus, if we would be saved, we must call upon the name of the Lord, according to the true meaning, extent, and spirit of this duty. And all that do, shall be saved. There will not be one exception. God's word of promise is sure; never will fail. If we perform the condition as required, the event—our salvation is as certain, as the word of God can make it.—

It may be subjoined, here, before we close the discourse, that calling upon the name of the Lord, may include a sincere engagement in the whole of Religion—not the duties of piety and devotion only—but of sobriety and righteousness also—or devoting ourselves to the whole work and service of God, in an upright manner, believing his truths—studying his will—obeying his laws, comporting with his Providence—and living as his obedient children.—

As the conclusion of the whole, we cannot but be highly delighted with the easiness of the terms

of falvation. They are as eafy as they could be confiftent with the law, chara ter and attributes of the Supreme Being ; as they could be, and be compatible with his holinefs and fovereign mercy.—Herein, the wifdom and the goodnefs of the Maker of all things fhine with a confpicuous Luftre. He always a ts, indeed, with the higheft wifdom, and with perfect benevolence. He requires of us only what is reasonable to be required. And the reafonablenefs of the Chriftian fyftem is among the moft fatisfactory and powerful evidences of its truth and divinity.—It is divine in its nature—pure in its laws—rich in its promifes—plain in its duties—pleafing in its hopes—fublime in its profpe ts—fupporting in its confolations—grand in its offers—and in its rewards, glorious beyond all that can be imagined in the prefent ftate.—We are to call upon the name of the Lord, in a right and pious manner, and be faved.—And to this duty of calling upon the name of the Lord we are bound by the ftrongeft of all ties—by our creation—by our prefervation—by our redemption—by all the favours of Providence—by our dependance on God—by his glories—by his goodnefs—by his omnifcience—by his omniprefence—by his omnipotence—by his faithfulnefs—by our own intereft—by our innumerable wants, for foul and body, for time and Eternity. And may we be faved, if we will do it, in that manner, in which we ought?—Certainly we may. And could we defire mercy upon any lower condition?—If we murmur and complain of this, we difcover the bafeft and vileft temper : and deferve everlafting excluftion from the blifeful prefence of a holy and gracious God. We muft be fpeechlefs, if condemned FOREVER.

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DISCOURSE V.

The duty of public worship, and its beneficial tendency.

MATTHEW iv. 10.

Then saith Jesus, get thee hence Satan, for it is written Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

IT is becoming fashionable not only to disesteem, but to speak lightly of the worship of the supreme Being, the fountain of all existence and blessedness. It is to be deeply regretted, that, by many his name is profaned, his sabbaths disregarded, his ordinances neglected, and all worship of him habitually omitted. Nay, it is even with one class of people, whose number is not inconsiderable, growing into a maxim, or kind of aphorism, that all Religion consists in doing right between man and man, in promoting the temporal welfare, the order, and best civil good of society. This is openly affirmed by men who pretend to clearness of thought, eminence of abilities, and extensive reading; and echoed by their admirers and imitators. They earnestly contend that Moral Virtue, or doing good to man is the most acceptable offering to

the divine Being, and not only the most acceptable, but the only rational and acceptable worship, which can be performed by us to our Maker, Preserver and Benefactor. Having gone this length, they are compelled to take one step more, and to assert that all other Worship, or what have usually been called exercises and acts of Piety, are of no worth, are mere superstition and folly, fit only for the vulgar, or to amuse the uninformed and unenlightened. They forget not, at the same time, to remind us, that this superstition, as they term it, is nursed by an interested and mercenary Priesthood. But the fact is, that a system of Religion, which leaves out the duties we owe to God, is an essentially defective system: and no man of reflection and discernment, who is not a disbeliever in the divine Existence and revealed religion, can adopt it. For men of thought and good capacities to deny or object against the duties, due from us to the FIRST CAUSE OF ALL THINGS, is quite unaccountable, provided they, at the same time, pretend to give credit to any religion at all. But what is still more strange is, that any who pretend to love and fear God, should yet deny all stated worship of him, whether public, social or secret, and refuse to engage in any duties of devotion, until moved or impelled thereto by some supposed inward impression. This, all must see who exercise their reason, is in effect to deny, and virtually to renounce all divine worship.— And whatever such may profess or declare, so it is, has been, and always will be judged, by all rational men.

A greater service, therefore, cannot be done to the true and spiritual Religion of Jesus Christ,

to morality, to order, to virtue, and the happiness of the Community, than to explain and urge the obligations, advantages, and importance of stated public worship. This is now proposed. The low condition of Religion and the existing circumstances of our Land, have induced me to enter, at this time, on this great, useful, and essential subject. It is a subject often indeed discussed. Many excellent discourses and treatises have been written upon it. It is a CAUSE, which hath been pleaded by learned and eloquent advocates, and of such merit in itself, as to deserve all the defence, which can be given to it, by its ablest friends. I would contribute my *mite* to place it in an advantageous and inviting light, hoping my exertions may not be altogether unavailing. May that gracious and merciful God, whose we are, and whom we ought to serve, smile on this attempt to recommend to all, *stated public worship*, the honors of his name!

IN the progress of these three discourses, what is intended is to evince the duty. And then illustrate the beneficial tendency of public worship.

THE first thing proposed is to evince the duty of public worship. What is now before us is to prove, by plain arguments from reason and scripture, that all people are under obligations to worship, in a stated public manner, the Deity, such obligations as cannot be violated without the highest criminality. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.*

THE occasion of our Saviour's mentioning this great original law of worship, which is binding on all intelligent Creatures in all worlds, on one

as much as another, was the attempt of satan to persuade him to pay divine worship to himself. For the trial of our Lord's Virtue, this enemy of God and man was permitted to tempt him, during forty days of miraculous fasting, in the wilderness of Judea. The temptation was conducted with wonderful art and address. The ability and experience of the tempter were called forth. In the progress of his assault, and as his last effort, he endeavors to excite within the innocent bosom of the Son of God, the sinful emotions of ambition and pride. For this purpose, he makes the greatest and most splendid offers of temporal honor and grandeur, shewed him, while on the pinnacle of the temple, all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory, (pourtrayed, no doubt, on his imagination,) and promised them all to him, provided our Lord would fall down and worship him, or pay him that service and those acknowledgements which were due to the one, only, living, and true God; and which could not be paid to any mere Creature, however exalted, without being guilty of gross Idolatry. But the snare, though most artfully laid, and managed with dextrous skill, was in vain. The temptation did not succeed. Our Lord was invulnerable. Though there was no sin in him for the temptation to work upon, yet the more holy and pure his nature, the more afflicting and disgustful must the temptation have been. He replies, as in the text, with pious indignation. *Then saith Jesus, get thee hence Satan, for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* He most pertinently and beautifully appealed to, and cited scripture, as

OUR SUPREME GUIDE, OR PRIMARY RULE by which to regulate all our conduct, to repel the solicitations of the subtle tempter. Hereby he put an honor on the written word of God. And he has left us an example, whenever we are harrassed with temptations, to go and do likewise. Perfect as he was, in moral goodness or innocence, he repaired not to any internal directory, as the primary guide, but to the written word of God, as the alone and supreme directory. And here, in the text, he lays down the GREAT MORAL LAW relating to our duty to our Maker. And what he delivers is as plain and peremptory a commandment as any that can be delivered. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* We may offer religious homage and praise to no other. If we do, we are Idolaters. We must worship and serve the one true God. He does not wait to know whether his rational Creatures be willing to worship him, or whether they fancy that they have an INWARD PROMPTER to tell them, when to worship, or how to worship him. He does not allow them to postpone his worship, till they think the spirit moves them to attend upon it. Because they may be awfully deluded here. For it is impossible for man, utterly impossible, to know whether he be not mistaken about the movings of the spirit, at the moment. We have a sure rule. The commandment is as express and peremptory, as words can make it. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* The great soveraign of the Universe, the Almighty maker of heaven and earth issues out his Mandate. It is absolute and unconditional. It is suspended on no condition whatev-

er. It is not, THOU SHALT WORSHIP the Lord thy God, provided you be willing, provided you feel disposed, provided you think it best, provided you fancy the spirit moves you to it. Such provisos would nullify and vacate the Commandment altogether. Are we thus at liberty to render the laws of God null and void, or of no effect? Woe unto that man, or body of men, who undertake thus to modify and tamper with the law of God, under any pretext whatever. It is at our peril to disobey, or put off, or omit to comply, with this great moral law of heaven. If we pretend to any superior rule, we presume to legislate for ourselves, and are wise above what is written. Man's inventions are not to be put in the place of, or to supersede the express command of God, relating to his worship.

BUT how far doth this great moral law of worship extend? How much doth it include? All who have common sense cannot but know that the right way of interpreting an absolute and unconditional law is to apply it to all that, to which it is, or can be applicable. According to this rule of interpreting, the law now under consideration reaches to all men, of all ages and nations. It binds all rational creatures, in the whole universe of the almighty, angel and man, one as much as, and as fully as another, without one exception or limitation. Wherever any rational creature or moral agent can be found, in heaven, on earth, or in any part of universal nature, there this law extends, and binds him eternally and unchangeably.

FURTHER, it is obvious to remark, that this law embraces all the ways, times, and seasons of

worship. It is impossible but that it should comprehend them all, one as much, and as fully as another, according to the nature and circumstances of the case. We are bound forever, eternally, and unalterably to worship God, in all the ways of which we are capable, and at all fit times and proper seasons, in a public, in a social, and in a private manner. For you will be pleased to observe, that this law of worship comprehends one duty of it, as much as another. It comprises indeed all the branches of it equally. It bids us worship and serve the Lord our God, in his public Assemblies,—in our houses—in our closets—on all other fit and proper occasions or stated seasons, constantly, perseveringly, while life and breath and being last. For if we say it doth not bind us to pay devotion and adoration, gratitude and religious praise statedly in our Families, we may, with equal justice, say it doth not bind us to offer homage to God in religious retirement, in our closets. We may, also, say it includes not stated public worship. And then we may proceed one step further, and say it binds us to no worship at all. To say it only binds us to worship God, the author of every mercy WHEN and HOW we may fancy the spirit moves or impels us, we say as much as that we will be *our own judges*, whether we will ever offer ONE PRAYER to the fountain of life and glory, the king, immortal, and invisible, or not : that is, we arrogantly assume the power to legislate for the Deity—to alter—repeal—and modify his law of worship as we please—or as our own fickle and perverse imagination suggesteth. This in effect is to ascend the Throne, to take the work of legislation out of God's hands into our own.—

What daring impiety and presumption!—What ignorance and wickedness are in the heart of man!

WITH evident propriety might we attempt to establish from the text the duty of the stated worship of the supreme Being, in all its forms; but in the subsequent reasonings, our attention will be principally confined to stated public worship to be constantly attended upon, on all God's holy sabbaths. The arguments however to evince this to be an indispensable duty, when we are able to attend upon it, at least many of them, will apply with equal force to prove the duty of social and secret worship; that is, we are indispensibly obliged, to worship God, statedly, in our families, and in our closets, as well as, in his SANCTUARY.

I. THE very reason and nature of things may convince us that God is to be publicly worshipped by his reasonable Creatures. Public worship comprehends, in general, solemn prayer, religious praise, and pious instructions. An essential part of public worship is stated and solemn prayer, preferring unitedly petitions for both temporal and spiritual blessings to the Throne of grace, devoutly imploring the free and full remission of sin, and gratefully recognizing the receipt of past mercies. Where there is no prayer offered to him, who, in gracious condescension, hath stiled himself the hearer of prayer, there is consequently no worship. Now had we no knowledge of Revelation, or suppose there never was any, we contend, that the light of reason would be sufficient to convince us that the public worship of the Deity is an indispensable duty. That homage from us is due to the one Supreme

Being seems to be a very obvious dictate of reason. For if he exist at all, and be necessarily what he is, from Eternity to Eternity, his existence ought to be noticed by us, in a becoming manner, not only meditated upon, but reverentially regarded—regarded with adoration and praise. He is in himself infinitely glorious and transcendently excellent, and of course, must be worthy of all love, esteem, and obedience. Rational creatures, are bound, by the intelligent nature with which they are endowed, to pay the Author of their existence, all the homage of which they are capable, and all those acknowledgments of gratitude, praise, and affection for which they were formed. That they are made capable of knowing, loving, fearing, and serving God cannot be disputed; and never was disputed. If capable of worshipping the Father of our spirits and former of our bodies, they are bound to do it. The very relation we stand in to him, obliges us to honour and serve him. In the very nature and necessity of the case, certain relations subsist between the Creator and Creature. It is impossible that these should be dissolved. They will necessarily continue, in full force, as long as the created nature continues. Whatever changes it may undergo, there can be no dissolution of these relations. They cannot but remain to all eternity, if the created rational nature be to continue forever. And that it will, is highly probable from reason, and the instructions, which can be collected from the best and wisest researches of philosophy, and is fully revealed in the Gospel, in which life and immortality are brought to light. As long, then, as the rational Creature exists, so

long the relation he stands in to God, as his Creator, lawgiver, sovereign, preserver—beneficent parent, governor, and judge; will continue. So long, consequently, the obligation to pay all possible adoration and praise, fear and reverence, gratitude and love to him, will continue. We cannot get clear of this obligation. Our crimes or follies, however great cannot annul it. We may as well think to change heaven and earth, as to change this obligation. He that made us and preserves us, certainly hath a right to challenge from us, all the service we can render unto him. For on account of the infinite glories of his nature he must be worthy to receive from us, the affections of our hearts, the praises of our tongues, and services of our lives.

AND to render unto him the glory and honour due unto his name, by a religious homage, is as much a MORAL duty as the offices of justice, mercy, and humanity. The moral Law as much binds us to love and serve God, as to do good to man, to promote his just rights and true happiness. Why are we to do unto others, as we would that they should do unto us, but because the very condition of our nature points it out as proper; reason, common sense, and common interest bind us. We participate of one nature, are placed in the same probationary state, and are liable to the same common evils. Man is then related to man. All are brethren. The laws of reason therefore oblige us to do justice to all:—to be compassionate:—to be condescending—to endeavour to advance the good of all, as we have ability and opportunity. Because the divine Being is our Maker and upholder, for the earth is his, and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein, we are to

worship and serve him. The infinite greatness and glorious majesty of God lay us under the most sacred bonds to worship him. *For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth; the strength of the hills is his also. The Sea is his; and he made it; and his hands formed the dry land. O come let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.* Here, in these words of pious David, we are to worship God, because he is God—great and glorious—and because the Maker of the world—and our constant benefactor.

WHETHER he need our religious services or not—Whether they can benefit him or not—Whether they avail to excite divine commiseration or not—or to change the divine purposes or not—is not the question. He is infinitely exalted, it is conceded, above all blessing and praise, whether of angels or men. His beatitude and glory are incapable of receiving an increase, or sustaining a diminution. His benevolence and clemency are boundless. His omniscience precludes the possibility of his being able to receive any new information. All our wants and necessities are perfectly before him. The condition of each member of his immense family, in heaven and on earth, is known to him, the blessings which they may need, the dangers which may threaten—the storm which may impend. In regard to the worship of our Father who is in heaven, therefore, the question is, whether

it be proper and fit in itself,—whether reasonable—whether the moral law enjoin it. The good it is designed to accomplish respects the worshipper—not the object worshipped. A very mistaken and absurd idea of prayer have those, who suppose the end of it, is to bring any accession of honor or felicity to God. He needs us not. But we cannot be happy without his favour. His favour is life; and his loving kindness better than life. We want his blessings, and must perish forever if they be withholden. And prayer is a mean appointed by him, to obtain all needed mercies.—It hath, therefore, an important—a glorious end.

MOREOVER, there is another consideration most interesting. We are social beings. Every thing indicates that we were made for society. We are placed in society. As individuals, or singly, we can worship God. We are, consequently, obliged to do it. Were there but one intelligent Creature, in the whole universe, he would be bound, stately and constantly, to pay homage divine to his adorable Maker. But as we are connected with our fellow-creatures, whether in smaller or larger circles, there are superadded ties to bind us to offer religious addresses to heaven, at all proper seasons or fit times: for there is a time or season for every purpose and duty.—Again, as formed for and placed in society, we have social wants, and, therefore, should look to the author of all good for a supply of them. We should seek his bounty. We have public mercies conferred upon us. These we are bound, by the very nature of the thing, thankfully to acknowledge. We have sins

which ought to be jointly confessed, repented of, and pardon solicited, publicly. As a Community or public, common evils are to be deprecated, common favours in Providence owned, and common guilt bewailed. As a people or public we need the smiles and protection of the Almighty. We cannot prosper without them. He orders favourable seasons. He disposes of all public concerns. With him, it is to do as he pleases with us—with ours—with all his people—with all creatures. The very principles of reason, then, teach us jointly to acknowledge our dependence upon him, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift; who can make us happy—or let us by leaving us to ourselves be miserable. The conclusion is we should engage in his stated public worship and praise. We are capable of doing this. We were made on purpose to shew forth his divine glories and praise. Our tongues, can utter abundantly the memory of his goodness. The faculty of speech, by which we are distinguished from the brutal world, was imparted to us, not to curse and blaspheme, but to praise and adore the glorious donor—not to slander and injure man—but to plead his cause, and the cause of Virtue—to aid man in the road to bliss.

By convening together statedly to worship God, we put a public honor on his name, attributes, providence, and ways. We proclaim to all, that we feel ourselves dependent on him, and subjects of his moral government.—But even beyond this, our being together for public worship quickens and animates each other in things divine and heavenly. It assists and strengthens all

the offices of humanity, increases our sense of moral Virtue—is contributing to the honour of Virtue and the depression of Vice. Nay, the power of sympathy—our wish to stand fair in the estimation of each other—the passion of shame—and sense of decency may all, by our being together statedly, in holy time, for the purposes of religious worship, be brought to contribute their proportion to advance the interests of morality, and human happiness. The benevolent lover of God and order—the well-wisher to man's best and real good—and the peace and happiness of society will stand in a kind of pleasing transport and rapturous gratitude, at the wisdom and goodness of God in appointing public worship. And he cannot but esteem it not a duty only, but a rich privilege to engage in it, at its stated returns.

As reason, thus, teaches us the duty of worshipping the God, who made us, in all the ways, of which we are capable, public, or private; so, it is, here, not improper to remark, we find that much the greater part of heathen nations, in antient days, at SET TIMES—OR STATED SEASONS, paid some kind of homage to their Idol-Gods. They had their STATED sacrifices, oblations, and libations, either annual, or monthly, or weekly. They had their domestic and supreme Divinities, and performed to them not only public, but private, and family devotions. Reason, then, bids all men pay worship to a superiour power. Revelation points to the right object, and marks out the only true way.

2. God, in his word, most expressly commands us to worship him, and signifies his will,

in so plain a manner and so repeatedly, that none can deny the duty, who will be upright in searching his word. We may pretend that we must put off worshipping him, till we reckon we have some internal impresson, or impulse, or moving on the soul, or that professed MUTE worship is sufficient to answer a clear Conscience, but God will not be mocked by such weak pretences. For such pretences disgrace reason, and insult common sense. They are but sorry pleas to evade a plain command. And he who denies, under any cloak whatever, or endeavors to dissuade from the duty of the stated public worship of the Majesty of heaven and earth, can be accounted nothing less than an enemy to God and man, to the glory of God and Salvation of man. *Then said Jesus get thee hence, Satan, for it is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* The moment Satan artfully attempted to seduce him from the worship of the one true God, and to draw him to Idolatry, he bids him depart. He frowns upon him with indignation. *Get thee hence Satan.* Here is an example for us. The moment any one denies, or reproaches the worship of the one supreme Being, our fears should be alarmed, our concern should be roused. Omitting or disparaging, by vile sneers, the worship of God is one of the first steps to a denial of all religion, and to a profligate and immoral life. For a writer of note, and not of the Priesthood, asserts, "that there can be no morality without Religion."

ACCORDING to the text, we are to worship God, because he is God: and we are to serve him alone, because there can be but one God---

one true God. For all Idols, are a vanity and a lie. And not to worship him, flatedly, is to neglect him, to forget him, to forsake him, to be hostile to religion. He has always had a church and people in the world who have faithfully served him. He reared the frame of nature, as a kind of spacious and august Temple, and placed man at first in it, as a Priest to be the mouth of creation to offer prayers and praises continually before him. All inanimate things, as it were, silently worship him. It is man's business to render vocal their homage. He is not to be mute, but to speak forth the divine praises. In the earliest times, God had public worship offered to him, *Gen. iv. 26. Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.* Then, began they, as soon as their numbers were adequate, to worship God publicly. A day for solemnizing public worship was instituted in Paradise. *Gen. ii. 1, 2, 3, Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made : and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it : because that in it, he had rested from all his work which God had created and made.* The appointment of a Sabbath implies the appointment of public worship. A Sabbath, or seventh part of time to be kept holy, necessarily includes the worship of God. For if he were not to be publicly honored and served by his people, in a collective capacity, why need there be a *day of rest* to be weekly celebrated by religious adoration and praise? And that the Sabbath was observed, and public worship performed by the Saints of the old world cannot be doubted by a-

ny, who believe that God had a seed to serve him, in that early age of the world. After the flood, we know that men publicly worshipped God. For we read of their erecting altars, in one place and another, where they removed or resided, and offered sacrifices and praises. Noah, who lived several hundred years before the deluge, and was the father of the new world, was a Preacher of righteousness. But the office of a Preacher cannot be executed without hearers. People must have assembled therefore at stated seasons, to hear him, and to join in worshipping God with him.

WHEN the moral law was given, God commands all to worship and serve him. The moral law was given to Israel as a people, and they were absolutely ordered to worship and serve, as a people, the true God, in distinction from all Idols. The first commandment points out the object of all religious prayer and praises. *Thou shalt have no other God before me.* They were to forsake all Idols. They were to own, acknowledge, and serve the God of heaven and earth. They were publicly, or as a people, to own, cleave unto, and worship him.—The second Commandment forbids all image-worship—all corruptions and mixtures of human invention in the worship of God. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them. For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.* The reason which God gives, for prohibiting all Idol or

image worship is his being jealous for his own honour. He will not give his glory to another, or have any competitor in worship. To worship Idols is directly to forsake and disown him. *The third commandment* prohibits all profaning the name of God, or his word, or works, or attributes, or any thing whereby he makes himself known. *The fourth specifies* the proportion of time, the stated season, and appoints the sabbath—or rather renews the appointment of it, for the original appointment was, at the close of Creation, when the six days of labour were ended. All these four commandments relate to the right worship and service of God—the true God ; and are honoured with the name of the FIRST TABLE of the law. The moral law begins with our duty to God. It is altogether fit and reasonable that it should begin with our duty to HIM, who is the sum of all being and blessedness. Divine revelation puts every duty in its proper place. It does not let a less important one occupy the place of a more important one. Our first duty—is with him who is the FIRST of all beings, and infinitely the most glorious.—Can any deny that the worship of God is a moral duty, when so much of the moral law is taken up in commanding it, and regulating it? *Then one of them which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him and saying, Master which is the great commandment of the law : Jesus said unto him, 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.* Our Lord thought that the first duty of man was to love and serve God.—And that person must have a very perverted mind

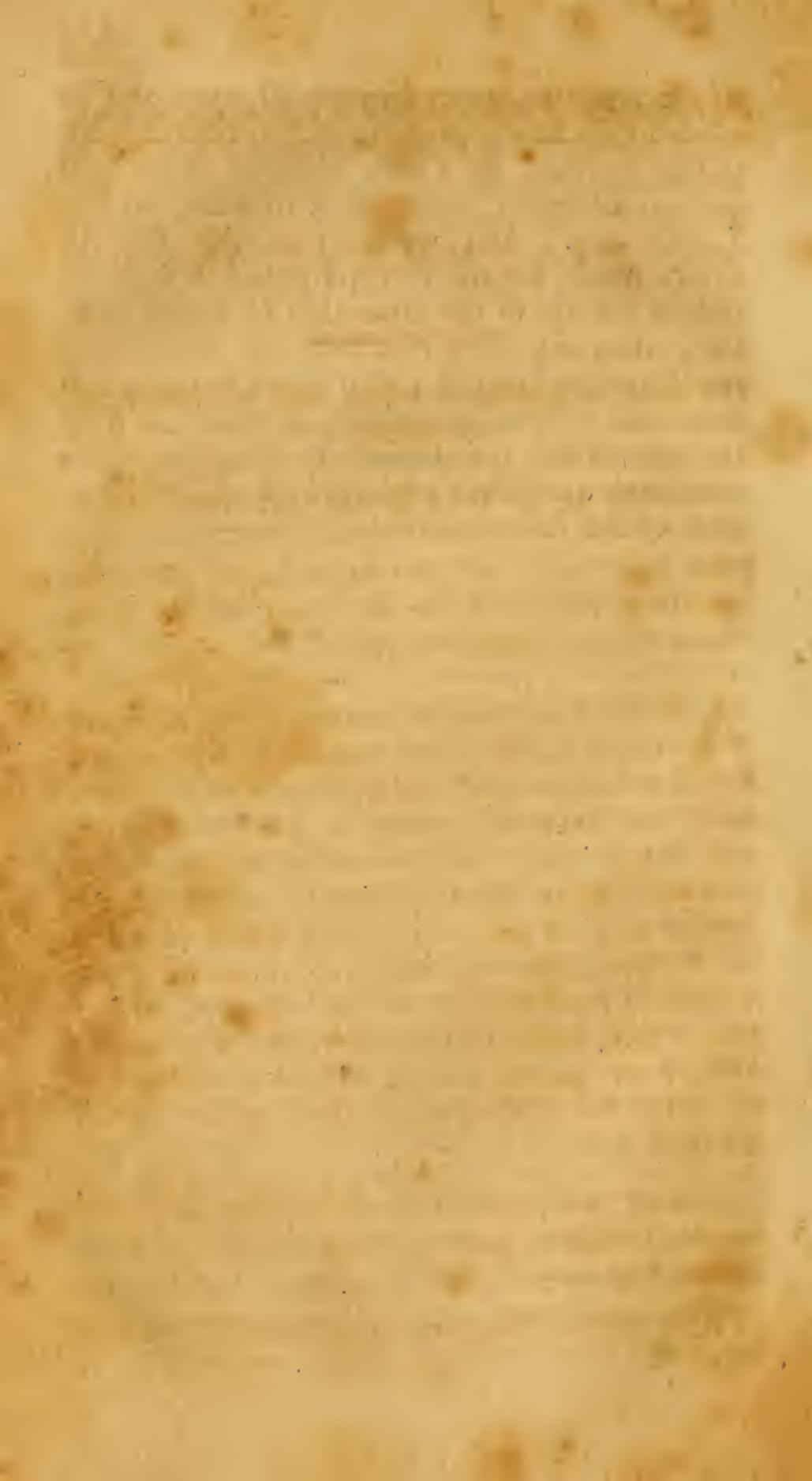
who can suppose, that the neglecter of divine worship can be said, with any propriety, to love God.

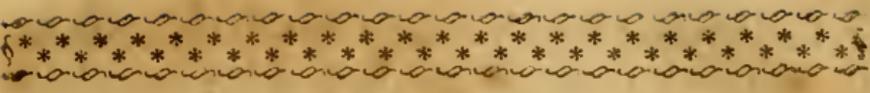
AGAIN, The tabernacle was erected for the public worship of God. It was fashioned by divine order. The very form of it was given to Moses in the mount. Speaking of the various articles used in that wonderful structure, the command to Moses, is, *And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount.* The Tabernacle was the appointed place of public worship for the people of Israel, or God's visible professing people, in their travels through the wilderness. It continued to be the PLACE of public worship for the nation, till the TEMPLE, one of the wonders of the world, was built by Solomon. Here God recorded his name. Here the people were commanded to come. The symbols of his divine presence were in this place. *And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light: to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people.* The glory of the God of Israel filled the Tabernacle, was over the mercy-seat. He promised his blessing in the place of public worship. *In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.* After the people had gotten possession of the promised land, the Ark of the covenant was lodged in Shiloh, and there for a long time, the people celebrated divine service. When the temple was finished, Jerusalem was fixed upon as

the permanent feat. Three times a year all the males were to appear before the Lord in Zion. After the captivity in Babylon the privileges of the SANCTUARY were again restored. A second temple was built by Zerubbabel, and Israel continued to worship, at Jerusalem, until the Messiah came.

On every Sabbath day, the law of Moses was read and explained by the appointed Teachers, and Songs of Zion were sung. When our Saviour was on earth, in Judea, there were Synagogues, at convenient distances, for public worship, and he honored the Sabbath and public worship by his punctual and constant attendance. *And Jesus came to Nazareth where he had been brought up; and as his custom was, he went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.* And even unto this day, the Jews continue the same practice of worshipping God publicly on their Sabbath-days. Isaiah prophesying of Gospel times says, *It shall come to pass that from one Sabbath to another all flesh shall come to worship before me saith the Lord.*—On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, St. Paul preached unto them ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight. In places too numerous to be particularly cited, all men are directed to hear the word preached—to attend to it—to obey it. Jesus Christ called and sent out his Apostles to proclaim the good news of Salvation. They universally attended the worship of God—prayed—preached—and in religious songs, celebrated the divine praises. And we find it has been the invariable custom of Christians, from the times

of the Apostles, down through all ages, and in all countries to the present day, to convene for public worship, in God's SANCTUARIES and HOUSES of prayer, from week to week, on the Lord's day. And we are now, this day, in God's house, for the same purpose. It is more indeed owing to the institution of public worship, than any thing else, that we now enjoy the Christian Religion; that it has not long ago been lost. Upon the whole, by public worship the interest of the Gospel is supported—the communion of saints preserved—and the kingdom of the Redeemer enlarged.—





DISCOURSE VI.

The duty of public worship, and its beneficial tendency.

MATTHEW iv. 10.

Then saith Jesus, get thee hence Satan, for it is written Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

AS the stated public worship of the supreme being is the great support of Virtue and Religion in the world, and the means of strengthening and increasing them in particular souls, my design was, with the divine assistance, to give you, in as short a compass as may be, a general view of the subject, an account of what the scripture says and requires, concerning our obligation constantly to attend upon it, on the Lord's day, unless real necessity may be pleaded; or such an excuse may be offered as will justify us, at the bar of Conscience, and at the bar of the final Judge.

WHAT was proposed in discoursing upon the words of the text was—to prove the duty of public worship.—

AND then to illustrate the beneficial tendency of it.

IN the preceding discourse, we entered upon the proof that it is an indispenfible duty ftatedly to worship God with our fellow-men. This we attempted by two arguments, *firft*, from the principles of reason—and *fecondly*, from the many plain and clear intimations of the word of God.—We pafs, thirdly, to obferve that, had not God intended that his people fhould ftatedly honour his name by public worship, he would never have instituted the Chriftian Miniftry. That he has appointed fuch an order of men, is as plainly revealed as any truth or doctrine can be revealed. He calls and qualifies them for the important work. He commiffions them. The qualifications for the miniftrial work and duty are frequently and largely defcribed. The particular manner, in which they are to be feparated to the work, or invested with the office of the evangelical Miniftry, is marked out. None who ferioufly believe in the divine authority of the fcriptures, can either deny or difpute the institution of the facred order, or appointment of ftated Pastors to be continued, in the Churches, till the fecond coming of our Lord Jefus Chrift. Moft full and exprefs to this purpofe are the following paffages. *And he gave fome Apoftles : and fome prophets : and fome evangelifts : and fome Pastors and teachers ; for the perfefting of the faints, for the work of the Miniftry, for the edifying of the body of Chrift : till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the fon of God, unto a perfeft man, unto the meafure of the ftature of the fulnefs of Chrift.—Go ye, teach all nations baptizing them, and teaching them to obferve all things whatfoever I have commanded you—and Lo ! I am with*

you always even unto the end of the world.—Again ; go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved, but he that believeth not, shall be damned. The Apostle Paul seems to make a constant attendance on the preached word a necessary mean of the conviction and conversion of sinners. *Whosoever, says he, shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* How then, adds he, *shall they call upon him of whom they have not heard? or hear without a preacher? And so he concludes, faith cometh by hearing, and bearing by the word of God preached.*

PRIESTS and prophets were appointed to minister in holy things in the Jewish Church. The Jews were bound in duty to attend upon their ministrations. A TEMPLE was built, by divine order ; public prayers were to be offered in it ; Sacrifices were to be attended ; and other religious ceremonies to be performed. But how absurd was all this : if the people were not to resort to this Temple, to unite in these prayers, and to engage in the other religious offerings ? Was it not expressly commanded that the LAW should be read on the Sabbath day ? But to what end could this be, if the people were not to hear it ? Did not God, in an extraordinary manner, by his spirit, raise up a succession of prophets in the Jewish Church, and send them forth with his messages to the people to warn, reprove, and instruct them ? Is not the necessary consequence that the people were to convene to hear their warnings, or the word of the Lord ? In the gospel-dispensation, God has appointed ordinances of worship. His ministring servants are to preach

his word faithfully—to take heed to their doctrine—to deliver sound doctrine: they are to teach all nations. But how can they discharge their duty, if people be not obliged constantly to attend to their teachings?

4. THE obligation stately to worship God in public may be argued from the frequent injunctions, in the Gospel, to HEAR the word dispensed. The parable of the *Sower*, with our Lord's own exposition of it, were there no other scripture-argument, would be sufficient to satisfy every reasonable mind that an order of men are appointed to preach the Gospel, and that the people are indispensibly obliged to assemble themselves together to hear the word preached, and to join in all the acts of public worship. The *sower* is the appointed and duly authorized Preacher. The seed sowed is the doctrines or truths of the Gospel. The different soils represent the various sorts of hearers. Those who wisely and duly improve the precious advantages of a preached Gospel, are those who receive the seed into good and honest hearts. Our Lord reminds all, of the duty and importance of rightly hearing the word of the kingdom, *Who, says he, hath ears to hear let him hear.* He tells all people to take heed how they HEAR. *Take heed therefore how ye hear.* But in order to hear, they must be where the word is to be dispensed. How much he prized the duty of a constant and faithful attendance upon a preached Gospel, we learn from his own mouth. *And he answered and said my Mother and my brethren are these which HEAR the word of God and do it.* A beatitude is pronounced upon such as *hear and keep the word*

of God. *But he said, yea rather blessed are they that HEAR the word of God and keep it.* If they hear it, they must be where it is appointed to be dispensed. St. James directs us to be swift to hear, which must imply that we be solicitous and careful to be in the place, where the word is to be preached. *Wherefore, continues he, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and recieve with meekness the ingrafted word which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not HEARERS only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a HEARER of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.* The duty of hearing the word of God dispensed in his sanctuary, is often enjoined in scripture upon all people, whether old or young, high or low, rich or poor. And this duty involves in it, or necessarily presupposes the whole of public worship. Such persons as think themselves too knowing, or too exalted, or too important, or such as through prejudice, or indolence or disregard of all Religion refuse, to appear before God in his house on the Sabbath to hear the word, and join in other Lord's-day solemnities, do what in them lies to discredit the public exercises of Religion, and are responsible to him, who will be their final Judge. The sin of neglecting public worship—of profaning the Sabbath—of forsaking divine ordinances is seldom viewed, as it ought to be, as heinous in its nature, and pernicious in its tendency.

5thly. THE duty of public worship may be argued from the institution of a Gospel-Church and the holy sacraments, baptism and the Lord's

supper. The very nature of a Gospel-Church implies the obligation of the stated worship of God in public. The Christian ordinances of baptism and the Eucharist necessarily include public worship. If divine ordinances are to be dispensed—if the friends of religion are to bind themselves to serve, love, and fear God, by covenant vows and a profession of religion, they must meet together for this purpose. How could the ordinances of God be administered, if his people were not to assemble themselves together to enjoy them? The institution of the Christian Sabbath is also a clear proof of the obligation of stated public worship. If God have ordained one day in seven, to be employed in religious duties, his people are to sanctify it, or use it for the ends, for which it was appointed. They are to convene together to pray unto him, to praise his name, to celebrate his ordinances, and to attend to his word. All these institutions, therefore, are connected. If one be denied, the other cannot be retained. They must all stand or fall together. If we give up one, we must, to be consistent, give up all.

HAVING now, at some length, proved the duty of stated public worship, we shall, as proposed, endeavour to illustrate its importance, in the Christian system, and its beneficial tendency.

IN order to see, in a clear and forcible manner, the great importance and beneficial tendency of public worship, we will consider the purposes, for which it was instituted by a wise and gracious God. These are three: Man's present and temporal happiness: his future spiritual and eternal happiness; and the divine glory.

1st. IN the institution of public worship, a wise and merciful God, had in view man's present and temporal happiness. This is a very important end, but is the least so of the three now to be illustrated. Could mankind be convinced of this, and really feel it in a proper manner, we should see a reformation in their conduct—our congregations would be full—our Churches crowded—and the holy Sabbath better observed. The ardent wish is to be happy. The general enquiry is who will show us any good? How may our interest be secured and advanced? While I am therefore pleading for the honours of God's holy name and worship, in the Sanctuary; I consider myself, and hope to be able to make it appear so, as pleading human happiness. All must, then, attend carefully to what promises to be for the benefit of all. Though few truths be more certain, than that public worship is designed and calculated to promote the real welfare of civil society, or present temporal happiness of man, yet very sanguine hopes of making a deep impression of this most pleasing doctrine upon the mind cannot be entertained. It is extremely difficult to induce people to believe that any part or duty of Religion will yield them a present profit, or be most for their present interest. But our present as well as future good is aimed at undoubtedly by public worship. An unnecessary restraint or burden was never imposed on man by his munificent Creator. God consults our happiness in his Providence and word, and in the whole frame of Christianity. *Those that honor me, says he, I will honor, but they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.* If we honor him with our substance, he will not

forget to bless us. *Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

THE peace, the order, and the well-being of society are intended in the Gospel.—The Religion which it exhibits, is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come. It is calculated, in its whole frame, its duties, doctrines, and ordinances, to secure the rights of man—to promote freedom, to make mankind happy on earth, as well as blessed in heaven. Its tendency to promote our present good deserves to be numbered among its excellencies and the evidences of its divinity. Indeed, rightly understood, there is no part of it, nor any of its duties, but tend to advance our well-being in this world.—If, in other Countries where it is known, it have, in any measure or degree, injured society, the evil is to be imputed not to its nature or original design, but to superstition, or to the corruptions of it. For in many countries where it is known, it has lost its native simplicity and proper glory. It is so disfigured and distorted that, if the first heralds of it, were now to revisit the earth, they would not even know, that what is called the Christian Religion, in some countries, and among some sects, was pretended to be the religion which they preached, and the truth of which, they sealed with their own blood.

IF, in other Lands, ecclesiastical tyranny and persecution have reigned, and the rights of conscience have been invaded and trampled upon, still in our country, there is not a single vestige

of this. All enjoy universal toleration. Civil government is not incorporated with the Church. In America there is nothing of the nature of a Hierarchy. The religion of Jesus Christ stands upon its own basis. Happy Land! It is our favoured lot, my fellow Christians, to live in a country which has the honor of exhibiting the first instance the world ever saw, of a civil Government established upon the broad basis of equal and universal liberty. Religion sheds indeed a most benign influence on society. Civil government and true liberty receive support and authority from it. It enforces all good laws by the powerful ties of conscience. It breaths forth ardent prayers to almighty God for the tranquility of the public—for the divine smiles to rest on rulers and ruled—on all the various orders of the community—that vice and all land-defiling sins may be suppressed—and that the righteousness which exalteth a nation may flourish. Besides one essential part of Religion is morality. There can be no true Religion without morality. And the more morality is taught, recommended and practised, the more prosperous will be civil society—the more strengthened in its kind purposes will be civil government—the more respected will be the laws against vice and injustice—the more esteemed will be civil rulers—the more sober, regular, and industrious will be the whole mass of the citizens. Public worship may fitly be termed the school of morality.—The weekly instructions, delivered to attentive audiences, on the Lord's day, on the duties of morality, have an unknown effect, an insensible influence upon the general morals of the people. As a people we do not realize the singular temporal blessings derived

from public worship. The instructions of God's house tend to enlarge the mind—to promote charity, peace and benevolence, and of course our best temporal interest. They are adapted to soften the heart and to liberalize the soul. They adorn the social life; they are well calculated to render man honest—friendly, and compassionate—diligent in his calling—faithful to his word—punctual in his dealings—sensible to the misfortunes of others—a good Christian—and from a good Christian to a good member of civil society the transition is easy. Were there, as the Atheist pretends to believe, no other world besides this, or were death to be the final extinction of the living principle, it would be wise in a people steadily to attend public worship, as an excellent expedient to advance the dearest interests of society.—I have enlarged a little upon this idea, that public worship is designed to promote man's present temporal happiness; because I deem it an important one, and because it is seldom enlarged upon.

2dly. ANOTHER and the great end of public worship is man's spiritual future and eternal happiness. Between his temporal and spiritual happiness there is no room for comparison. As much above the former is the latter as heaven is above the earth. Our spiritual happiness claims from us our first, our greatest, and chief attention. It is as much to be preferred to our present interest as the soul is to be preferred to the body. Hence the exhortation, *labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life*. What is it to be happy for a few fleeting days on earth, to being blessed in

heaven to all Eternity ! Even were we to gain the whole world, and lose the soul, we should be infinite losers. God has instituted public worship on purpose that we might be saved from sin and misery : that we might attend supremely to our highest, our spiritual well-being :—that we might know the truth :—that we might be blessed while we live :—and blessed when we shall come to die : and reside after death in his kingdom forever. It is the principal mean, appointed by infinite wisdom and goodness, to awaken, to convince, to convert the sinner—to comfort and establish the saint ; to instruct—to guide—to save us from error—to animate us in duty. The truths to be dispensed, in the sanctuary, are God's truths—the word preached is his word—not human opinions or traditions—or dreams of philosophy ; the ordinances administered are also his holy ordinances. The divine word is powerful and penetrating. It is purifying and enlivening. It is compared to things most powerful—to *fire* that melteth—to a *hammer* that breaketh in pieces the flinty rock—to a sharp *two edged sword*—to *incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth* forever. The word to be dispensed is morally adapted to accomplish all its own purposes—to impress the conscience, to call up attention—to reprove for sin—to convince—to enlighten—and to console the mind. The grace and spirit of God are, moreover, promised to render it effectual. God will not suffer his own means to fail of success. He will clothe them with an almighty energy. Where he hath recorded his name, there he will meet with and bless his assembled people. Zion of old, we are informed, was the birth-place of saints. THERE

they received light and were comforted. This man and that man we are told were born in her. By public worship *there* performed, souls were quickened—God was honoured—truth was promoted—and grace divine manifested. The great End of public worship is to promote man's future, spiritual happiness—to bring him to pardon—to sanctify him—and to meeten him for the joys and glories of the heavenly state.—

3dly. GOD, also, instituted public worship to advance his own glory. This is his highest aim in all things. His ultimate end in Creation, Providence and Redemption. For his sake or to manifest his praise all things are, and were made. *Thou hast made all things and for thy pleasure they are, and were made.* Of him, as the original cause, through him as the grand Preserver, and to him as the ultimate end are all things: to whom be glory forever. That which is of the greatest worth or importance, no doubt, will by him be first of all regarded, and regarded exactly according to its worth. The divine glory is certainly, in reason's view, infinitely the most worthy object. And, of course, it is infinitely fit that God should make it his highest aim. It is of more worth than the whole universe. All nature had better go to ruin, than God's honour be stained. And what HE, who is the wisest of all beings, steadily pursues as his ultimate end, ought to be the highest object with all intelligent Creatures, whether in heaven or on earth. In saving man doth the divine glory shine with an attractive splendor.—When the sinner repents—when he submits to a holy and sovereign God—when he is pardoned—when he is sanctified—

when he is justified—the divine glory is illustriously displayed. - And public worship, in a peculiar manner, honours God. Those who attend upon it testify publicly to the world, their belief in his existence, trust in his mercy, dependence upon his goodness, obedience to his laws, subjection to his authority and acknowledgement of all his glories. When we convene in the Courts of the Lord, to pray unto him, and praise his name, we do as much as declare to all, that we are not ashamed to own and serve him as our God and king, and by our example invite others to give him the glory due unto his name. That God considers public worship as honouring him is evident from his terming the habitation of his house, *the place where his honour dwells*; that is, where he is honoured in a special manner.—Moreover we are told, that *he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*. Praying families he loves; but praying worshipping Assemblies he loves more, because he receives a larger tribute of glory from them.—

To show the great importance and beneficial tendency of public worship, some further particulars may be pertinently added. Its happy effects are many and great. Could I describe them, in their beauty and glory, every heart would be warmed, every ear would listen, every tender emotion would be excited.

IN general, we may be certain that God would not have ordained public worship, had it not been necessary, useful and wise; had it not been for our good in time, and in Eternity. Neither his wisdom, nor goodness, nor justice, nor mer-

cy would require us to do what would, when done, be of no service or benefit to us in particular, or of any importance to the world at large.—

ONE happy effect of public worship is to prevent Religion from being lost in the world. If ever mankind be brought to a steady, regular, punctual, and conscientious attendance upon it, they must be convinced of its beneficial tendency both on the mind and the morals. The real friend of the Gospel and its benevolent System of principles and duties wants no aid from superstition, or fanaticism. He wishes the promotion of no Religion, which is not genuine and rational. People are not made better by any superstition, or wild and irrational practices. If public worship be not adapted to benefit society, to secure and advance its best interest, its peace and order; if it be not calculated to make us better men—better citizens—better members of civil society; if it have no natural adaptedness to do us good in every relation in life, in every station,—in every condition, it can answer no very valuable purposes, as to this world in respect to civil government or our temporal happiness. People at large will entertain no cordial esteem for its duties, or exert themselves stately to attend upon it, unless we can offer arguments sufficient to satisfy them of its great advantage. To prove that the supreme Being hath most expressly instituted it, and that he most solemnly requires all, of every rank and station, to a punctual attendance upon it, is not enough. This we can easily do. This often hath been done. But the most material point of all, on this subject, is to convince the mind that it hath a most

happy beneficial tendency not only to secure our future, but to promote our present felicity. Unless we can lay before people, considerations of sufficient weight, to impress their minds with a deep affecting sense of its great importance and good effects, they will not feel the obligations to attend upon it, in such a manner, as will be influential on their practice. They will treat it as of little consequence in itself, or to the community. They will speak of it in terms either of disrespect or reproach; they will infrequently attend upon it, or wholly retire from it.—Hath it then any happy effects on the minds and morals of a people, or hath it not? Is it of any advantage?—Or is it of so much advantage as to make it highly expedient—and not only highly expedient but an indispensable duty to repair stately to places of public worship, and join in all its holy exercises? Let us go into a large and candid enquiry. Let us attend to the arguments, which shall be offered, without any prejudice, or unwillingness to be convinced. Let us receive light when presented: hear patiently, and weigh carefully reasons when offered. A prejudiced mind is not in a situation to admit conviction. A real and inward dislike of Religion, will prevent our hearing an argument, as we ought to hear it, the design of which, is to honor and recommend any important branch or interesting duty of it. If we really hate Religion, and have no regard to principles of morality, we are prepared to treat with scorn all arguments in favour of any one of its duties, though the arguments be altogether rational and fully conclusive.—

PUBLIC worship is directly calculated to preserve religion in the world, or to prevent it from being lost, and is, therefore, of the greatest moment and most beneficial tendency. This consideration will have no effect upon any, who do not esteem Religion both necessary and important. For if it be a fiction, a mere fable, it ought to be disesteemed by all, and expelled from the world, and of course that which tends to prevent its being lost, would on this supposition, be really of pernicious tendency. To all who admit the reality of religion, whatever hath a tendency to preserve it, must be exceedingly dear. And they will be cordially attached to it. As long as public worship is honored and maintained, religion, the holy scriptures, and morality will be honored, likewise, and maintained: will be esteemed and admired. They can never be lost as long as a Christian Ministry and Christian worship are regarded. There is no other way, possibly, in the nature of things, to extirpate the true religion from the earth, but to pull down all the Altars of God—to rase to the ground all the temples of the Most High—to prevent or forbid all worship of the Deity in public. And the spirit of the present day which hath gone forth against the *corrupt governments* in Europe, or the *thrones* of Kings, wages war also against the *Altars* of God. It makes no discrimination between gross superstition and rational religion. By ridicule, by insult, by impious scoffs, the enemies of morality and the Gospel are exerting all their malice and power to induce people to treat all religion as a mere human contrivance, and to leave the temples of God to moulder down, forsaken and despised.

Julian, a Roman Emperor, surnamed with great justice the Apostate, was a very cunning and subtle man. He had great abilities. He was a philosopher. After he became an unbeliever, and openly renounced the Christian religion, he resolved to annihilate it, to expel it, name and thing, from the world. And there are too many, in this age, who ardently wish he had succeeded. As the only probable mean to accomplish his purpose, he deposed all Christian Ministers, and prohibited, by his imperial authority, all public worship. The pagan Priests he honored every where, and highly distinguished them by his favor. The temples of God he turned into *shrines* for pagan Idols. Lectures on the platonic philosophy succeeded to the exhibition of Gospel doctrines and divine ordinances. And had not THAT BEING, who is wiser than the wisest, and who, with infinite ease, frustrates the counsel of man, interposed, and raised up a successor to the imperial Dignity who was a cordial friend to the Gospel of the Saviour; the artful Apostate would have done, what all enemies of christianity wish had been done, wholly extirpated it. But Jesus of Nazareth, the despised Galilean, the doctrines of the cross, have triumphed. The gates of hell, Satanic and human malice, cannot prevail. The Christian Religion has lived, in spite of all opposition—and will live to the End of the world. Under Providence, the continuance of it, to this day, is to be chiefly, if not wholly, ascribed to public worship and divine institutions. Drop all public worship, and religion is supplanted. Probably the holy scriptures would never more be translated—if preserved, at all, in their original languages, it would

be in the cabinets of the curious. To public worship, then, are we mainly indebted, that religion is not lost, in the waste of time, the revolutions of the arts and sciences, the confusion and wreck of kingdoms, the wars and public calamities of nations, the vices of men, and the multitude of idolitrous rites.



DISCOURSE VII.

The duty of public worship, and its beneficial tendency.

MATTHEW iv. 10.

Then saith Jesus, get thee hence Satan, for it is written; Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

AMONG all the visible Creatures, it is man's peculiar excellency, that he is capable of considering and worshipping his Maker and was made for that purpose. Your attention is again called therefore to the duty and beneficial tendency of public worship.—We have already largely argued the duty of it from reason and scripture, the two great sources of moral and religious knowledge.—The beneficial tendency of it we urged from a consideration of the purposes, for which it was instituted; which were these three, man's present and temporal happiness:—his future spiritual and eternal happiness: and the divine glory.—It's beneficial tendency we likewise argued from this consideration, that it is an excellent expedient to prevent Religion from being lost in the world. There will never be much serious godliness among any people or in any family, where public

worship is lightly esteemed, or generally neglected. For it is an excellent expedient to keep alive on the mind a sense of Religion, and our obligations to a gracious and holy God.

THIS is the second consideration, which will be urged, to illustrate the great utility of public worship.

No man who has any just views of the nature and importance of Religion, can be indifferent about the state of it, among those with whom he lives, and in the place where divine providence has cast his lot, and where he expects to spend the remnant of his days. If he desire to have it flourish, to see morality honoured, and the happiness of others increased, he must be a firm friend to the public worship of God. He who treats his Maker with intire neglect, or disowns the obligations he is under to him, will treat his fellow-men with scorn, and make light of the obligations he is under to them. Without public worship God would soon be forgotten, and Religion lost among us. If men be once released from the obligations of Piety, no other will bind them: there will be no mutual trust and confidence among us: yea, society would be dissolved. The fear of God is the principal support of government, and of the peace and good order of the world. The more godliness there is among us, the more honesty, industry, and sobriety there will be. Nothing but religious principles will restrain men from secret wickedness, controul the licentiousness of the Great, who think themselves above law; and curb the wild passions of the people. And as there is no probability that Religion will ever flourish, or e-

ven subsist among us, without public worship, it is very desirable it should be constantly and faithfully attended upon for the good of our country; that we may become a sober, virtuous nation, and God may not be provoked, to send upon us destroying judgments, or still more severely chastise us. Let every one then, who wishes well to the interests of his country, shew it, by diligence in attending upon the duties of Piety in God's Courts. We hear many express themselves very high on the subject of honesty and faithfulness to promises. And too much cannot be spoken in praise of these. They are the pillars of public order. But in what way are we to expect, that the great body of people will be honest, sober, industrious, temperate, and faithful? In the omission, or in the practice of the duties of public worship? Can we hope that they will be regular, sober, honest members of civil society, while they despise the duties, which they owe to God, in his sanctuary, on his holy Sabbaths? If we flatter ourselves that this will be the case, we discover our want of wisdom, and a true knowledge of human nature. We may as well look for the streams to flow, when the fountain is dried up. Will the rose blossom and send forth its fragrance, when the root is decayed? Some will tell us notwithstanding, that they have constantly attended public worship, for many years together, and still have never found any happy effects either on their minds or lives. They fail not, also, to add that others, in the circle of their acquaintance, are constant in appearing before God in Zion, who are very bad men, who practise all manner of wickedness.

To what purpose, they ask, is it, then, to be constant in the duties of public worship on the Sabbath, if the week be spent in dishonesty, idleness, falsehood, and vice?—It would be perfectly safe to risk our cause in an appeal to experience or fact. Let us examine the lives and conduct of those, who make conscience of the duty of public worship, and those who deny or neglect it altogether. Every one who is capable of observation knows the difference. So true is this, that it is a common remark that no one denies or deserts public worship, but he falls into some vice, some scene of iniquity. He has done that which makes him ashamed to see his fellow-men, and join in worshipping God with them. Atheists and Libertines renounce the duty. They reproach it, and display all the bitterness of malice against it. Some, it is granted, are never seen, or seldom seen, within the walls of a Church, who are still honest and upright in their dealings—and against whom the charge of immorality and profaneness cannot be justly laid. Others may omit the duty, through mere sloth or negligence, or some prejudice or pique. But when candor has made this concession, it must stop. I would wish to wound the feelings of no man—much less to bring in a false accusation. However truth is sacred, and must not be given up.—Are not sabbath-breakers—look round and see, and judge righteous judgment, are not neglectors of the duties of Piety in God's house, generally profane and immoral? Do they not too often prove, by their conduct, that they have no principle?

• If any still object and say, “I have attended
“ constantly for a succession of years, and have

“found no real good effect on my heart or con-
“duct. I am as much averse to religion as ev-
“er : as dishonest and unjust as ever : as igno-
“rant and blind as ever, having no knowledge
“of one duty, doctrine, ordinance, or virtue of
“Religion—as profane, as hard-hearted, as un-
“kind, as brutal in my manners and temper as
“ever, as intemperate and villainous as ever. I
“therefore am resolved, I will never go to public
“worship again. I have gotten no good. Public
“instructions have never taught me any thing. I
“know no more of the subject of Religion and
“morality, than if I had never heard one word
“about them. I have no more conscience a-
“bout duty, or seriousness, than if I had never
“been urged and importuned to become an up-
“right and good man.” Is this really the case?
Can any one make this confession consistently
with truth? If so, your situation is indeed awful
and alarming. The tear of commiseration may
be shed over you. If you have any sense or rea-
son, you must tremble. An immediate reforma-
tion is now incumbent on you. You have not
a day or moment to lose. But can you think
this a valid objection against the importance and
happy advantages of public worship. It is a full
proof of your own guilt and iniquity, but no
proof against the duty of a constant attendance
upon the holy solemnities of Zion. But let me
expostulate a moment with you. I feel an un-
common solicitude for you. Give me leave to
ask, how do you know that public worship has
been of no benefit to you? Can you possibly tell
how bad you would have been, or how much
more vile and abominable, or ignorant and a-
bandoned, you would have been, than you now

are, if you had always refused to attend public worship? You might have been in the midst of almost all evil. You have been under great restraint. If you be not sensible, that you ever received any instruction or one idea of christian doctrine, still you may have acquired much religious knowledge, and gained much strength against temptations and sins, and not be sensible of it. We imperceptibly acquire knowledge and the habits of moral honesty. Perhaps, by attending public worship, you have been saved from those open sins, which would have destroyed your reputation, and ruined you, both for this world and the next. But further, permit me, or rather suffer conscience to do its friendly office, and ask you, if you have never gotten any good at all by public worship, was the fault yours, or was it not? Where is the blame to be fixed? Somewhere it must lie: for it is exceedingly great.—When you have been in God's Sanctuary, did you never hear one proper prayer offered to the throne of grace, did you never hear from any one, a discourse that contained, at least, some moral or religious truth, some really Gospel-doctrine, something to regulate your morals, to enforce duty, to invite you to love, fear, and serve God, to do good to man, and to live a pious and holy life? Is it possible for you to say, you never heard one prayer, or one discourse, that had any truth or knowledge in it? If you have heard both pious prayers, and edifying discourses, what is the reason you have gotten no good? The blame is yours. Have you not been prejudiced? Have you not been careless and inattentive? Have you not been stupid and thoughtless? How unreasonable then is your conduct in

objecting against public worship! How foolishly do you act to forsake God in his worshipping Assemblies? A man sick unto death calls an eminent Physician. The Physician repairs in haste to the chamber of the sick. He hears his groans, he critically examines his case. He prescribes the only proper and effectual remedies; and retires. The patient refuses, after viewing them, to apply them. But he insists upon it, that the physician is unskilful, and the means ineffectual. The disorder rages: nature yields under its violence, and the poor Sick man dies, because he would not apply the prescribed means. Where is the blame to be charged? Let common sense furnish the answer.

PUBLIC worship is peculiarly calculated to keep up a sense of Religion on the soul. Such is the nature of man, that he must have forms of worship, or he will lose all sense of God and divine things. The substance and power cannot be preserved, where the forms are denied and relinquished. In the public Assemblies of God's people, the various principles of human nature are made to operate in favour of religion: the power of sympathy, all know, is very great, and in public worship this may be the mean of exciting serious attention and thoughtfulness. When we go to the house of the Lord, weekly, to pray and praise, to speak and hear divine truths, we shall be ashamed to fall into vice—to commit scandalous crimes—or to act an unjust or unkind part. If we do what is mean, dishonest, or vile, we shall reluctate seeing our fellow-worshippers again, when the Sabbath revolves. All love the praise of others, and desire their es-

teem ; and they therefore will endeavour to behave so as to see their fellow-worshippers with pleasure again. Joint prayers tend to solemnize the soul ; joint praises to enliven the affections ; and public instructions to enlighten the mind. Nay, barely seeing each other together, after the business, toils and dispersions of the week, tends to soften and humanize the soul :—to promote kindness and friendship, benevolence and morality :—to make us ashamed of our follies and vices—fearful of error— and to esteem and revere Virtue. It nourishes moral sentiments and keeps men from degenerating into an uncultivated unsocial state. In the institution of public worship, the supreme Being considers men as being what they are, as being influenced by the principles, we find they are, in our connexion with the world. He treats them as moral agents and social beings. And all the powers of human nature and principles of society are compelled to operate in favour of moral and divine things. Public worship, therefore, tends to make men sober and moral, pious and just : good citizens and obedient subjects, faithful parents and dutiful children, obliging neighbours and useful members of the Community.—The seasons of public worship are placed at a convenient distance. Were the distance greater or less, it would not be so well. Were the seasons of it to return once in three days, multitudes would not have time enough, to attend to their necessary concerns—or to provide for their comfortable subsistence. Were they to return only once a month, or three or four times in a year—we should forget our duty—be under great disadvantages about acquiring religious knowledge, or be-

ing fitted for duty. One day, in seven, seems to be a happy mean—a due proportion of time. Six days we may attend to our secular pursuits or callings. Every *seventh* is to be consecrated to God, as a season of public devotion. And the solemnities of public worship have a direct and immediate tendency to impress the mind with a sense of the reality and importance of divine things, and to cherish and preserve a sense of religion among mankind.—

A THIRD consideration to convince us of the happy tendency of public worship, is its adaptedness to diffuse extensively religious knowledge. That a just understanding of the holy scriptures, and of the essential principles of the Gospel and morality is of high importance, it is presumed no one will dispute. For the soul to be without knowledge is not good. We cannot be happy without it. We cannot be saved without it. It is the food of the mind; supports and invigorates. And here, it ought to be remembered, that such is the nature of the Christian Religion, that it cannot flourish, or be even continued in its purity, without knowledge. A high degree of ignorance is incompatible with salvation. Man is also exceedingly averse to the trouble and pains of acquiring knowledge. He is stupid and unwilling to attend to spiritual things. He needs line upon line: instruction upon instruction.—Besides, a very large proportion of the children of men must of necessity labour for a subsistence in the world. From the very state and circumstances, in which they are placed, laborious diligence is requisite. It is not optional with them, whether to be industrious or not. Necessity compels them. If they will not work,

they cannot live. And this is a wise ordering in Providence. For industry is friendly to health and Virtue. If the earth were to yield, spontaneously all that man wants for his support, it would not be so well for him. It is a blessing then that he is obliged to be industrious. Idleness is the inlet of every vice. If man be not necessarily employed about what is useful and good, he will employ himself about evil. Since then so great a part of the human race are obliged to be engaged in laborious employments, public worship is a happy expedient to spread Christian knowledge. Innumerable multitudes may be instructed at one and the same time. The benefit of a whole week of diligent study may be enjoyed in one day by thousands. Public instructions, in God's house of prayer, are the easiest way of communicating and diffusing knowledge. The Christian Minister, we hence learn ought to be *able* to teach—to be *furnished* with a high degree of knowledge—to be a man of learning and extensive science. An illiterate man, however pious and good he may be, is totally unqualified for sustaining the office, or discharging the duties, of a Gospel-Minister.

A FOURTH argument to prove the beneficial tendency of public worship is, that the duties or exercises of it are well adapted to promote the Salvation of men.—If any under the peculiar advantages of the public stated worship of God finally perish, it will be a dreadful reflection, when they shall be forced to say, how have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof? And have not obeyed the voice of my Teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me. I was

in almost all evil in the midst of the congregation and Assembly.—Wisdom says unto all, of every rank and condition, *hear instruction, and be wise and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.* Blessed, indeed, are all who hear the word of God and keep it;—who are constant in attending upon, and who duly improve sanctuary-opportunities and privileges; who never fail, except when strict necessity or charity may be pleaded, to appear in God's house, and exert themselves to have its duties of essential service to them. Every part of divine service is fitted to awaken serious consideration—to call the mind off from vanity and folly—to raise it to heaven and heavenly glories—to represent all vice and hypocrisy in an odious, and all Virtue and duty in an amiable light. God and angels are witnesses of the devotions of his worshipping people. When we are before him, here in his courts, his all-seeing eye is upon us. He records in the book of his remembrance what is amiss or insincere, and an account must at last be rendered unto him of the hours we spend here, as well as of all our thoughts, words, and deeds. This is sufficient to compose the mind, to solemnize the heart, and to render us attentive. We may well exclaim with Jacob, *how dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!* We should all say with Cornelius, *now therefore are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

A FIFTH argument to evince the beneficial tendency of public worship is, that it is calculated to

bring people to a friendly temper towards each other, and to mutual love and forbearance. In divine ordinances, the worshippers appear like brethren. They ask for the same mercies. They look to the same Mediator for a full pardon of their manifold impieties. They profess to believe the same truths, to need the same purifying grace to restore upon their hearts the lost image of God. They partake of the same ordinances. Their voices are mingled in the same praises. Can they, then, fall out by the way? Must they not be mild and forgiving towards each other? Can they refuse to practise condescension? They all appear before a holy God—profess to hope for the same salvation—and at last to enter into the same kingdom of Glory.—

THE sixth and last consideration to evince the beneficial tendency of public worship is, that it serves to train us up for the worship and employments of the celestial kingdom. Pious worshippers cannot but rejoice, to think that the institution of public worship is, as it were, a CONCERT of prayer—that all Christians in past ages have loved to engage in it, and left their testimony in its favour by their constant attendance upon it. They recorded their sweet experience of its pleasure. And all sincere friends to the cause of the Redeemer, over the Countries where the Gospel is known, make conscience of assembling together to honour God in public worship. When we address ourselves to the various parts of it, we are animated, we are consoled, with the thought that we are not alone, but that all God's people are joining with us. How has my heart been enlarged with this idea! But what is

the worship of God here on earth compared to the heavenly! Here sin stains our best duties. Imperfections cleave to all our warmest devotions. Clouds of error obstruct the clear and full view of truth. We know but in part, we prophecy but in part. Our harps are hung on the willows. A dead languor rests on all our religious performances. But in heaven there will be no cold hearts—no dissenting voices.—Perfect love will animate all the worshippers in the realms of eternal day. They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. Their joy is one. Their happiness is one. And their worship is the perfection of ardour, sublimity and purity—How can we behold worshipping Assemblies joined in prostrate adorations before the throne of grace, and uniting their voices in hallelujahs of praise to the Eternal King, without having our thoughts led forward to that delightful scene of heavenly worship, where mingled choirs of angels and saints, whose number is ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, are continually saying with a loud voice, *worthy is the Lamb! blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne.* Do not the crowded Assemblies of Christian worshippers bear some distant resemblance to the Zion above?—Let it be our supreme concern, to be fitted and trained up by the humbler forms of devotion in the Church militant, for the exalted services and work of the Church triumphant.—Such are the happy effects of stated public worship and instructions, prayers and praises. “Prayers, says a mahometan writer, are the pillars of Religion; and they that forsake prayer, forsake Religion.”—The

public devotions of God's house, how advantageous : how useful : how beneficial in their tendency !—" To thee, O devotion, we owe the highest improvement of our nature, and much of the enjoyment of our life. Thou art the support of our virtue, and the rest of our souls in this turbulent world. Thou composest the thoughts. Thou calmest the passions. Thou exaltest the heart. Thy communications, and thine only are imparted to the low, no less than to the high, to the poor as well as the rich. In thy presence worldly distinctions cease ; and under thy influence worldly sorrows are forgotten. Thou art the balm of the wounded mind. Thy sanctuary is ever open to the miserable ; inaccessible only to the unrighteous and impure. Thou beginnest on earth the temper of heaven. In thee hosts of angels and blessed spirits eternally rejoice." So important is the duty of public worship to the world and the interest of moral Virtue, that we can hardly be too zealous in recommending it, or exceed in our encomiums upon it. For it is impossible a man should be good, while he altogether omits the duties of Piety. The neglect of them shews that we have no right notions of God, no sense of his presence, no hearty desires of his mercy, and no solid hope of his favour.—

WE will here, as the proper place to insert the remark, and as a farther proof and powerful recommendation of the duty of public worship, see what the views, and opinions, or feelings and practice of the scripture-saints were in regard to it. How the Apostle Paul viewed it, we learn from the following direction of his. *Not forsa-*

king the *Assembling yourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another.* These words teach us that there were, in the days of the Apostles, and should be in all ages, Christian Assemblies for the public worship of God and mutual edification: and that it ever was, and ever will continue to be the duty of all Christians to frequent these Assemblies in obedience to the command of God, to perpetuate and maintain his worship in the world, and for the confirmation of their faith, and their mutual edification unto life eternal. To the Corinthian christians, he says, *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together:* He speaks of their being convened for public worship, as their *stated* custom. And in his salutation to them as a Church, he mentions those *that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ.* *Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are Sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.* Those *in every place that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* are all worshipping Assemblies of Christians. Our Lord himself promises, in a most tender and affecting manner, his gracious notice, presence, and blessing with ever so small a number of his worshipping disciples or followers. *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* His calling his followers a CHURCH implies necessarily their assembling *statedly* for worship and mutual edification. Public worship directly honors Jesus Christ, and is a most expressive way of owning him before men; and denying it or neglecting it, is denying him and being ashamed of him. *He that denyeth me, and*

is ashamed of me and my words before men, him will I deny before my father which is in heaven and his angels. The Psalms are full of expressions of warm affection and attachment, as all know who read them, to the courts of the Lord, to public worship. All good men love the ways of Zion, esteem and value exceedingly the word of God—the house of God—the worship of God—the truths of God—the ordinances of God—the Sabbaths of God.—Man never appears in so amiable an attitude as when on his *knees* before his Maker. The pleasure of engaging cordially in public worship is noble. How often too does God honor his worshipping Assemblies by his favorable presence—by communicating his grace—mercy—peace, and pardon to pious worshippers. What delight! what joy! what sweet experience! what comfort—what transport in joining “in work and worship so divine.” As a specimen of the esteem for the public worship of God, of delight in it—of ardent desires after it—of the profitableness of it—I have selected from the Psalms, the following passages—*How amiable are thy Tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the Courts of the Lord.—Blessed is the man whom thou chusest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy Courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple. My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, to see thy power and glory so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and with fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.—*

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord; and to enquire in his temple; for those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing. Again—I was glad, when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord, whether the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem to my chief joy.

I HAVE NOW, my Hearers, largely argued the duty and beneficial tendency of public worship. Better reasons I cannot offer. More powerful inducements to a constant attendance upon it, unless real necessity may be pleaded, as your excuse, cannot be laid before you, than are contained in those considerations which prove its beneficial tendency, above illustrated. If by those you will not be convinced, and reformed, if heretofore negligent of the duty, you must remain unconvinced and unreformed. Divine power and grace alone can awaken, convince, and reform you. Remember, if you neglect or deny public worship, you provoke God—you neglect a plain duty—you set a bad example—you dishonor Jesus Christ—you injure religion—you disserve the cause of morality—you contribute your proportion of influence to extirpate from the earth the christian religion—and must be responsible for all the evils you are the occasion of.

Let us all, then, make conscience of so plain and so important a duty as public worship, that by it, we may be trained up for the worship of heaven, for **THERE**, they are before the throne of God and serve him, day and night, in his temple.

DISCOURSE VIII.

The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper not a human invention, but a divine Institution.

MATTHEW xxvi. 26—31.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and break it, and gave it to the disciples, and said take, eat, this is my body.—And he took the Cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sin. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day, when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.—And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.

IT affords peculiar satisfaction to the thinking mind, in attending any duty of Religion, to be well assured that it hath either a divine warrant, as *thus saith the Lord*, or is supported by the clear light of Reason. If we make that a duty which God hath not enjoined upon us, either taught us by the light of nature, or the light of

Revelation, we are guilty of will-worship or superstition. In this case, it may justly be said to us, *who hath required this at your hands: bring no more vain oblations.* To worship God in a way not appointed in his word, or by rites and ceremonies not authorised by him, is to presume to interfere with the kingly office of the Saviour. He is king in his Church, and alone had power to make laws and appoint ordinances of worship. It is an infallible mark of an apostate and antichristian Church to pretend to institute sacraments or ordain modes of worship. Our Lord, knowing the proneness of human nature to err, and to adopt modes of worship of their own, has left his people this needful warning and excellent advice. *But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* We reject, with abhorrence, all human inventions or commandments in things divine. We glory in being guided solely by plain scripture, and not by the opinions or decrees of any men---body of men, or venerable ecclesiastical councils, however wise, or learned, or pious. Superstition and impiety are two extremes, in Religion, which ought to be shunned with equal care. We are not to turn aside to the right hand or to the left. While we anxiously flee from superstition, we should tremble lest we run to the opposite extreme of irreligion. Excellent is the advice of the wise man on this head. *Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.*

The right-hand errors of superstition, and the left-hand errors of irreligion are to be avoided with the utmost sollicitude.

As worshipping God in more ways than he has appointed, or in unauthorised ways is superstition; so neglecting the ways and ordinances of worship, which he hath most obviously appointed is irreligion. If we refuse, under any pretence whatever, to attend upon that, as DUTY, which he hath most expressly commanded, and which is altogether reasonable in itself, we are guilty of impiety, of despising his authority, breaking his laws, and rising up in rebellion against him; and of course shall be dealt with accordingly. For to retrench is no less criminal than to add. We are as strictly prohibited from taking away from, as adding to, the revealed will of God. The conscientious mind, therefore, would wish above all things to avoid both crimes, taking from or adding to, going beyond or stopping short of duty. To determine which crime of the two is the most heinous, is perhaps beyond our abilities. It is enough for us to know that both are very aggravated Sins, and to be avoided with the utmost sollicitude.

WE should carefully and diligently worship and serve the Lord our Maker, just as he has commanded us, precisely, and not according to any traditions of men, decrees of councils, uninspired canons, or our own vain imaginations. Religious and Gospel-worship and ordinances should be kept, pure and entire, free from all human mixtures and inventions. These are the feelings and views which our Churches profess to entertain—to walk by—and to hold. If in

any instances, or degree, we deviate from them, we do it mistakenly—and unintentionally; and therefore we trust, should this be the case, it will not be imputed to us, as a wilful aberration from the original purity and primitive glory of the Gospel. We profess, and wish to take Christ's spiritual and heavenly Religion, just as he, and his Apostles have delivered it to us, in the sacred Volume.—And that we may all be fully and perfectly satisfied, that while remembering the bitter sufferings and agonies of our once crucified, but now risen Redeemer in the sacrament of his supper—in the elements of bread and wine, we are only acting in pious obedience to a plain, positive, and express command, as express as any one can be, of our glorious high Priest, the captain of our salvation.—It is proposed, in the sequel, to—

I. Consider the original and actual institution of the sacramental supper—

II. And—the nature of it, and who may rightfully attend upon it.

I. WE are to consider the original and actual institution of the sacramental supper. It may be not improper or unuseful, just to notice here as we enter on this important subject, the names, by which this Ordinance of the New Testament dispensation, is commonly known. I now, in the entry, call this ordinance, an ordinance of the New Testament dispensation, because I hope to be able, in the subsequent reasonings, to prove it to be so, to every mind that has candour, and discernment, to see the force of arguments. It has been differently denominated, in the Christian

Church, and by different communions of Christians. It has been called the holy Sacrament—the great Gospel feast—the Christian Passover—the holy supper—the Eucharist—the Communion—and the Lord's supper. Among all these appellations, that by which it most commonly goes, among christians, is the Lord's supper. In each of these names, there is a peculiar significance and propriety, as is justly observed in those numerous discourses, which have been published on this Gospel-ordinance. Pious and sensible tracts have been published by learned men and sound divines on the nature of this ordinance—the qualifications of the worthy recipients—the terms of admission to its blessed privileges—the due preparation for attending upon it---the graces to be exercised while attending it---the design of it---and the temper and conduct which become christians after rising from the holy table ---as well as the danger and sin of an unworthy and irreverent approach to it.---There is, in holy scripture, most obviously, sufficient reason for these several names given to it. But we readily concede, the word *sacrament* is not in the New-Testament-writings. It signifies binding ourselves to the Lord by covenant-vows and promises. Whenever we participate of the sacrament of the supper, we solemnly covenant, engage, and promise virtually, to be the Lord's ; to believe his truths, to be faithful in his service, to perform the duties which he enjoins—and to take him for our only Saviour.—

It may also, once for all, be here remarked, that there are, among the various communions of christians, some circumstances relating to this Ordinance, which are not essential, but are left

to the convenience, prudence, and situation of the followers of the Son of God. Such as the frequency with which it ought to be celebrated; the posture of the recipients;—the quantity of the *Elements* to be taken;—and several other less points, which indeed have caused much contention among pious christians, to the disgrace both of reason and religion. In all indifferent things, it is folly to contend. It is no where said how often the Lord's Supper is to be solemnized—or whether in the morning or evening of the Sabbath-worship—or whether we shall sit—or stand—or kneel while we partake of the symbols of the body and blood of the Redeemer. These circumstances are perfectly immaterial. And how unhappy, that christians should ever interrupt the harmony of churches on account of them, or divide and separate from each other. But about what trifles, MERE NOTHING, will men furiously quarrel! He who kneels at the holy table is as acceptable a worshipper, as he who sits or stands. God looks at the heart, and not at the outward appearance. A composed, decent, and respectful or reverential posture is becoming, and is required. And as often, as the body of the people, with whom we worship, deem it expedient to solemnize the holy ordinance of the supper, we should do it, even if our private opinions should happen to be different. All that Christian Churches are concerned about, is that their Communion-days or Sacramental seasons may not be too near each other, or too far distant, lest the good effects, which they are intended to accomplish, should be frustrated. These observations are made to reconcile unhappy differences in Churches—to prevent needless disputes—and to promote among all

that love our Lord Jesus Christ, however distinguished by name or distant in place, union—love—charity—condescension—and mutual forbearance. I hope the glorious day will soon arrive when God's people of the various denominations, will make the most of their union, and the least of their difference—and be in all ESSENTIAL THINGS, of one mind, of one way: and will lay aside and be ashamed of their foolish attachment to, and intemperate zeal for mere circumstantial points, names, and forms. Happy are the persons or the church that can divest themselves of all party-views and prejudice—of all bigotry and narrow notions, and embrace all pious people, of whatever sect, in the arms of fraternal affection—loving those most, who appear to have most of the temper and holiness of the Gospel! Alas! what mischief to the best of all causes, that of Jesus of Nazareth, hath bigotry done in every age, and every land, where his name has been known!

BUT the principal design of the present discourse is to prove, from scripture, the reality of such an ordinance, as we call the sacrament of the supper. Is there, then, such an ordinance, in the Christian Church, to be observed by all the followers and disciples of our Lord, in every age and country? If there be not, we are, in our attendance upon it, justly chargeable with adopting human inventions and corruptions. Consequently are guilty of will-worship or superstition. We go beyond what is required of us. We cannot, of course, hope, upon reasonable grounds, for the divine acceptance and approbation. For God is never honored by, or

pleased with our religious observances, however seemingly devout or pious we may be, when we presume to offer him, either what he hath not required of us by plain instructions of his own word, or made known to us by the dictates of reason: or when we offer it in the way, which he hath not required. We are to admit as articles of faith all that he hath enjoined, and only what he hath enjoined, and no more. In our practice, as professed christians, we are to do precisely as he hath commanded us. To believe as he tells us, and to do as he bids us, is the chief of religion. As professed followers of the Redeemer of the world, we are to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless. On the subject of positive duties we are to be guided, in our inquiries, altogether by the revealed will of him, who appoints them.

LAYING aside all prepossessions from education, tradition, or other sources, let us candidly and critically enquire, whether Jesus Christ did not, in the most POSITIVE and EXPRESS manner, institute the sacrament of his supper, or a solemn commemoration of his passion and death by partaking of bread and wine set apart to be emblems of his body and blood. And it is not possible for any language to be plainer or easier to be comprehended, than the passage of scripture chosen for our present meditation. In it we have an account, concise, but full, of the original appointment. We have, in it, the history of the first Christian sacrament ever attended upon. The Jewish Passover is done away EXPRESSLY, by him whom it typified, and who alone had authority to change or abrogate the whole Jewish

system. He says, in so many words, that he abolishes it, and would never more attend it. He says, he sets up another and new ordinance, in its room, to be continued in his Gospel kingdom. He himself dispenses the Elements after consecrating them by prayer. His disciples partook of them. All the circumstances are minutely set down. Nay, he ordained, as king of Zion, as head over all things to his Church, that the commemoration of him, by material bread and wine, should be STATEDLY observed to the end of the world, in his Church, for the important purposes of honouring him as a Saviour, and preserving warm in the heart, and perpetuating the memory of his sufferings, his dying love and rich grace. I will explain and illustrate this history of the institution of the Lord's supper, in the following manner, and principally, in the words of an *approved expositor*.

AT the close of the paschal supper before the table was cleared, Jesus to show that he was thereby typified as the lamb of God who was to be sacrificed for us, took in his hand such bread as was in common use, and having set it apart for sacred service, by thanksgiving and prayer, he brake it and distributed it among his disciples, saying *take eat*; for I appoint this sacramental bread to be henceforth eaten as the memorial of my body's being broken for your redemption by my sufferings and death; in like manner as the eating of the paschal Lamb was appointed to be a memorial of the preservation of Israel from the destroying angel, and of their deliverance out of Egypt.—After the same manner he likewise

took the cup of such wine in his hand as they had at the paschal supper, and setting this apart by thanksgiving and prayer to sacramental use, delivered it to his disciples, saying to every one of them, *drink of this* : for I appoint this sacramental wine to be henceforth drank by all my disciples as the representation and memorial of my blood's being shed for the confirmation of the new covenant, and purchasing of all its blessings ; and particularly for the forgiveness of the sins of vast multitudes, not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles, also, even of all that by faith receive the atonement.—

BUT I tell you that from this time forward I have done with drinking the juice of the grape in commemoration of Israel's deliverance, and will have that Ordinance continued NO LONGER than till the things it typified shall be fulfilled by a more glorious redemption in the Gospel-kingdom, which will take place after my resurrection, and will call for a NEW USE of wine in the commemorative Ordinance which I have NOW INSTITUTED.—And when at the close they had sung an hymn or song of praise suited to the occasion, Christ knowing that the time of his being betrayed was just coming on, would not stay to be apprehended in the house, lest he should bring the Master of it, into trouble, nor in Jerusalem, lest he should occasion public tumults and outrages, but retired with his disciples to the Mount of Olives. Here is a minute and circumstantial account given us by the Evangelist Matthew, of the ABROGATION of the Jewish ordinance of the Passover, and INSTITUTION of the Christian Ordinance of the Lord's supper. It

is a plain and particular account, as much so, as can well be conceived. And of all the four Evangelists, it is often observed, Matthew is the most circumstantial and particular in giving us the memoirs of our blessed Lord's life, discourses and conduct. St. Mark and St. Luke rehearse to us, in the same words, as nearly as may be, the ORIGINAL INSTITUTION of the ordinance of the Supper, and the abolition of the paschal Supper, and of the continuance of the former in the room of the latter. The Evangelist Mark's account is this. *And as they did eat Jesus took bread and blessed and break it and gave to them and said, take eat this is my body.—And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said unto them this is my blood of the new Testament which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the Vine until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.* St. Luke's account is of an exactly similar tenor, though the order be a little different. *Saying with desire have I desired to eat this PASSOVER with you before I suffer. For I say unto you I will not any more, eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup and gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the Vine until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying this cup is the new Testament in my blood which is shed for you.* No words can

be more particular. All the three Evangelists exactly agree in their account. There is indeed a wonderful harmony in this, as in all their other accounts of the birth, life, doctrines, institutions, sufferings, and death of the son of God. They vary so much as is a full proof that they did not transcribe from each other—or pen their Gospels by previous concert:—and they harmonize so completely as to satisfy all candid minds, that they gave a true, and not a false or fictitious history. All these three Evangelists tell us that Jesus Christ, DIRECTLY and EXPRESSLY, abolished the ordinance of the PASSOVER. And that he also in the Gospel-kingdom, or his Church, would have bread and wine used as an ordinance commemorative of his broken body and shed blood. He was very formal, as well as solemn and particular in this. He told his disciples what the bread was a sign or symbol of—his body broken: and what the cup was the sign or emblem of—his blood shed for the remission of sin.—All reasonable people will agree that his disciples, who were present and heard him, and partook of the consecrated bread and wine, understood him perfectly. But how did they understand him? If they did not comprehend his meaning, it was because he did not utter himself intelligibly, or they had not common capacities to take up his meaning.—How they understood him, their conduct explains to all who have eyes to see, or ears to hear. Did they ever more after this attend the paschal Ordinance, which had been so dear to the Jewish Church, from the day of its institution?—Did they not on the *first day of the week*, the Lord's-day, attend public worship, and solemnize the Lord's

Supper? They did. What did they do this for, if their Lord and Master had not ordered them to do it? Dared they, of their own accord, undertake to appoint an ordinance of worship? Their actions speak louder than words can do. In the Acts of the Apostles, we are told xx. Chapter—7. that the disciples and believers solemnized the ordinance of the Lord's supper—on the LORD'S-DAY—the day of his resurrection, the FIRST DAY of the week. *And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread Paul, preached unto them.* This could not be common *breaking of bread*. No person, in his senses, can imagine the Apostles went about from house to house to do this. It could be no other, therefore, than sacramental *breaking of bread*. It was on the FIRST DAY of the week—the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's day. They met for public worship. Paul preached to them. They had likewise public prayers. They assembled as we do, and as the Christian world ever since have done, on the Christian Sabbath to preach, to pray, and to solemnize the holy Ordinance of the Supper.—A still more minute account is given us of the various parts of public worship observed in the Apostolic days—
 11 Chapter—42 verse—*They gladly received the word, and were baptized, and continued steadfast in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship—and in breaking of bread and in prayers.* They were steadfast. They gladly received the word—took a pleasure in hearing it—in being where it was preached. The ordinance of water-baptism was administered to them. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was celebrated and prayers were attended. *They*—that is, all the professed be-

lievers in Jesus Christ *continued steadfast in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship.*—It is then a fact incontrovertible, that in the primitive days of Christianity, the disciples all attended the divine ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper--public worship and prayers, on the FIRST day of the week.

To put the matter beyond all doubt, we will see what St. Paul's views of it was. He was the chief of the Apostles. An immediate revelation was given to him, and he was a wonderful and most successful instrument of spreading the glory of the Gospel—and by whom also a very considerable part of the New Testament was penned.—In his first Letter to the Church at Corinth, he gives us a very particular account of the ORIGINAL INSTITUTION of the ordinance of the Lord's supper—and EXPRESSLY informs us that it is to be perpetuated in the christian Church till the end of the world—that all christians are by it, to show forth the death of Christ till he *come*—come to judge the world, and to render to every man according to his deeds.—xi. Chapter—23—27—*For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also, he took the cup when he had supped, saying this cup is the new Testament in my blood: this do ye as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. That this is not com-*

mon daily eating and drinking to support life—to satisfy hunger and thirst is evident to every person, who makes use of his reason in things of religion. Could the Apostle speak as he does, if he meant no more than our common meals? If he meant only common eating and drinking, must he not be insane to speak as he does? Is common eating and drinking a remembrance of Christ's sufferings and death? If we eat and drink, at our common meals, without a pious and thankful heart, are we guilty of the body and blood of the Lord? Is our common eating and drinking, if not done in a holy manner, eating and drinking damnation to ourselves—not discerning the Lord's body? Are we to wait, in partaking of common nourishment, till we have examined ourselves? *But let a man examine himself, and so LET HIM eat of THAT bread, and drink of THAT cup.* The Apostle severely reproves the converts at Corinth for an unworthy, disorderly partaking of the Lord's Supper, when they assembled for that purpose. He calls the ordinance, the *Lord's Supper*. *When ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the LORD'S SUPPER.* What the Lord's Supper is, we know as well as we know the meaning of any word ever used: as well as we know what the *Lord's prayer* means. The Lord's Supper is not every meal or any partaking of any food, but a *Supper* that is PARTICULARLY SO—EMINENTLY SO. If I were to call every prayer the *Lord's prayer*—and every meal I made—or food I received, the *Lord's Supper*, I should justly be looked upon, either as a wilful perverter of scripture, or insane.—

FURTHER, the Apostle calls the ordinance now under consideration—the *Communion*—and partaking of it—setting at *the Table of the Lord*, the cup—the *cup of the Lord*. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ. The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ.* 1. Cor. x. 16. Again, verse 21. *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils.* We may also observe, that the abolition of the Jewish passover, and institution of the ordinance of the holy Sacrament of bread and wine, in the room of it, is plainly intimated, when the Apostle calls Christ our Passover sacrificed for us—and directs us to keep the feast, alluding to the paschal feast, in a sincere manner. *For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* It is most easy and natural to understand this, of the Gospel-feast of the sacramental supper—and that this comes in the room, of the Jewish passover. This is the way in which it is generally and justly understood. Christians, in general, of all denominations, have from this and other very plain passages of scripture, been of the opinion, that the *Lord's Supper* as a holy ordinance succeeds the ordinance of the passover. There were two stated or fixed ordinances in the Jewish church, Circumcision and the Passover. There are two, in the Christian church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The latter, no doubt, came in the place of the former. At least this hath been the common belief; and it will

not be given up without very solid reasons.—None, generally satisfactory, have ever yet been alledged, and it is presumed never will.—To evade the force of the above reasonings and plain scripture, it has been said, all that is contained in scripture relative to the sacramental supper, is only allegory—mere metaphor—and that the Apostle John speaks of a spiritual supper in the soul. That he describes the regeneration of the soul, by Christ's coming into it, and the sweet pleasures of internal religion, by his supping in the soul, in the following words, is granted.—And that the language being highly figurative and metaphorical, is just and beautiful is also allowed. *Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him and he with me.* The spiritual supping of Christ in the regenerated soul, or his imparting to it, divine consolations, no more proves that there is no ordinance of the Lord's Supper, to be a *standing ordinance* in the Church, to the end of the world, than the first verse in the book of Genesis proves it. It doth not refer to it, so much as in the remotest degree. Before a person can bring himself to believe in such a strange perversion of scripture, he must have resolved that he will understand nothing, according to what it is in truth. What will not man do, to get clear of plain truth! How will he twist and pervert the plainest words!—

It hath also been alledged, that our divine Lord, directed his disciples to wash one anothers feet as a token of humility—John xiii—from the 4th to 15th verse. There is no word, in this whole

transaction, that can possibly denote that *washing of the feet* was to be a standing ordinance in the New Testament-dispensation.—Most plainly doth Christ tell them, that what he had done was only an *example* of humility, or significant way to teach them this important Virtue. It was an outward action calculated to impress their minds with a sense of the duty of being meek—humble—con-
 descending—and forbearing. So they understood it—for they never practised it as an ordinance. We have a right to say they did not, because, we are no where told of their observing it as a divine ordinance. So Christians have, in general, understood it.—One very small handful of pretended followers of Christ have understood it differently—and observed it as a CHRISTIAN RITE. But admitting it to be an ordinance to be observed in Christ's Church, it doth not disprove the other ordinances.—Upon the whole, we may as well deny any duty as the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. We may with as good reason affirm that all the scripture is mystery, and none of it capable of being understood, as to affirm that what it says relative to the institution of the Lord's Supper as a *standing ordinance* to be continued in his Church to the end of the world, his second coming to judgment, is only mere metaphor—allegory, or figurative language.—But it is one thing to show malice against God's special ordinances, and another to disprove them. All who reject, despise, and deny them, cannot, with any consistency, pretend to receive the word of God, as the only rule of faith and practice.

HAVING reviewed the scripture account of the Institution of the Lord's Supper, as a standing or-

dinance, in the Christian Church, to be continued to the end of the world.—We shall, as was proposed, examine

II. Very briefly into its nature, and enquire who may rightfully attend upon it.—God is infinitely wise, in all that he requires of us, as duty. He never did require, or enjoin upon man what was inconsistent with his wisdom or goodness, or when complied with, would be of no benefit to him. The ordinances of the gospel are spiritual in their meaning, and highly subservient to the purposes of fervent piety.—And the ordinance of the Supper, is an ordinance wherein by giving and receiving *sensible signs*, we show forth the death of Christ till he come to judge the world at the last day. By visible signs, it represents to us the body and blood of the Saviour. The material emblems, the bread and wine, convey to us, or signify spiritual things; and are designed to impress the mind, with the liveliest ideas of the dreadful sufferings of the son of God, of his blood shed, and body broken for us, by the aid of our external senses, our eyes and taste.—By these Elements, as they are termed, we behold him as crucified afresh:—as groaning on Calvary:—as expiring on the Cross:—as rising from the dead:—as bursting asunder the cords of death:—as ascending up into heaven:—as sitting at the right hand of God:—as an all-willing and all-powerful Saviour. Our eyes see it, in the sensible signs. May our hearts realize it! The duty of remembering our Redeemer, in the memorials of his dying love, is most reasonable. We consist of body and soul, and in this ordinance, the apprehensions and devotions of the latter, are aided by the senses of the former. This

is treating human nature as being what it is. Had we no BODY, or were we unembodied spirits this ordinance would be absurd.—

It may here be pertinently added, God has had his sacramental institutions in every age of the world—even, before the FALL of man. In a state of innocence, before the Apostacy, the tree of life was the Sacrament, or standing sign by which Adam was to be confirmed, if he had maintained his integrity.—The Rain-bow, a natural phænomenon, was expressly appointed by God, as a sacramental sign, by which his covenant with Noah was ratified, and in which he promised that the world should not, a second time, perish with water.—In the Jewish dispensation, the Passover and circumcision were two noted sacramental institutions, by which God's covenant of grace, was confirmed.—And in the last, best, and most perfect dispensation of all, the Gospel, are two most plain and important Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

IN all these instances, the wisdom, goodness, condescension and grace of the Supreme Being are remarkably manifested. He considers what we are, weak and frail Creatures. He treats us as being what we are, imperfect Creatures ; and hath, in the sacraments, appointed outward signs to assist us in conceiving rightly of divine things, and to move and affect the heart.

2dly. THE nature of the ordinance of the supper is a commemoration of the sufferings of a dying Redeemer. This is sufficiently proved by the very words of the blessed Jesus in the original institution and distribution of the Elements,

THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME. He, as our passover, is sacrificed for us. We are then to remember him, principally, as dying for us:—as bearing our sins in his own body on the tree:—as our propitiatory sacrifice:—as our righteousness. This needs no other proof, than the very words used in the distribution of the outward signs. *This is my body which is broken for you*:—broken with an inconceivable weight and variety of sufferings.—So again, *This Cup is the new Testament in my blood which is shed for you*: shed for you—a ratification of the new covenant, which is the meaning of the word Testament here.—Who can hear the divine Jesus—who can see him holding out life and glory, in these appointed signs, saying eat, *O friends, and drink ye all of it*, without being melted into love, gratitude, and a cordial compliance!—The sacramental supper, then, is a memorial of his dying love, bleeding piety, and wonderful grace.—By it, as the Apostle expresses himself, we *show his death* TILL HE COME—till he come to visit our guilty world as the final judge. As a dying friend he gives us this memorial of his love. He knew that we, in this wicked world, and amid its concerns and temptations, should be apt to forget him in the riches of his grace and bitterness of his death. Accordingly that the manner of his death, and magnitude and variety of his sufferings might never be effaced from the mind, the same night in which he was betrayed, he instituted this precious Ordinance, and bid all his followers, to remember him in it, with all the weight of his divine authority, and affection of ardent friendship.—And can we forget thee, O suffering Immanuel! Whom

should we remember, if we forget thee!—Can our cold hearts be unmoved at those things, which thou didst undergo for us!—Can any pretend to be thy disciples, deceiving mortals, and still exert themselves to persuade others not to remember thee, in thy DYING COMMAND!

3dly, THE sacramental supper is a Communion-Ordinance. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.* This ordinance from these words is often called, by way of eminence, the Communion; and it has been celebrated ever since the days of Christ, as a *standing ordinance*, in every Country, where the Gospel hath been enjoyed by all denominations of Christians, except some deniers of all outward ordinances. Serious and enlightened Christians have always highly valued it. They have always loved it. They always deemed it a blessed privilege to remember their dear, departed Lord in his own appointed emblems. And while attending upon this great Christian solemnity, the Communion-Table, we commune with one another—with our Father who is in heaven—and with the Redeemer of a fallen world.—As brethren we sit at the same table, commemorate the same suffering Lord, participate of the same rich provision. This shows our union in all essential doctrines, our charity; that in the things of God and religion we have one heart, one Lord, one hope, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and that we acknowledge one another as fellow-Christians.

We stand, as it were, at the foot of the Cross, beholding the awful sufferings of our Lord, and professedly rest all our hope on his merits and precious blood, our hope of pardon, hope of peace, hope of acceptance with a holy God, and hope of eternal blessedness in heaven.—We also commune, by the divine spirit, with God himself. A spiritual intercourse, at the Sacred Gospel-Passover, is maintained between him and his pious people. He communicates, by the influences of his holy spirit, his love to them ; and they pour out their hearts, desires, and prayers before him, and to him. He draws near to them, in mercy, and in the tokens of his favour. They draw near to him in duty. Hence he is said to dwell in them. He smiles upon them through the Son of his love. He owns them in the covenant of grace. He pities them in all their sorrows. He comforts them with his own consolations. He establishes them in the truth and right way. They are, in fine, feasted at his own table—a Father's board, upon the best provision.—What a high privilege! What a sublime felicity!—

AND WHO may rightfully attend upon, and enjoy this divine Ordinance? The answer is, all Christ's disciples. His professed followers who believe in him, and obey his precepts. All are bound to honor the God of ordinances. He alone can make them profitable and savingly beneficial. Without him, they will be inefficacious.—And to have a right to approach them, we must profess the religion of the Gospel, must admit all its essential doctrines. And behave and conduct accordingly. *Do this in remem-*

brance of me is the absolute command. And we are to remember a dying Redeemer, as his friends, as his followers. All, therefore, who have a disposition to live a life of piety and Virtue, to perform the duties thereof, and to walk in the fear of the Lord all their days, may, and ought to approach the holy ordinances of the Gospel.—

IN the review of what hath been offered, we infer the indispenfible duty of partaking of divine Ordinances. It is as much our duty, as professed Christians, to remember the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ to atone for sin, in his own appointed way, as it is to practice the moral virtues of compassion, honesty, or truth. A positive duty is absolutely binding. When it is made known to us, we may not neglect it any more than a moral duty: though moral duties may be more important, and be not to give place to positive: for *God will have mercy and not sacrifice*. If *both*, as both are obligatory, cannot be complied with, under certain given circumstances, the *moral* claims the precedency. All, therefore are obliged to prepare themselves to wait on God, and to honor him in his own institutions. None can excuse themselves. And what is requisite on their part hath now been concisely stated.

AGAIN, from our subject we see how exactly we follow Christ in the way, in which we attend upon the Sacramental Supper. We profess to follow him altogether, and to make nothing essential, which he doth not make essential. Every communicant is left to his own option and free liberty to stand, or sit, or kneel, as he conceives is the will of his divine Lord. As our

professed aim is to honor God, and Jesus Christ, we endeavour to make the revealed will of our Lord, in this Ordinance, our rule. Did he set apart the sacramental bread by prayer, so do we. Did he do the same as to the Cup, so do we. Did he close all by an hymn of praise, so do we. We close the solemnity by a well adapted religious song of praise to God and the Saviour.—

WE infer, further, from what hath been said, how painful to the real lover of Virtue and piety it is to reflect that this divine Ordinance, upon which we have been discoursing, should be so much disregarded, as it is, among those who call themselves Christians. Some profane it. Some depreciate and speak evil of it, and of all divine institutions even the christian Sabbath and Christian worship. Some cast off prayer, and maliciously and impiously reproach all christian duty. In this Country, it is with difficulty, that many who, in the judgment of Charity, are Christians, can be persuaded to honor God in his special ordinances. How melancholy the idea!—But what is of all the most affecting is, that there should be so many open enemies to that very Redeemer, who died on purpose to save man, lost man! For he came to seek and save that which was lost. His sceptical scoffers, will not have him to reign over them. Such should remember the observation of the wise man respecting the Deity's treatment of scorers. *Surely HE scorneth the scorers: but he giveth grace unto the lowly.*—Those who deny Jesus Christ in his word, in his worship, and in his ordinances, and will not have him to save them from sin and

misery, will never have any salvation at all. *If ye believe not, says our Lord, that I AM HE, the promised Messiah, ye shall die in your sins.*

To conclude all—IN THE ABOVE DISCOURSE, I have endeavoured to plead the honor of the only Saviour in his holy ordinance:—I have enquired what faith the scripture, not what men have said, or Councils decreed. If in any thing I have misapprehended, or misrepresented divine truth, I hope it may be forgiven me by a gracious God ; and that all my sins may be washed out, as to their guilt, in the precious blood of that Jesus, whose Religion I solemnly believe to be divine, and on whom I am intirely willing, after the most deliberate examination of his celestial pretentions, to risk my ETERNAL FELICITY.

DISCOURSE IX.

Baptism by water not a piece of Superstition,
but appointed by Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW xxviii--and this part of the 19 verse.

*BAPTIZING them in the name of the Father, and
of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

EVERY true friend to Christ and his Religion mourns over every departure from the duties he enjoined, the doctrines which he taught, and the Ordinances which he appointed. The more sincere and cordial his friendship; the more dear to him, will be the duties, the doctrines and the institutions of his divine Lord and Master.

WE should be exceedingly solicitous, then, to abide in the doctrines of Christ, to preserve Gospel-ordinances in their purity; avoiding carefully all human additions, supplements, and traditions; adhering to the original primitive simplicity of Gospel-worship and order; rejecting all that Christ rejects; holding to all, to which he holds; hoping all from him; and keeping from whatever contradicts his doctrines. All the ap-

pointments of the Saviour are to be highly esteemed, and diligently observed by his professed people. And one of these, is the Ordinance of Baptism by water, to be a *standing ordinance* in the Church to the end of the world ; of the clear and express institution of which it is now proposed to lay before the audience, a plain and faithful account from scripture ; being in the enquiry wholly directed and guided by what Christ and his Apostles have left us, have said, and practised respecting it..

So far, my hearers, as I know my own heart, I would cheerfully give up any thing, which I could not find duly supported in scripture understood in its plain natural sense, and not perverted by ignorance and wilful misrepresentation.— That the ordinance of water-baptism has been greatly abused and perverted, is readily acknowledged. Different denominations of professing christians, have entertained different opinions about its nature, as well as the subject and mode. But different opinions and different practices do not disprove the reality of the ordinance, or its utility as a christian privilege. They are however a full proof of the weakness, prejudice, and imperfection of human nature. If we must relinquish all that has been perverted and abused in religion, or disputed and differently understood; we shall have nothing left. We must, as many have done, commence infidels. For there is no article either of religion or morals but has been disputed, perverted, and differently understood. I hope for a patient and candid hearing of the arguments, which shall be alledged to prove that baptism by water or christian baptism is not a

piece of superstition, but APPOINTED by Jesus Christ.—I would attempt humbly to enquire, what is the mind or will of God, as revealed in the holy scriptures, concerning christian baptism. I have taken all proper pains to search them, looking to the Father of lights for his guidance and spiritual illumination—to weigh and compare what they affirm, and to examine the original language. I hope, by divine grace, to be preserved from all error in opinion, and intemperance of words, or harsh and uncharitable expressions, being fully persuaded, *that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*—

THE words chosen, as the subject of present meditation, make a part of that great Commission, which our Lord after his resurrection and before his ascension to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God, gave to his Eleven Disciples or first Ministers. The whole Commission runs thus, *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo! I am with you always even unto the End of the world.* To remove all possible doubt, if any could remain, of his authority to ordain and commission them, he informs them, that all power was given unto him, in heaven and on earth: power to do every thing in his church, and even to render the whole system of nature obedient to him. He appointed the time and place, when and where the *eleven disciples* were to meet him in order to be invested with the commission to preach his Gospel, to gather and organize churches, and to admit converts to the Sacra-

ment of baptism. *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

1st. THE first argument that there is such an ordinance as water-baptism to be administered to all, who are the professed people of God, to be continued to the end of the world, is taken from the very words of the text : *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* In the original, it is *into* ; which however altereth not in the least the meaning of the passage. To baptize *in* and *into* the name of the SACRED THREE is precisely one and the same thing. And the word, *baptize*, as all the learned know, is applying water in some way or other to the subject, as will be proved in its proper place. And in the commission which our Lord, just before his ascension into heaven, in a very formal and solemn manner, gave to his Apostles, the ELEVEN DISCIPLES, we should naturally expect, if any where, as the most fit time and place, on account of the institution of the ordinance of baptism, as an initiatory or introductory ordinance in his Gospel kingdom or New Testament-dispensation. Accordingly the very thing is done ; the ordinance is INSTITUTED in as plain, and as clear, and as precise a manner as words can state. The very particular form of words is given. That precise form which Jesus Christ would have us use, and which the christian world, in all its various ages and different communions, have ever since used. For the sacraments or or-

dinances of the Gospel are positive institutions ; and in all positive institutions the observers are wholly confined to the declared will and form of the institutor. They are neither to go beyond or fall short of it. They can do neither, without offending the institutor. In the appointment of christian baptism our Lord hath then prescribed the very form of words to be used. The Sacrament of baptism has a most important meaning, and by an outward sensible sign, exhibits to us divine truth, or one of the foundation-doctrines of the whole system of christianity. And outward signs are a most affecting way of teaching mankind spiritual doctrines. By these, as well as by words, doth God, in his infinite wisdom, teach us. It discovers a peculiarly base and disingenuous mind to object against any of the ways in which it may please him to teach us, sinful and guilty creatures. Christian baptism teaches us, in a most striking and affecting manner, BY AN OUTWARD RITE, the absolute need of our being washed by regeneration :—that we are defiled with sin, in our natures, and cannot be saved unless this defilement be done away by the purifying efficacy of grace. To apply water to the subject, whether infant or adult, whether by immersion or sprinkling, in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy Ghost, is to signify our belief in the one true God, distinguished, as now stated ; our subjection to him ; and our adherence to whatever is revealed by him. For to baptize in the name, or into the name of another is openly to denote our following him, belonging to him—our subjection to him, to his will and cause. Thus, when the Apostle Paul thanks God that he had baptized but

few : when the Corinthian converts were so divided about the Preachers who ministered to them, he assigns this reason, not that the ordinance was unnecessary or unprofitable, or not divinely appointed, *but lest any should say he baptized in his own name or into his own name*, which must mean that he was to be their head ; and they wholly devoted to him as followers. To baptize, therefore, into, or in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost, is to denote an entire consecration to the Trinity, to the love, fear, and service of God, and a full renunciation of all other Religions—of all Idols, and the vanities of the world—that we take God, for our God and portion, Jesus Christ for our only Redeemer, and the holy Ghost for our sanctifier. By Christian baptism we signify our duty to be God's, and declare it to all the world ; we declare in a more solemn manner than words can do, that we need the washing of regeneration—and that we are defiled in our nature by sin. All Christians should see that they understand the nature, use, and intention of baptism. And how reasonable, that by some outward rite, our need of being sanctified, should be exhibited !—When, therefore, we call the sacrament of baptism, a positive Ordinance, we do not mean that it has no moral uses, or is not beneficial in Religion, or reasonable : we only mean that it is an Ordinance which we should not have known, or been obliged to attend upon, except it had been expressly appointed by the Author of the Christian dispensation, who has the sole and exclusive right to legislate in his own kingdom, and to appoint what ordinances of worship he pleases. He is king in his Church.

Referring to the Messiah, and to his kingly office, Jehovah says, *Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*——

As to the mere circumstances of the Ordinance of baptism; these are left to the convenience and discretion of those who use it. And the disputes which have been carried on respecting these, between different Christian denominations, have been a disservice to Religion and Charity: have perplexed honest and serious minds very often; and opened the mouths of gain-sayers to object.——

LET it be particularly remembred here, that we do not substitute baptism by water, however dispensed, whether by sprinkling or immersion, in the room of regeneration. Some of the Christian Fathers used the words, *regeneration* and *baptism*, as similar in signification, though at the same time, they by no means excluded the doctrine of a renovation of nature; or meant to be understood that the application of the Element of water, in the baptismal Sacrament, was the actual scripture-new-birth. Some few Christians, have supposed that baptism rightly administered is the scripture-regeneration. Those who do, are few in number, and are considered by other Christians, as exalting the ordinance of baptism above its proper place, and taking the *sign* for the *thing* signified. Those, in general, who practise water-baptism, hold to the new-birth or regeneration of the soul as much, and as strongly, as if they never practised infant or adult baptism.

WE proceed in the argument—and ask, is it not strange, indeed, that Christ should be so par-

ticular in directing his Ministers to the end of the world, his Apostles, and in them, all faithful Ministers, to baptize into the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy Ghost, all who were brought over to his religion, or who embraced his Gospel, if he intended there should be no baptismal Ordinance in his Church? They were to teach and to baptize. Go teach all nations, *baptizing them*. The word *teach* here signifies to disciple them, or bring them over to the Gospel. And to *baptize* them is to apply water in the name of the father, son, and holy Ghost to the individuals, who should be induced, through the preaching of the Apostles, to become Christ's disciples. He promises to be with them, while engaged in their sacred work, *teaching* and *baptizing*, two different acts entirely, even unto the end of the world. Here is a plain scripture-account of the actual institution of the sacrament of baptism, or christian baptism, by whom to be dispensed, and to whom;—and how long to be continued. It is to be dispensed by Christ's ministers, or regularly authorized Teachers; the subjects to whom it is to be administered are all who *professedly* become disciples of the Redeemer, or embrace his Gospel, including, as we believe, their infant offspring; and it is to be continued to the end of the world. No words can be more explicit and full than these. If these can be explained away, by sophistry and art, any may, that could be used. If these be perverted, we must despair of finding *any* which are incapable of perversion. To say that to *teach* and to *baptize* are one and the same thing, is to deny the natural and obvious sense of the words—to make our Lord guilty of a silly tautology—an

unmeaning repetition—is contrary to the whole current of scripture. For it never, in one single instance, uses the word *baptize* for *teaching*. And the word *baptize* no more signifies teaching, than it does meekness or humility, or faith, or repentance. None can adopt such an absurd idea, except they be predetermined to deny every thing in the Gospel which makes against their favorite system.—On the other hand, all who are willing to receive Christ's Institutions, and doctrines, or religion as delivered in his own word, will never want a full proof to support them in holding to the ordinance of Christian baptism, as long as this text now under consideration, is found in scripture.

2dly, A FURTHER scripture-proof of the institution of Christian Baptism is from the Evangelist Mark xvi—15, 16 compared with our text. He is giving us an account of the very same Commission as the Evangelist Matthew, but is not so full and particular. *And he said unto them, go ye, into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every Creature, every person who will hear you wherever you may, under divine direction, travel. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* This Commission is certainly to the following effect.—“I ordain and send you my chosen disciples and Ministers to spread the Gospel, by your preaching, far and wide the world over, without any distinction of Jew or Gentile, and to dispense the Sacrament of baptism, as a standing ordinance in my kingdom, and as highly necessary, as you have hitherto practised it, under my direction, and by my order, while I exercised my personal

Ministry; he that believeth on me and receiveth baptism shall be saved." I argue thus, baptism is of high importance, and a divinely instituted ordinance, or it would not have been mentioned in this order or connexion, *he that believeth and is bapitized shall be saved*. Why baptized, if not needful, or a divine ordinance? Was our Lord ignorant of what he said; or did he use words which cannot be understood; or did he mean to deceive us? of one or the other he was guilty, if he intended his followers, to the END of the world, should not be BAPTIZED with water. For baptism here must mean the application of the element of water to the subject, and not the sanctifying, regenerating, or miraculous power of the holy Ghost, because it is put after believing. But none, all must admit, do believe to the saving of the soul, but regenerated and sanctified ones. And that water-baptism is not in Christ's religion as necessary as faith, is plain from the last clause of the verse, *but he that believeth not shall be damned*. It is not said, *he that believeth not and is NOT BAPTIZED*, shall be damned. For many may believe, and have no opportunity, however desirous, to receive baptism. And such as are not in Providence allowed to have opportunity to receive it, in a Gospel-way, are not therefore shut out of the kingdom of glory.—Besides, it is a circumstance on this subject of no small weight, and merits a particular remembrance, that Christ invested his eleven disciples or Apostles with this commission to carry the glad tidings of peace and Salvation, and in them, his true ministers, round the world, and to dispense the ordinance of baptism to all meet subjects, just before his Ascension into heaven.

It was one of his very last acts in our world. And they could not possibly help understanding him to mean water-baptism, in their Commission, for during the whole term of his personal Ministry, they had practised administering it, as an ordinance, to all who professed to be convinced that Christ was the promised Messiah and who followed him.—

3dly. THEREFORE, a third proof, from scripture, of the institution of water-baptism, as a special ordinance or sacrament in Christ's kingdom, or spiritual religion, is that his disciples, after he had entered upon his public Ministry, *statedly* practised it. This must be a satisfactory proof to all, who are willing to follow Christ and his Apostles, and not to set up a religion of their own making. Deluded and visionary men have often undertaken to make schemes of religion of their own. What daring impiety!—That Christ's chosen disciples or Apostles, during his public Ministry on earth, practised water baptism the Evangelist John tells us. John iii. 22. *After these things, came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea, and THERE, he tarried with them, and BAPTIZED.* iv. 1, 2, 3. *When therefore the Lord knew, how the pharisees had heard that Jesus made and BAPTIZED more disciples than John; though Jesus himself BAPTIZED not, but his disciples, he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee.* Making disciples and baptizing them were two entirely different acts. To *make disciples* was to teach them his doctrines, and to persuade them to embrace his religion. To *baptize* them was to apply water to them, as an ordinance or sacramental sign. *Baptizing* these pro-

fessed followers of Christ was the application of water to them, as a sign, or symbol, whether by immersion or sprinkling, is not now material to enquire, and not the *renewing of the holy Ghost*. In the first cited passage, it is said, *Jesus BAPTIZED*. In the last, it is said, he *himself BAPTIZED* not, but his disciples. There is no manner of difficulty in reconciling these two different accounts. For Christ is said, and with the most evident propriety, to do, what he ordered and directed his twelve Apostles to do. They were only his organs; and as his **TEACHERS**, they did nothing but by his order and direction.

HAD our Lord no design in this? He had now been some time on his public Ministry. He had begun the promulgation of his Gospel-kingdom, the new religion, which he came into the world to erect. He had collected many followers. And his Apostles **BAPTIZED** them all. The words are, *made* and **BAPTIZED** disciples. All that were made disciples, the necessary inference is, were **BAPTIZED**. It follows, then, that every one that was *made* a disciple, was *baptized*, without one exception. There was but one way of practice. All or none were *baptized*. These chosen Ministers of Christ did not venture, of their own heads, in imitation of John the baptist, to administer baptism. Neither did the son of God commit an error. He was perfect: a teacher come from God, both impeccable and infallible. As people, in various parts, where he and his disciples travelled to preach, hearkened to him and owned him, as the true Messiah and Saviour, the disciples were bidden to *baptize* them.—How did they **BAPTIZE** them? Doubt-

less as professed followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The form of words made use of, is not recorded; neither is it of any importance that it should be, at this time; because Christ intended to prescribe the VERY FORM, at the proper time, just before he ascended into heaven.—Did Christ allow his disciples to *baptize*, accidentally, or undesignedly, or by mistake, or merely because his forerunner John did? Can any one believe this, who has his intellectual powers underanged, or any honourable thoughts of his Saviour? Nay, would not this be to blaspheme the son of God? All he did, in his public Ministry, and as an infallible Teacher, was of design.—Or again, did he admit his Apostles to *baptize* all who professed to believe in him, to gratify the caprice, humours, and prejudices of the people? Did the glorious and divine Jesus act from such base and low motives? Did he make these WHIMS and PREJUDICES the rule of his public conduct as Messiah? Dare we bring in against him, such a false and groundless charge?—We come, therefore, to this conclusion, that we only follow him, when we administer water-baptism to all, who profess their faith in him and love and obedience; or to visible believers; the promise being to them, and their seed. And in things of religion we are safe, and only safe, when we most strictly follow him.—

4thly. THE fourth argument to prove from scripture the INSTITUTION of water-baptism to be a *standing* ordinance, is taken from John iii. 5. compared with the 26 verse of the same chapter. *Jesus answered, verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of WATER, and of the*

spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Why, is being *born of water*, mentioned here? Is it to no end; was it merely a word of course, to fill up a sentence? This was an important evening conference, of which these words are a part, with Nicodemus, a ruler in Israel, on the very nature of that new dispensation of religion, which Jesus was opening as the teacher come from God, called the *kingdom of heaven* or *kingdom of God*. Regeneration or the new-birth is mentioned verse 3. as indispensibly necessary; in this 5th verse *water* to be used, in a certain way, is made a term of entrance into the kingdom of heaven or Gospel-church; that is, we must be born of *water* as well as of the *spirit* in order to be *regular* members in his church. Water, in the ordinance of baptism, denotes the need of purifying grace. To be *born of water* may very well, without any unnatural force, mean *baptism*. As if Christ had told this ruler, in Israel, you must be renewed in your soul, and baptized with water, in order to be entitled to the blessings of my kingdom, or to be a regular member of the Gospel-church. Expositors generally suppose that *baptism* by water is implied in this passage. If Christ intended to have no *ordinance* of this sort, in his church, why did he point to *water* in the way he does?—Some, indeed, suppose that the ordinance of baptism is not meant here, but that to be *born of water and of the spirit*, is to be born of the spirit, which purifies and cleanses from the filth of sin, like water.—In the 26th verse we read thus: *And they came unto John; and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness. The same BAPTIZETH, and all men come unto him. He bap-*

tized by his disciples. They dispensed the ordinance for him, by his order, and authority.—Immense multitudes were baptized. The text says *all men* came unto him; that is, multitudes, and multitudes from all parts of the land. And they who professed to receive him as the Saviour and Son of God were baptized. *The same BAPTIZETH, and ALL men come unto him.*—

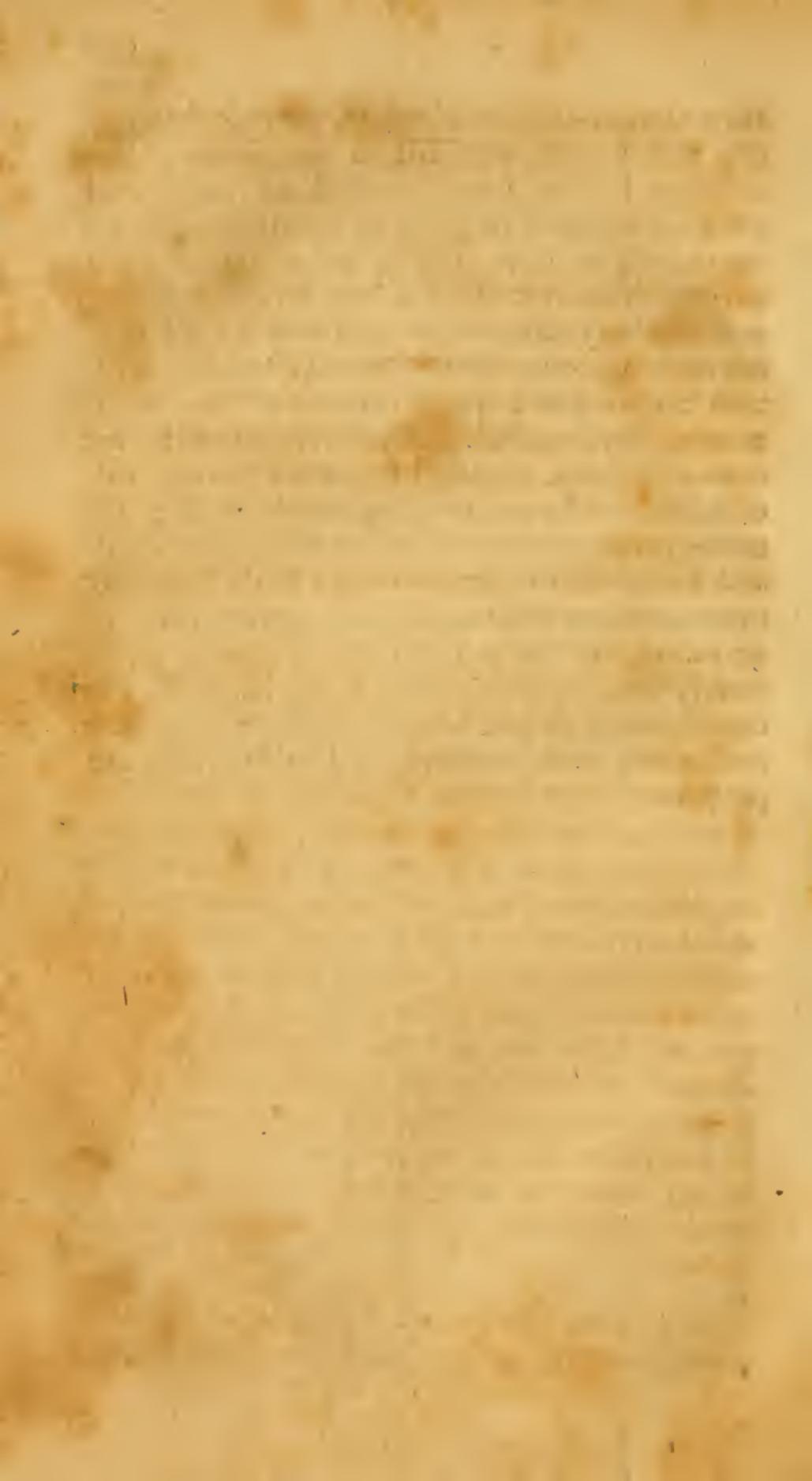
5thly. THE fifth argument, is taken from those numerous passages of scripture, where baptismal water in the name of Christ, or, no doubt, in the name of the SACRED THREE, is said to be used. There are in the New Testament, we readily own, several instances, in which the baptism of the holy ghost is mentioned; all of which, one excepted, mean his *miraculous influence*. And it is to be carefully remembered that when the words *baptize* and *baptism* denote either the sanctifying grace, or miraculous gifts of the spirit, they are used not in their natural or literal, but in a figurative and metaphorical sense. These instances I will carefully recite. Once *baptism* is used by Christ to represent his sufferings, especially on the Cross; Luke xii. 40; and Mat. xx. 22. There are but three, or at most four instances where *baptism* and *baptize* mean evidently or necessarily the sanctifying grace or miraculous powers of the holy ghost. Mat. iii. 11, compared with Mark, i. 8, compared with Luke, iii. 16, compared with Acts, i. 5, and xi. 16. These texts all refer to one and the same thing. And most evidently intend the *miraculous gifts* of the holy ghost. Christ's *baptizing with the holy Ghost and with fire* necessarily means his giving the *miraculous powers* of his spirit, as is fully pro-

ved by comparing Acts, i. 5, with the first sixteen verses of the second chapter. In these passages, in the Evangelists, there is a pointed and marked distinction between John's *baptizing with water*, and Christ's *baptizing with the holy ghost*, or giving the *miraculous powers* thereof. They are entirely different. But Christ's *baptizing with the holy Ghost and with fire*, does not mean the sanctifying grace, but the *extraordinary gifts* of the holy Ghost, as now proved from Acts i. 5, and ii. 1, 16. Christ's *baptizing with the holy Ghost and with fire*, or imparting the miraculous powers thereof, is essentially different from John's baptism; but it neither proves, nor disproves the ordinance of *baptism by water* as a *standing* ordinance, to be continued in his church, to the end of the world. It hath no reference to such a thing, more or less. What kind of logic must that man have who reasons thus; Christ's *baptizing with the holy Ghost* is altogether different from John's *baptism of water* unto repentance, and therefore he never intended to have any ordinance of *water-baptism* in his dispensation of religion, or in the Gospel-church? A man who can suppose this to be just reasoning, or any kind of reasoning, must be disordered in his mental capacities. There is but *one* instance, where being *baptized* by the spirit can mean being regenerated by his divine influence. And that is 1 Cor. xii. 13. In describing christian graces and exercises, allusions to baptism by water are many times made, which is an argument in favour of it, and not against it, as will be illustrated, in its proper place. The word translated *baptize* with its derivatives, in the Old Testament, is the common word used

for *application of water*, in some form, to the subject. In the New-Testament the words, *baptism* and *baptize*, with their derivatives, or compounds, borrowed and brought down from the Old Testament, are used about sixty times; and must necessarily mean the application of water, in some way, to the subject, except in the four instances and their parallel places, now recited. I have endeavoured from the original to make the selection with diligence and care. We know what the first, original, and natural signification of the word, *baptism* or *baptize* is, as well as we do know, or can know the sense of any word; in any language. And that the *first, plain, original* signification of the word, *baptize*, and its derivatives, is the *application of water*, in some form, to the subject, all the learned know:—and to them I appeal, as the only proper judges, in this case; though unlearned men may see how it is used, in the New-Testament, to their full satisfaction, in the sequel. Whenever the word is applied to denote either the *sufferings* of Christ, or the *sanctifying grace*, or the *extraordinary and miraculous powers* of the holy Ghost, I affirm from scripture, it is used in a figurative and metaphorical sense. To reject the plain common meaning of a word, in nearly fifty instances out of sixty, and to insist on the metaphorical sense, for the sake of expunging from Christianity, a PLAIN ORDINANCE, is having recourse to a strange expedient to establish a point.—And whether it be not a gross perversion of scripture, and contrary to all the rules of a fair and candid construction, is left for all to judge, who have eyes to see, or ears to hear.—We will now attend to those texts, numerous

indeed, which directly or impliedly speak of baptism by water, as a *standing ordinance* in the spiritual religion of Jesus Christ, according to Apostolic practice. Rom. vi. 4. *We are buried with him by baptism.* Eph. iv. 5. *One baptism.* Col. ii. 12. *Buried with him in baptism.* Heb. vi. 2. *Doctrine of Baptisms.* 1. Pet. iii. 21. *Baptism doth now save us.* Acts. ii. 38. *Be baptized every one of you.* EVERY ONE OF YOU. 41 verse, *They that gladly received his word were baptized.* viii. 12. *They were baptized both men and women.* NO DISTINCTION OF SEX AS IN CIRCUMCISION. 13 verse, *Simon believed and was baptized.* 16 verse, *Only they were baptized in the name of Jesus.* 38 verse, *Here is water, what doth hinder to be baptized?* 38 verse, *And he baptized him.* ix. 8. *Saul received sight, and arose and was baptized.* x. 47. *Can any forbid that these should not be baptized?* 48 verse, *Peter commanded them to be baptized.* COMMANDED. xvi. 15. *Lydia was baptized and her household.* 33 verse, *The jailor was baptized, he and ALL HIS straitway.* xviii. 8. *Many of the Corinthians believed, and were baptized.* xix. 5. *And when they heard this, they were baptized.* xxii. 16. *Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.* Rom. vi. 8. *Were baptized into Jesus.* 1. Cor. i. 16. *I baptized the household of Stephanas.* x. ii. *And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud.* xv. 29. *Else what shall they do, that are baptized for the dead?* Gal. iii. 27. *As many as have been baptized.* These are some of the principal places in the New-Testament, where *baptism* and *baptize* are used : and they all, mean the ORDINANCE of water baptism, or allude to the use of it, as a *standing ordinance.*

How numerous are these texts, more so than any one, at first view, would have imagined. How unhappy is our Lot, if against all these, and plain are the most of them, as words can be, we are to believe Jesus Christ never intended to have the sacrament of water-baptism administered, as a *standing* ordinance, in his Church ! So considerable a portion of the New-Testament occupied in giving us a plain account of this sacrament deserves notice. Could reason wish for more ? What a beautiful display of divine wisdom, in so fully and so particularly stating the matter, as if, on purpose, to cut off all the cavils and objections of gainsayers—as if, on purpose, to prevent any from DENYING, REJECTING, OR EXPLAINING away the Ordinance.—It seems utterly unaccountable how a denial of it, can consist with a serious belief that the scriptures are from God, or the only rule of Christian faith and practice.



DISCOURSE X.

Baptism by water not a piece of Superstition, but appointed by Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW xxviii--and this part of the 19 verse.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost.

I PROCEED, in this discourse, to lay before the audience a plain account, from scripture, of the Sacrament of Baptism as an ordinance to be observed, in Christ's Church, or the Gospel-kingdom, to the end of the world. This, it will be acknowledged, is a very important and interesting subject. For if there be no such sacrament too long have we, and the christian world, of the various Communion, practised upon it. If there be, we ought to see the scripture-proof of it, and observe it, as we are directed. If it be a human invention or tradition, only a piece of superstition, the sooner the discovery is made the better.—

WE finished the former discourse, in taking a concise survey of the numerous texts, which

—
 speak of the administration of baptism as an ordinance, in Christ's house, the Church of the living God ; or which allude to it, as an established Apostolic practice.—

6th. DURING our Lord's personal Ministry, which lasted as is generally supposed about three years and an half, his own chosen disciples, the twelve, administered water-baptism to all who embraced, or professed to embrace him, as the promised Messiah. It appears to have been the common practice of initiating them into his kingdom by *baptizing* them with water, as the appointed token or visible sign of their being his professed followers. We must necessarily conclude that our blessed Saviour ordered his disciples, during his public Ministry, to administer baptism by water to his professed followers, and gave them the *form* of words to be used. And that there was likewise a complete uniformity in their practice, we must necessarily conclude ; because we never, in any of the four Gospels of *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*, find that our Lord reproved them for *baptizing* converts to his Religion, as the *introduction*, or intimated to them, in the remotest manner, his disapprobation : or spoke any where against *baptism* as administered by his harbinger, John the baptist, as if it were a *piece of superstition*—or an empty form : but he received it himself, which is at least a presumptive argument, that *water-baptism* was to be an *ordinance* in his religion ; for John came to prepare the way of the Lord, in all respects, and to dispose people in their minds, to receive the Christian System ; but if there were to be no christian baptism, how could John's

baptizing unto repentance be from heaven or a preparation for the introduction of the Gospel-System? If Jesus Christ designed to have no such ordinance, to be a *standing* ordinance, in his Church, to the end of the world, we should have had, we rationally suppose, some *direct* or *implied* hint at least of his dislike of *baptizing* with water. For when he gave his eleven disciples, and virtually, in them, all his true Ministers, the commission in the text, *go teach all nations, baptizing them, in the name of the Father—and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost*, they could not understand him, but as *instituting* and *appointing* the ordinance of water-baptism. As they had been universally, during his public Ministry, in the practice of it, if he had intended to have the practice discontinued, he would have told them so:—he would have forbid them to continue it, and told them it was an *idle ceremony*—a *perfectly useless* and *insignificant rite*—no *better* than old *Jewish fables*—and *wholly unbecoming* the nature of his own spiritual religion. But there is not a word of this. On the other hand he, in the most solemn manner possible, commanded them *to go and BAPTIZE all that should embrace his religion, professedly, throughout the world*. And after being *endowed with power from on high*, on the day of Pentecost, or *baptized with the holy Ghost*, that is, invested with his miraculous gifts, they continued to dispense the ordinance of water-baptism, as they had done before. As they gathered and organized Churches over the world, and preached Christ and him crucified, they dispensed *water-baptism* to all their converts, not one excepted, that we hear

of, or know of; and so careful were they about this matter that they even baptized some of John's disciples over again. In the progress of their labours, they gathered an immense number of churches in Asia, in Europe, in Africa, in all parts of the then known world. And they were uniform in their practice. All the churches were formed doubtless upon the *same* model. They did not practise baptism in some instances, and omit it in others. They administered it to all, as the *standing introductory* ordinance. They did this, as long as it pleased the great head of the church to employ them in his work. They had with them, when they did thus practise, the *promised comforter*: That holy spirit who was to assist them—to inspire them—to secure them from all error in doctrine or discipline—to lead them into *all truth*: to be an INFALLIBLE guide to them. All these are facts. And all, who believe the holy scriptures, cannot help knowing them to be facts. I appeal to them as facts. I have proved them to be facts, in the large number of texts cited under the last argument. With an irresistible evidence, then, doth it appear, that water-baptism was the *stated* universal practice of the Apostles. The union of the Apostles, in the practice, will be particularly noticed and enlarged upon, under another head of proof.—Now, what can be said against baptism by water, as an *appointment* of Jesus Christ, and not a piece of superstition? Is any truth—is any duty—is any point of christianity more substantially proved, more clearly revealed?—So plain is this matter that it cannot, one would imagine, be contested. However to get rid of the argument and of the ordinance, it is said the Apostles, it is true, *did*

practise it; but did administer it in ignorance—as uninformed and erring men—in weakness, and condescension to the wicked humours of their hearers:—but all along told them it was unnecessary and unprofitable—no Gospel-ordinance—but weak and beggarly elements—rudiments of the world—an abrogated rite—an abolished institution—old things that must pass away.—Strange indeed! Alas, did the Apostles practise this ordinance in ignorance, and to gratify prejudice in their converts? They acted, then, very wickedly. For they have herein set an EXAMPLE to all the christian world, in every age, and land. For all the various communions have followed their practice, for more than Seventeen centuries, though differing about the modes and circumstances of it. If, then, we be in an error, we have been led into it by Christ and his Apostles, by following them in administering *baptism* as an ordinance, in his spiritual religion. For his kingdom is not of this world, it is a spiritual and heavenly kingdom. Are we not safer in following the Apostles, as inspired guides, in doctrine, and worship, and ordinances, than in listening to such as tell us THEY were weak and ignorant men?—But be pleased, to consider a moment, my hearers,——Who can believe that, under the *baptism* of the holy Ghost, his *miraculous inspiring* influence, the Apostles would have practised water-baptism universally, if it had not been the mind and will of Jesus Christ, that there should be such an ordinance, in his religion?

7thly. It may tend to corroborate the proof that there is such an ordinance to be observed in

the church of God, that it was the common received opinion, in the times of John the baptist, that the promised Messiah, the great Saviour of man, would practise *baptism by water* in his ministry and kingdom. The people objected against John's baptism, because he declared that he was not the Christ, John i. 25. *Why BAPTIZEST thou, if thou be not the Christ?* This question most obviously and clearly implies that it was expected that Christ, the promised Messiah, would have *baptism by water*, *statedly* practised, in his kingdom or dispensation. *Why BAPTIZEST thou, if thou be not the Christ?* As much as if they had said, you take too much upon you, in your baptizing: you assume one of the offices of the Messiah. We expect he will have *baptism*, in his kingdom, as an initiation, or introductory ordinance, representing our need of renovation.—The Jews might be mistaken in their ideas of the expected Messiah, in this, as in other respects.—What is now mentioned is only to show what the common expectation was. And that common belief must have had something to be grounded upon.—

8thly. ANOTHER consideration of no inconsiderable importance to prove, that baptism by water, was to be a *stated* ordinance, in the New-Testament-dispensation, is taken from those passages of scripture, which do not directly, but impliedly assert, or allude to water-baptism, as a *stated* ordinance or practice, in the Apostolic and primitive Church. Titus iii. 15. *Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy Ghost.*

Paul is here guilty of a needless repetition, or else he intends two different things, by the *washing of regeneration* and *renewing of the holy Ghost*. By the first, most Commentators and learned men, suppose he must intend baptism by water as a sign of the renewing of the holy Ghost. The original word translated *washing of regeneration* is the laver of regeneration—alluding to the laver or vessel to wash in, in the Jewish tabernacle and temple. We must be *baptized*, then, as well as *renewed*. The Apostle here speaks, indeed, most honourably of baptism, if he intend it, at all, as doubtless he doth.—Eph. v. 26. *That he might sanctify it, that is, the Church, having cleansed it by the washing of water, by the word*. Christian baptism is generally supposed to be alluded to, in this passage, as one thing implied in being *cleansed*, in being regular and proper members of Christ's Church. Romans, vi. 4. *We are buried with him by baptism*. How absurd would such an expression be, if there were no ordinance of baptism *statedly* administered!—It would be unintelligible to the Christians at Rome. What does the beloved Apostle mean? they would naturally say: We know of no such ordinance as baptism. He must have forgotten himself, or he would not speak of our being buried with Christ in *baptism*.—We have a similar allusion to the ordinance of *baptism* in Col. ii. 12. *Buried with him, that is Christ, in baptism*. If Christ would have no baptism, as a *stated* ordinance, how improper all such allusions to it. This scripture applies to all Christians, in all ages and parts of the world, who have the Gospel. But what instruction doth it contain in such allusions, if there be no ordinance of baptism?—More

texts of this kind might be easily added, but these are enough as a specimen. If not of themselves a sufficient proof of the point before us, still they confirm the other arguments already adduced.—

9thly. It may, with much force be added here, as a convincing and satisfactory proof of the Institution of *baptism by water*, as a *standing ordinance*, in the Gospel dispensation, that the Apostles were *unanimous* in the administration of it, as an *appointment* of their Lord and Master. They absolutely knew his mind and will. They were with him so long, that it is impossible that they should be ignorant of his will. When he told them to *baptize*, they perfectly knew what he meant. They ALL practised baptism as a divine appointment. They baptized all their converts, without one exception, that we find on sacred record. Their command was, *be baptized EVERY ONE of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of Sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Ghost.* These were about three thousand, being all pricked to the heart by Peter's Sermon, on the day of Pentecost. Now *when they heard this they were pricked in their hearts*, or convinced of Sin and savingly wrought upon, no doubt. *And they said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, for they were all together, the Eleven, see Chap. ii. 1. Men and brethren, what shall we do?—Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized EVERY ONE OF YOU.* This is a command from all the Apostles; for Peter spake in the name of the rest. They were all of one opinion on the subject; and this was but a *few days* after they received the commission to *baptize* all that should believe—*go teach all na-*

tions, baptizing them. They never differed about the necessity of baptism. But were perfectly united in their practice. No one of them ever made any objection to the need of the ordinance, because Christ's Religion was a spiritual Religion. Nay, they positively commanded their converts to receive the ordinance. Acts x. 48. *And he COMMANDED them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus,* using, beyond all reasonable doubt, the very form of words prescribed in the original institution. Here were both Jews and Gentiles, and one as well as the other, were COMMANDED to be baptized. Now is it possible for any candid person, exercising his reason and reflecting powers, and not determined to support, at all events, a pre-conceived opinion, to suppose all the Apostles, in all parts of the world, among Jews and Gentiles, in all the Churches gathered by them, would unitedly, without one scruple, or one objector or objection, go into the practice of baptizing with water, if not an institution of their Lord, designed to be perpetuated, in his Gospel-kingdom, to the end of the world?—The Gentile converts, who were thousands of miles from Jerusalem and Judea, and where there were no Jews, were baptized, as well as Jewish converts. There could be no reason drawn from condescension or indulgence to prejudices, in their case, whatever there might be, in the case of Jewish converts.—

THE arguments in support of the divine right of baptism, as a Gospel-ordinance, would admit of much more illustration and enlargement—but I pursue the point no further, trusting that the attentive and reflecting hearer hath received

full and entire satisfaction from the proofs already offered.

AFTER contemplating the scripture-proofs of the ordinance of baptism, as a standing ordinance in the religion of Jesus Christ, it may not be a mere waste of time, to consider, in a concise manner, what hath been objected against it. PLAINLY as it is INSTITUTED, it has nevertheless been denied.—This, together with the Lord's Supper, hath been classed with the old abrogated Jewish rites and ceremonies, and exploded with them as wholly unworthy the regards of christians, and disgraceful to the spiritual nature of Christ's religion. The texts of scripture, which inform us of the abolition of Jewish rites—meats and drinks—or carnal ordinances, have been applied to the Gospel-ordinances. The argument is this, the Apostles tell us no Jewish ordinances are binding on us, but are all abrogated, therefore there are no christian ordinances binding on us. This all must see, who can exercise any reason, is no argument at all. And no man who uses it, can believe it to be any argument. The passages of scripture which declare the abolition of the Jewish ordinances are Col. ii. 14, to the 23 verse—Rom. xiv. 1, to the 17 verse. And in several other places the same thing is affirmed. These places refer ONLY to the Jewish rites and ordinances, and the abolition of them. Any one may see this, who will attend to them. To apply them to the christian ordinance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, is not only unfair and unjust, but a horrible perversion of scripture. It cannot be done ignorantly; for any one who can read, and who is

capable of perverting such passages, must know better.——

AGAIN :—The abuses of the ordinance of baptism, and the disputes about it, are alledged as valid objections against there being any such ordinance to be observed in the Gospel-kingdom. We lament that it ever hath been abused or perverted : and that there have been so many controversies about its nature, and the subject and mode. But this is no kind of argument against its being a *divine ordinance*. For can a truth—a duty—or a doctrine of religion be named, which hath not been *denied*, or *perverted*, or *abused*?——

ANOTHER objection against the holy ordinances of the New-Testament, baptism and the Lord's Supper, is taken from our Lord's *washing his disciples feet*—*Paul's circumcising Timothy*—*St. James directing that the sick be anointed with oil*—and the *decrees of the first Apostolic council met at Jerusalem*.—These several instances of conduct are recorded John xiii. 4—to the 12, Acts xvi. 1—to the 4—xv. 29—and James v. 14. The objection from these things, against the two standing sacraments or ordinances of the Gospel, *baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*, is very easily obviated. Our Lord's washing the feet of his disciples is described as an extraordinary instance of humility, and is a representation of the cleansing efficacy of his blood soon to be shed by wicked hands—calculated to teach us to love one another—to be meek—ready to do any kind of office when needful, though mean—and that we should not assume any Lordship or dominion o-

ver one another's consciences. And at the close, he expressly tells them he had set them a pattern of meekness and condescension, and not ordained an institution to be observed in his church to the end of the world. There is a material and essential difference between *setting a pattern* of a virtue or giving a remarkable display of it, and solemnly *appointing a holy Ordinance*. We cannot argue from the one to the other.—We are to follow the Redeemer, in all his doctrines and ordinances, but not to perform the same extraordinary PERSONAL actions—any more than to imitate him in his exterior manner, air, and habit.—As to Paul's *circumcising Timothy*, there was a very plain reason for it. It was necessary for his reception, at that time, among the Jews. The ordinance of circumcision was not then DECLARED to be abolished. When the time had come, when there was to be an open declaration of its abolition, no one of the Apostles practised it, upon their converts. Moreover, Timothy was circumcised as *born of a Jew*, and not as a *christian convert*. As a convert to christianity he was *baptized*, as of Jewish lineage he was circumcised. And St. Paul's example to us, in this is, to exercise condescension, forbearance, and humility. As to the *anointing the sick* in the name of the Lord, James v. 14, it was an appointment for the *miraculous cure* of such, Mark vi. 13. But since those extraordinary gifts are ceased, as being no longer necessary for the confirmation of the Gospel, our faith in the common course of things has no warrant for using that ceremony; much less doth what is here said about it, give any countenance to the Papist's Sacrament of *extreme Unction* which they admin-

ifter not for the recovery of the sick, but for a pretended purgation from the sins of those that are in the very article of death, or past hope of recovery.

As to *the decrees of the* famous Apostolic council met at Jerusalem, they were adapted to the then existing case and circumstances of the Gentile converts, and not of perpetual obligation in Christ's kingdom, except one article of a moral nature, *abstinence from fornication*. The others are not described as binding on all Christians. There is nothing, in the result of that council, which can possibly signify that the practice of Christians, in all ages, should be conformed thereto. It was wholly adapted to the then state of the Gentile Converts.—-----Thus it most manifestly appears that these instances of actions above cited and commented upon, are not binding on Christians, in the common ages of the Church; and were never intended to be;—nor can any argument or objection be raised from them, of the least weight or plausibility, against the two PLAIN, EXPRESS, and POSITIVE Institutions of the Gospel, to be observed, in all ages, to the END of the world, *baptism* and the Lord's Supper.—

WE will now make some improvement of what hath been said.—And what are the great and special uses or purposes of this Ordinance? Some affirm that it is a vain and unprofitable ordinance. Let us enquire, is it so then indeed? Did Jesus Christ impose on his church a rite useless and absurd?—The profit of it, however, appears to be great every way. But were we convinced, that he had actually appointed it, we

ought to observe it, even if we could not discern any moral uses, or religious benefit resulting from it—trusting in his love, faithfulness, wisdom, and goodness.—It is of great use and importance as it teaches us, in a striking and affecting manner, our defilement and pollution by sin, one of the foundation-doctrines of the Christian Religion. It teaches us this more affectingly than words can do.—It is a clear and lively emblem of the need of the renewing of the holy Ghost. Baptismal water points out the need of a spiritual baptism—or that we must be cleansed from sin by grace divine, and a Saviour's atoning blood.—The very form of words prescribed by our Lord, and always used, teach us where all our hope, our love, our trust, our dependance for salvation must center, in the Father, and the son, and the holy Ghost—a triune God. Baptismal water, as a visible sign, represents our need of having all our sins, as to their guilt, washed away by the blood of Jesus—*Be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.*—Baptism, as a sensible sign, signifies our obligation to renounce sin, and to put on the temper and character of Christ—to put away the filth of the flesh, and to put on newness of life—to renounce the vanity and pomp of the world—and to become clean in heart and life. And when we are baptized, or have our children baptized, we bind ourselves to love, to live to, to obey, and serve the one true God as set forth in his own word.—Can the ordinance, then, be useless?—Does it answer no important ends, no moral and religious purposes?—It is also recognizing our engagements to be the Lord's we and our's. And teaches some of the greatest and

most important doctrines, truths, and duties of Religion.—Does it then, as the deniers of it affirm, keep us FROM GOD—FROM CHRIST—FROM THE SUBSTANCE—FROM THE POWER of religion?—No : it brings us, in its tendency, to them. How unhappy that any, under a christian name, should set themselves to vilify—reproach, and deny, it!—May the scales of ignorance and prejudice fall speedily from their eyes ; and that Jesus whose ordinances they reject, commiserate and forgive them ; and not suffer them to be the means of spreading irreligion !—

2dly. We may enquire for the improvement of this subject, who may, according to scripture, enjoy the ordinance of baptism ? The answer is, all who confess that Jesus is the Christ—who profess to believe in his religion—and have a desire and disposition to honour him in it,—and live a regular, pious and religious life. Such may enjoy it for themselves, and infant seed.—

3dly. As another observation for the improvement of the subject, we may ask how is it to be administered ? *Water* is to be applied to the subject by sprinkling the face, or by immersion, in the *name of the father, son, and holy Ghost*. The quantity of water is a mere circumstance. And immersion is as valid as sprinkling.—Mere circumstances are left to the wisdom, prudence, and convenience of the observer. Some prefer immersion as the most scriptural, and others, sprinkling. Both are valid. Both are right ? All that is essential is the application of water, *in one of these ways*, to the meet subject, as the form is prescribed. Some admit, others exclude infants, but this need be no bar to christian

communion. Had the various denominations of christians entertained these catholic and charitable sentiments, there would never have been any dispute about the mode, and much evil would have been prevented.—I hope and expect the day will come—and O that it might not be far distant, when these reconciling and compromising sentiments will have a general diffusion; when all real christians will be united, though practising in different forms, and bend their whole force and zeal against error—vice—and irreligion.

4thly. LET all Christians feel a due and unshaken attachment to public worship, the Sabbath—and all divine ordinances. All of them ought to be dear to Christ's disciples. We should esteem them. We should love them. We should diligently and constantly attend upon them. We are, at the same time, to take care that we do not place our hope in, or dependence on them, instead of the God of ordinances, the Saviour's all-cleansing blood, and the spirit's sanctifying operations. Means and ordinances are the helps provided by a wise, gracious, and holy God. In the appointment of them we see, in a most wonderful manner, his love and grace, goodness and patience, wisdom and condescension. Let our eye, then, be to the God of grace to bless and sanctify unto us, all means and ordinances. By the power of the holy Ghost we are; and we must be renewed. But we ought nevertheless to prize and esteem all divine institutions, as means of holiness and pious instruction. We should be grieved when any neglect them, revile them, or deny them. For they are the ways prescribed

by God, to uphold religion, in the world, amid the floods of error, ignorance, fanaticism, and infidelity, which threaten the existence of all serious godliness.

5thly. WE hence infer the duty of all people to prepare themselves without delay, to enjoy the ordinance of baptism. It is a precious ordinance. It is divinely appointed to teach us, the great truths of Religion, and to help forward our salvation. All parents should see that they lose no time in preparing to enjoy it for themselves, if unbaptized, and for their Children. And what, my dear friends, is required of you, is to seek and know God:—to desire to do your duty: to honor your Maker and Redeemer in the ways, which he has so clearly appointed.—Permit me with all tenderness and affection as a Minister of Jesus Christ to urge you to give no rest to yourselves, till you have rendered yourselves meet for the enjoyment of Gospel-ordinances.—How mournful is the idea that so many, in our Land, live in the total neglect of this holy sacrament of baptism.—Unbaptized Children! Unbaptized Parents! Unbaptized Youth!—How affecting the thought to all the lovers of Gospel-ordinances.—What impiety prevails!—what neglect of religion in general—of prayer in families in particular, and of public worship.—Will not a holy and righteous God visit for these things?—Many boast of this, as the age of reason—of our land, as the land of reason—and talk of the complete downfall of superstition, and bless themselves, at the thought of the diffusion of sceptical principles, and are as zealous to propagate irreligion, error, and infidelity, as if the salvation of our country, their

own salvation, and the salvation of others depended on the abolition of christianity, against which the most virulent attacks are made, under the name of superstition, or a sectarian religion.—

BUT some seriously inclined people are objecting, perhaps, and saying we wish to enjoy *divine ordinances*, but you make the way *too strict*, more so, than God has made it, in his holy word.— Consider a moment, before you draw up a conclusion so unfounded, and so much to your disadvantage. All that is required of you, is to give yourselves up to God and the duties of Religion.—Can less be required? Can any lower terms be rationally desired? We must never profane an ordinance, or prostitute and abuse it to worldly designs and ends.—Often, alas! have this, and the ordinance of the Lord's supper been perverted and profaned; and so have the holy Oracles of God, which are the only Oracles of reason, and of eternal truth, and of all religion. Let us see that we are not among the number of those, who profane and abuse, or neglect and forsake it.—Come, then, and take the vows of the Lord upon you, and give yourselves up to the duties of our holy Religion, and enjoy all its ordinances and special privileges.—Defer not—procrastinate no longer the concerns of your souls and of Salvation.—Behold now is the accepted time! Behold now is the day of Salvation! To day, if ye will hear his voice. There may be no to-morrow for you—no more time—no more seasons of grace. A small space of time will end all our days, and open to us an everlasting state.—Hear, then, the call of God, of reason, of virtue, and of Religion. Delay:—

O! delay no longer. *Come and take Christ's yoke upon you, and learn of him, for he is meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

6thly. FROM what hath been said, let all who have enjoyed the ordinance of baptism, feel the sacred bonds thereof, and seek divine grace to enable them to live up to their baptismal vows. Let parents who have come forward and had baptism for their Children, and have devoted them, therein, to God, to be his, and for him, bring them up in the ways of Religion—teach them to pray—and pray with, and for them in their houses:—instruct and govern them for God—set a pious example before them—and teach them their baptismal dedication—the meaning and import of it, as above explained, and as a peculiar privilege binding them to be the Lord's.—And let such parents, farther examine their own hearts and ways, and see if they gave up their Children, in the baptismal dedication, in outward appearance only, or in sincerity and in truth, hoping and trusting in God's mercy and truth for them.—And let parents who never prepared themselves to bring their Children to God, in baptism, when they look on their dear infant flock, feel a deep sense of their sin, in the neglect of their duty to them: and *so pity, and so love* them, as to come forward, and give them up to God in baptism.—And Let unbaptized youth realize their duty, and never give themselves rest, till they have dedicated themselves to God, in his covenant and baptismal institution, to be his in life, his in death, and his forever.—And let the whole Congregation that now hear me, old and young, esteem,

rightly improve, and highly value all the institutions of the Christian Religion; endeavour, by all the light and advantages, which you enjoy, truly to understand them:—to place them on their proper foundation; and to look to the God of all grace, for his powerful, purifying, and all-cleansing influence, and to Jesus Christ that the guilt of sin may be washed away:—and make it your grand concern to *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.*

DISCOURSE XI.

IT is the will of the Author of Christianity that, in the New-Testament dispensation, there should be particular Gospel-Churches.

I. THESSALONIANS i. 1.

PAUL and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the Church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ: grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

THESSALONICA was the Metropolis of that part of antient Greece, now Turkey in Europe, called Macedonia. It was built by Philip of Macedon, Father to Alexander the great, so famous in history, and called Thessalonica, in honor of his victory over the Thessalians. In this renowned City, Paul preached a considerable time, and was greatly successful in spreading among its inhabitants, the truths and glory of the Gospel. From the Jews and profelytes to their faith, and the idolatrous heathen or Gentiles, he collected a Christian Church. The people of this large city were principally heathen, who worshipped them which are by nature no Gods.

THIS Epistle to these Christians gathered into a Church-state by the labours of St. Paul, assisted in the arduous and important work by Silas and Timothy, was the first Letter, we are told in ecclesiastical history, which he ever wrote as an inspired penman to any of the Churches. And he begins it, in a very modest manner, with the words of our text, which may be thus paraphrased——“ Paul, together with Silas and Timothy, his assistants in the work of the Lord at Thessalonica, send greeting to the Church of Christ, which has lately been planted by means of our Ministry, and ordinarily assembles for religious worship and discipline at that renowned Metropolis of Macedonia, and consists of believers in God the Father, in distinction from the idolatrous Gentiles, and of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only true Messiah, in distinction from the unbelieving Jews, who denied him: and so we regard you as persons that are in union, and have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.—May all the riches of divine love and favour which is the fountain of every blessing; and as the fruit of this, may all manner of prosperity inclusive of every desirable sort of peace with God and others, and in your souls, be multiplied to all and every one of you, according to the scheme of salvation from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Mediator and peace-maker, who has purchased all blessings for us by his blood; and freely communicates them to us by his spirit in an inseparable concurrence with the Father.” The salutation of the inspired writers, in their Letters to the various Churches, are exceedingly tender and affectionate. They wish them ev-

ery blessing : that the grace of God may be with them : that the mercy of God may abound towards them : that the peace of God may dwell with them. The Apostles in all their Epistles appear most friendly and cordial ; anxious to guard the Churches from error—to warn them of heresy, unsound doctrine, and false Teachers. They lay before the Converts to Christianity, the subtlety, the arts, the divisive efforts of impostors. And the need of such things is experienced in every age of the Church. Deceivers and scoffers have, more or less, every where, abounded since the days of the Apostles. And by them, the glorious cause of the Gospel and of the Redeemer has been greatly injured.—This Christian affection, displayed in the salutations of the Apostles to the Churches, does great honor to them as men, and as Christians : it shews, at the same time, the aimable and pleasing temper of the Christian Religion. It is a religion of benevolence and kindness. It is a religion of goodness and philanthropy. One of the most surprizing objections against it, ever made, is that it is defective in point of friendship. This is the last thing that ever I should suspect would be spoken against it. Such as thus object, it is to be feared, are totally unacquainted with its nature.—For every one, who possesses the temper of the Gospel, not only loves God with all his heart, but his neighbour as himself—is willing to do, as he would be done by—and wishes the good of all.—His wish for others, is like that of Paul to the Thessalonian Church, *grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

AFTER thus introducing the words of the text, what is proposed, is to state the scripture-evidence in favour of the institution of a Gospel-Church.—What is before us, is to prove that it is the WILL of the author of Christianity that, in the New Testament dispensation, there should be particular Gospel Churches.

IN order to do this subject justice, it will be necessary briefly to explain and illustrate the nature of a Gospel Church—the ends of its institution—the terms of admission into it—and the duties particularly incumbent on its members.—To enter largely upon these several points would require, even each one, a volume. Christians have thought very differently concerning them. And learned divines have disputed much about them.—I shall confine myself to what will be conceded by all parties to be important and necessary. The great and essential things are those, which should principally be regarded and attended to by all. When we descend into what is very minute and critical, the ingenious and the learned will take different paths. And very often, things, in their nature, minute or abstruse, occasion angry controversy; and call forth as much warmth as the essential truths or duties of Christianity. It is well known, and generally observed, that the Church of God is either invisible or visible. The former is composed of all who are, have been, or shall be the people of God in truth and reality, in whatever age they may live, or in whatever Country they may dwell, or to whatever Communion they may belong. The latter, or the visible Church of God is composed of all such as openly pro-

fess the Christian Religion, attend its divine ordinances—have received baptism—and have devoted themselves, in some open manner, to the Redeemer. Persons may lose their membership in the visible Church, by denying revealed Religion, or by embracing errors fundamentally wrong, or by open and gross immoralities. The general visible Church is made up of all the particular Churches of the various denominations which hold to the foundation. Particular Churches are societies of professing Christians, who have formed themselves into one body, in different ages, places and Countries, for mutual edification, in the joint public worship of God, and the celebration of Gospel ordinances. Thus the professing Christians in Corinth—those in Thessalonica, those in Ephesus, those at Coloss are called a Church. These however made but one Church in reality. For they received the same Gospel, maintained the same form of worship, and professed subjection to the same common Lord. The Church universal comprehends all the particular and local Churches. That there should be distinct, separate, or local Churches, is evident from this consideration, the *convenience* of attending public worship, of exercising discipline, and enjoying special ordinances. Different forms of doing this have been adopted, in different ages and Countries. Some are attached to one form, and some to another, according to education, or habits of thinking. And the administrations of different forms will be allowed to be good, or valid by all who are not under the influence of bigotry. Catholic and candid Christians of various denominations will embrace each other, in the arms of Christian or

fraternal affection and Charity; while the narrow-minded and bigoted of every communion withhold Charity from all, who are out of the pale of their Church. To confine salvation to one form only and exclusively is the mark of a bigoted mind. The Scripture hath no where laid down the *precise form* of Church-order and government. It hath left, the particular and precise form to be practised upon, to the convenience, wisdom, and prudence of Christians; or to their peculiar circumstances. One particular form may have its advantages and disadvantages. That is the most eligible which hath the fewest inconveniences, and most excellencies. Such only are essentially wrong as plainly contradict the word of God, and introduce tyranny and domination into the Church of God. Lording it over God's heritage is always a crime of a malignant nature. Ecclesiastical tyranny is as much to be dreaded as civil. There must, with regard to local and particular Churches, be distinct places of worship, and jurisdictions. They may, however, be considered as one in doctrine, in discipline, in love; calling on the name of the same Jesus, their common Saviour and Lord, receiving for substance the same articles of faith, and attending on the same ordinances. A Church, in the original meaning of the word, is an assembling together of a number of persons, for particular purposes; especially religious ones, that they may jointly engage in divine worship, mutually edify one another, and attend all divine ordinances, agreeably to the word of God, taking that for the only rule of their faith and practice. And a number covenanting together to walk by this rule, to conform to all

the revealed will of God, and to watch over one another, and to exercise the discipline of the Gospel, is the sense, in which the word Church is used, in scripture, when it is taken for a particular Church. The word indeed is used in the several senses, which have now been mentioned.

THE design of the supreme being in the institution of a Gospel Church is, in general, the mutual edification of the members, the interest and honour of religion, the divine glory, and man's Salvation. A gracious God has wise intentions in all he does, whether in the world of nature, or administrations of providence, or redemption of the Gospel. He doth nothing in vain. In the things of Religion the divine wisdom and goodness appear in a most pleasing and attractive light. And his design, in the institution of a Gospel-Church, was that mankind might be under the best advantages, to honour his great name, and secure their own Salvation; that the interests of piety and Virtue might be best consulted and promoted. A regular or duly organized Church is composed of the church-officers and private brethren. The officers in Christ's kingdom are of two kinds or ranks, Pastors and Deacons. And the Pastors are called indifferently *Elders, Teachers, Ministers, Bishops,* and *Overseers* of the Church. As Christ's kingdom is not of this world, so no considerations of a worldly nature are the Scripture-motives for our professing ourselves to be members of it. The design which we ought to have in view in belonging to it, should be altogether spiritual; that we may, in the enjoyment of proper means, be built up in knowledge and holiness; that we may be made meet for the inheritance of the

faints in light ; may publicly worship the Deity, attend divine Ordinances, celebrate together the divine praises, on the holy Sabbath, and watch over one another ; that we may all at last be convened together in heaven, to join in all the purity, sublimity, and perfection of celestial worship : and be prepared in the temper of our minds to celebrate forever, the high praises of our Creator and Redeemer, in the Church triumphant.

AMONG the members of a Gospel-Church there is always supposed a solemn covenant or agreement to walk together in the laws, doctrines, truths and ordinances of Christ, to exercise the discipline of the head of the Church in meekness and love, and to aid each other in the way to eternal blessedness.

WHAT is required of us in order to be received, as regular members, into a Gospel-Church, is that we have some general knowledge of the great and essential doctrines of the Gospel ; that we declare our belief of them ; our subjection to Christ as our Lord ; and that our conduct and conversation have been agreeable to the Gospel, or if otherwise, that we profess sorrow and reformation. Much hath been said and written about the qualifications necessary to an orderly and acceptable attendance on the special ordinances of the Gospel. Good men have differed widely from each other, in their opinions, concerning a point which, all will allow, is very important. But in too many instances, this difference has occasioned bitterness, and hard judging. If we lay aside prejudice, and attachment to *names* and *parties* ; and impartially look for direction and guidance from the holy scriptures,

it might be expected that there would be a greater union. The scripture is plain. And the very reason and nature of the thing teach us what is required, in order to participate of Gospel-Ordinances to divine acceptance, and our own edification and comfort. The nature of the ordinances, and of a Gospel Church may lead us to form some just opinion of what is necessary as a term of admission into the latter, and enjoyment of the former. All Christians who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, if they impartially consult the advancement of his cause, would wish to have any differences which may subsist among them, lessened, and their union strengthened. Their endeavour should be to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The more Christians differ, the more occasion is given to the enemies of the cross of Christ to triumph. The very attempt to promote peace and union merits the approbation of all Zions friends. There is but one Salvation—and one way to obtain it. *There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called, says the Apostle to the Ephesian Converts, in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism—one God and father of all who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* Must it not be evident, then, that all who would enjoy the peculiar ordinances and privileges of this *one Lord* and his religion, should have some general knowledge of the doctrines, truths, and duties of this religion? If grossly ignorant of these, how can they honor the Redeemer, or rightly or profitably attend his holy institutions? And is it not also clear, that they must believe in this religion; and openly profess their belief, in some way, which shall be satisfactory; and feel a regard and love to it? Must they not be

impressed with such a sense of its importance as to be resolved, to live agreeably to its precepts, that they may enjoy its consolations, and be entitled to its rewards? And if their former lives have been openly immoral and profane, or scandalous, is it not indispensibly necessary, that they profess repentance? All who are doctrinally taught, morally clean, and piously disposed, may acceptably attend on the special ordinances of the Christian Religion. If we examine the conduct of the Apostles, our infallible guides, in discipline as well as doctrines, we shall see that they required of all, whom they admitted into the Churches gathered and formed by them, a confession that Jesus was the Christ, and a solemn purpose to conform themselves to the precepts of his Gospel, and to depend on him for salvation.—

AFTER just hinting at the terms of admission into the Gospel-Church, the duty of the members may with propriety be stated in a few words. This is of large extent. In general, it is to walk in all good conscience before God. And in particular, they should set a pious example to others, by a steady and unshaken attendance on public worship—on means and ordinances. They should show to the world, their high esteem of them, as appointed by infinite wisdom and goodness. And if in any place or among any people, where their lot may be cast, at any time, divine ordinances should be vilified or disowned, they should more especially show their esteem of, and attachment to them. To study the peace, the prosperity, and welfare of the Church; to watch over one another in meekness

and love; to do all in their power to prevent errors; to heal divisions, if any arise; to avoid giving just grounds of offence to any; to keep from all party views and aims; and to honor God, in all his ways, is incumbent on all members of Churches. The solemn covenant and promises, which they take upon them, either expressly or virtually, bind them to peculiar duties. The vows of the Lord are upon them. And covenant-breakers—and promise-breakers are among the most odious characters. For we never know when or where to trust such. The character of a citizen of Zion is, that *he that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart---and he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.* The man who deliberately breaks his religious vows and covenant engagements, can have no sense of God or divine things. His heart must be obdurate, and his conscience asleep.—All, who have named the name of Christ, should be careful to depart from iniquity, and see that their conversation is such as becometh the Gospel. Such, in brief, is the duty of all the members of a Gospel-Church.

THE way is now prepared to exhibit the scripture-evidence that it is the will of the author of Christianity, that in the New Testament-dispensation, there should be particular Gospel-Churches. The proof of this from the word of God, is plain and full. It is apprehended that, if we admit the divine authority of the scriptures, we shall be obliged to admit the reality of Gospel-Churches.—For—in the first place, Jesus Christ, in so many words, declares that he has a Church, which is sometimes called his kingdom—his

flock—his followers—his people,—and those whom the Father gave him, or his sheep. When Peter made that noble confession in answer to his Saviour's question, *Thou art Christ, the son of the living God.* The Saviour replies; *And I say unto thee thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Allusion is here made to the meaning of the word *Peter*,—his person—or successors in office, was not the rock, upon which the Church was to be built; but the confession that he made, that Jesus was the Christ, was the rock, upon which the Church was to be built. And to the joy of all true friends to the Gospel, no power of evil men, or evil angels, however, much they may be permitted to vex, persecute, and distress, shall be able to overthrow the Church. It will live amidst all winds that may blow. It will be supported in the midst of all storms, or dangers. No weapon formed against it shall eventually prosper. It will continue, through all time, and finally prevail. *Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel.* The words of Balaam spoken of Israel, may be pertinently applied to the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!* Saul is said to make havock of the Church. *As for Saul he made havock of the Church, entering into every house, and hauling men and women, committed them to prison.* These men and women, who fell as victims to his persecuting rage, were members of the Church. But how could he make havock of the Church, if there were no such thing as Gospel-Churches? Herod is said to stretch out his hand

to vex the Church. *Now about that time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church.* The unhappy individuals, whom he sorely persecuted, were members of the Gospel-Churches, organized by the inspired Apostles,—The Church at Jerusalem received some that were sent to them, upon special business, with friendly affection. *And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the Church.* This must be the Church that was planted in that City, of which St. James was the stated Bishop, and whom Herod cruelly put to death. And the Church is said to be purchased by the blood of Christ. *Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.* Christ is represented also as head over all things to the Church; and it is by an easy metaphor called his body. *And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all things.* He is said to love the Church—to give himself for it—to sanctify and cleanse it. *Even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.* Again, observes the Apostle Paul, *This is a great Mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and his Church.* All particular Gospel-Churches make one universal Church. Where the same essential doctrines are maintained—the same common Saviour owned—the same ordinances celebrated

—though there may be many circumstantial differences, as to names, opinions, and forms, it is the same Church.—If there be not a Gospel-Church, in which the word and ordinances are to be dispensed, prayers offered, and the Sabbath observed, why is there this frequent mention of the Church? a multitude of other passages, which speak of the Church or particular Churches, might be easily cited, but those already cited are sufficient, as a sample. Did our Lord and his Apostles know what they said; or did they mean to mislead and impose upon us? If they knew what they said, and meant faithfully to teach us, then the institution of a Gospel-Church cannot be denied.

In the next place, when the Apostles went forth and preached the Gospel to all nations, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following, they gathered and formed churches, ordained pastors, and chose deacons. In Judea, in Galilee, and in Samaria were churches formed, teachers set over them, and other necessary regulations made, before Paul's conversion, while he, by the fury of persecution, endeavoured to destroy the christian cause. For we are informed of the rest and peace which the churches, in those countries, enjoyed after his conversion to christianity. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria and were edified. In those places, churches were collected, in which public worship and divine ordinances were celebrated. In Galatia, Ephesus, Smyrna, Thiatira, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Thessalonica, Philippi, Rome, and Jerusalem: and to name no more particular

places, in Asia, Africa, and Europe, that is, in a great part of the then known world, were churches gathered and christian Ministers set over them, by the Apostles. This we are as certain of, as we can be of any thing recorded in holy Writ. We find it, in the history of the acts of the Apostles, and in their Epistles. We cannot doubt or hesitate about this matter, whether it be fact or not. The Apostles wrote, sent, and dedicated their Epistles to particular churches. For instance, inspired letters are directed to the church at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Coloss. But why is this done, if there were no churches formed in any of these places? Did the Apostles dedicate long Epistles to what did not exist? Did Paul write to the church, at Thessalonica, as my text says he did, when at the same time, there was no church there?—If we ask, what was the business of these churches; the answer is, to attend upon the preached word, and dispensed ordinances. By public worship they were to honour God, to promote religion, to preserve pure and entire all divine appointments, and to build up one another in faith, love and good works.—

In the third place, the institution of divine ordinances, the christian Sabbath, public worship, and the christian Ministry, is an argument in favour of the institution of Gospel-churches, which cannot fail deeply to impress conviction upon the mind. We have full and very plain proof of the institution of divine ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, of public worship, of the christian Sabbath, and of the office and

work of a Gospel-Minister. The conclusion is there are particular Gospel-churches. There is no possible way to get rid of this conclusion, but to deny the premises. Both are true, or both are false. If we reject the one, the other cannot be maintained. In order to be self-consistent and uniform, if we deny the institution of a Gospel-Church, we are under a necessity of denying all divine ordinances, and rejecting the idea of a Gospel-Ministry. One error, like one falsehood, draws after it another: it leads to a second—to a third, to support itself. He who denies one part of the Gospel, is at length compelled to retract his error, or to give up another part. If we deny the institution of the Christian Sabbath, we are obliged to deny, in order to keep ourselves in countenance, by the appearance of consistency, *stated* public worship and divine ordinances. And if we deny these, we must reject all idea of particular Gospel-Churches. For the very notion of a Gospel-Church is a number of professed believers in Christ, formed into an union and fellowship, by a solemn covenant, to enjoy religious worship, and Gospel-ordinances.

In the fourth place, it seems that a denial of the institution of particular Gospel churches, in which the discipline of the Gospel is to be exercised, as well as its worship and ordinances observed, involves in it the denial of the whole Gospel. The Apostles certainly tell us of their planting churches—of overseers placed over those churches, to labour among them in word and doctrine—to reprove, to exhort—and to feed them. They tell us of the discipline to be ex-

exercised in Christ's house; how church-officers are to conduct, in the discharge of their offices, how the church is to be ruled and governed—how ordinances are to be dispensed—how deacons are to serve the table of the Lord—how private brethren are to demean themselves. They largely describe the character and duty of Ministers—and the duty of the members of a church in a church-capacity. But how are we to understand all this? If there be no Gospel-churches in the New-Testament-dispensation, what are we to believe—what are we to admit—and how shall we acquit the Apostles of dishonesty and ignorance? The whole Gospel, therefore, must stand or fall with the idea of particular Gospel-churches, instituted by the labours of the Apostles, under the authority and inspiring influence of the holy Ghost. If the formation of them be a human device, man's work and contrivance, then we can rely on nothing, which the Apostles either taught or did.

IN the review of this subject, we see the necessity of keeping most exactly to the holy scriptures, in the discipline and order of our churches, in the forms of external administrations, as well as in doctrines and duties, ordinances and practice. Our articles of faith, and our rules of life are to be taken wholly from them. The direction to Moses, that distinguished servant of the Lord, in respect to the building of the Tabernacle, *See that thou do it according to the pattern shewed thee in the Mount*, should lie, with all its weight and importance, upon the minds of all the builders in Christ's spiritual kingdom. We should anxiously aim at the original primitive simplicity

of the Gospel, in our mode of worship, in our discipline, in our terms of admission into the church, and in our doctrines. A medium between fanatics and formalists seems to be nearest the faith and order of Gospel-Churches. Mankind are so prone to extremes, in things of Religion; as well as other things, that a medium is usually the nearest to what is right. Fanatics are for refining and reforming away all order, and truth. Formalists place all Religion in things exteriour. This hath ever been the case, from the days of Christ, down to the present age, as appears from the history of the Church. Both fanatics and mere formalists are wrong. But which are most culpably criminal and erroneous is hard to determine. *For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. And unless our righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*—Upon the whole, let us all be persuaded that true Religion is the way of duty: and that the way of duty, is the way of happiness.

DISCOURSE XII.

The right way to understand the inspired writings.

L U K E xxiv. 45.

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.

THE design of the scriptures is to make us wise unto salvation. They contain all that is requisite as a rule of life or standard of faith. They instruct us what to believe concerning our Maker, our Redeemer, and a future State. They place before us all that is necessary to be believed, and to be done, in order to be accepted of God, and entitled to life eternal. Those, therefore, who really desire salvation, will feel it to be a duty of very great importance to study, as accurately as they are able, and to read diligently, the inspired writings. A frequent, daily, and serious reading them is incumbent upon us all. *He that is of God, heareth God's words, ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God,* said our Lord to the unbelieving Jews. And he directs us thus, *search the scriptures, for*

in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me. If people refuse to search them, or to read them with care, frequency, and a serious endeavour to understand them, how is it to be expected, that they can know the character of the Saviour, or their duty.—The inhabitants of Berea are commended for their care in searching the scriptures. *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so.*—It is a noble duty—a rational, and commendable duty to study, and daily peruse them, that we may know the truth, and be excited to practise it.—And the best way to gain entire and full satisfaction, with respect to the divinity of them, or whether they be, what they pretend to be, DIVINELY INSPIRED, is carefully and critically to read them. As the most satisfactory way to be convinced whether there be a God, is to open our eyes on his works! so the most satisfactory method to know whether the holy scriptures be from God is to read them, with seriousness and diligence, and with a candid and unprejudiced mind. He who will read them, in this manner, and practice according to their precepts; and sees their tendency and aim, which most apparently is to glorify God and save man, cannot long retain any scruples about their celestial origin.—*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

THE pains we are to take to read and understand the scriptures may be seen, in a beautiful manner, in the following words: *And these words*

which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy Children, and shall talk of them, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. The advantages of heedfully and seriously reading and studying the word of God are many and great. It will make us knowing and wise, in things heavenly and divine. It will tend to render us pious and devout. It will lead us to God and duty. It will be a safeguard against error and infidelity, against superstition and enthusiasm.—

CONSIDERATIONS of this nature render the subject, proposed now to be discussed, peculiarly important and interesting. This subject is the RIGHT WAY to understand the inspired writings.—*Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.* The occasion of these words is this;—Jesus had risen from the dead, and took the most prudent and eligible method to convince his disciples and friends of the fact, upon which rests the truth of his religion. Two of them, Cleopas and another, were going to a village, called Emmaus, about three-score furlongs distant from Jerusalem. On their way, they conversed about the STRANGE THINGS, which had happened—the crucifixion of the expected Messiah, and his wonderful resurrection on the third day.—Jesus joined himself to them, as a stranger, in the midst of their interesting conversation. He enquired what the subject was,

upon which they were conversing; and upon which they seemed so anxious and deeply engaged. They informed him. And Cleopas expressed much surprise, at his enquiry. *Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?*—Upon hearing the subject of their conversation—and which indeed was the general topic at that time, in all the city, he took the lead in it.—And the disciples were all attention—they were all ear—and their hearts burned within them, with a heavenly flame, while the appearing stranger, though in reality their risen Lord, discoursed on the pleasing theme, and expounded to them the scriptures, which related to himself. They were delighted. They were improved. Light broke in upon their understandings, and devout affections were inkindled. *Then said he unto them O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things; and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*—He, then, discovered himself unto them. They could hardly believe, what their eyes had seen and ears heard, for joy. He again showed himself to his chosen witnesses, and expounded to them also, the word of God, as in the verse next above the text, *And he said unto them, these are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me.*—Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures. *Saying thus it is written, and thus it beho-*

ved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day. And that repentance and remission of Sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

How did he open their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures? It was by a just and true expounding them as well as deeply impressing their hearts. He laid their real and true meaning before their minds. He showed them their connexion, and reference to himself. And they understood him, and plainly saw the meaning, design, and intention of the Sacred writings. He gave them no NEW faculties and powers. He directed them how to use and employ their reason rightly to apprehend, and duly to apply scripture. We are, consequently, to exercise our rational powers in seeking the meaning and design of divine revelation.—Christ opens our understanding to understand the oracles of God, by using with us the proper means of information and instruction, and by saving influences on the soul. We are rational beings. And he treats us as such, not as machines, or beings that had no reason or conscience. He opens the understanding, by enabling us, in the exercise of reason, and our reflecting powers and capacities, to study into, and seek the meaning of holy Writ—to search into the meaning of the words used, and the order and connexion of them; and to divest ourselves of all corrupt biases and prepossessions. By reason of sin, or through the depravity of the heart, the mind is blinded to the spiritual beauty and glory of divine objects.—The purpose of

the present discourse, is to point out the **RIGHT WAY** to gain a true and just understanding of the holy scriptures.

AND in general, it must be allowed, that they are capable of being rightly understood. If the Supreme Being, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, be pleased to grant us a revelation of his will at all, he would give us such an one, as, with honest and upright intentions, could be easily understood, in its great and essential principles and duties, ordinances and doctrines. For to give us one that was involved in mystery, and could not be comprehended after a diligent, painful and careful examination, could answer no valuable purpose; nay, it would be altogether improper. It would, in truth, be to insult our misery. The language of it, would be this. “Here is poor fallen man, blinded with prejudice—carried away with evil passions—plunged in the ruinous effects of the Apostacy—unable by the mere light of unassisted reason to find the path of duty and happiness. He is in perishing need, consequently, of a safer guide, an infallible directory, in the way to glory. Behold I will compassionate him in his darkness: I will provide a Saviour for the helpless: a sanctifier for the unholy: I will grant him a revelation of my will.—But such an one as cannot be understood by him, even when he hath used most sedulously all possible pains and care, and means to understand it. Such an one as is insufficient to answer the intended purposes.” To urge, then, that the **REVELATION**, which we enjoy, of the divine will and our duty, cannot be truly and really understood,

in all its essential principles, when no exertions or honest endeavours and faithful care, on our part, have been wanting, is to reproach the wisdom and goodness, grace, and justice of God: nay, it is to blaspheme his name: to represent him as trifling with his creatures; and mocking them in their misery. Far be such folly and impiety from us! We do therefore plead, and strenuously insist, that all things necessary to salvation, are laid before us, with sufficient clearness, both in regard to doctrines and practice, both what we are to believe, and what we are to do. The design of all the inspired writings is to save fallen man—to teach him that he may be pardoned and accepted of his sovereign Lord and Maker—to open the method, in which pardon here, and happiness hereafter have been procured—and the terms upon which they will be granted. As these things are of infinite importance to all, high or low, learned or unlearned, so they are revealed with as much plainness as possible. What the Psalmist says of the divine law, may with equal truth be applied to the Gospel. *The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes.*

ST. PAUL takes it for granted, that the principal and fundamental points of christianity, which he calls the *first principles* of the oracles of God, are easy for all to comprehend and to learn. *And when for the time ye ought to be teachers; ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.* There are certain doctrines and duties of the Gospel,

which are essential to the very existence of all religion, and which may, with the utmost propriety, be called the *first principles* of the oracles of God; upon which all the rest are built, and to which they constantly refer. These are plainly expressed, often illustrated, and warmly inculcated. None can mistake them, who honestly and faithfully attend to the scriptures. All that is wanting is care to read them, and an honest heart, free from wrong biases, to receive the truth, as they exhibit it. Among these *first principles* of the oracles of God, may be, enumerated, the lost state of man by nature: the absolute need of regeneration: the nature of it as consisting in the implantation of a holy temper of heart or true love to God:—that what Jesus Christ did and suffered for fallen man is the sole meritorious ground of our pardon, and acceptance with a holy and sin-hating God:—the incarnation of the divine Saviour, and his sufferings to expiate human guilt:—the universal resurrection: a righteous judgment:—an eternal retribution. To these we may add, the great and essential duties and virtues of piety and morality or of the gospel—the need of repentance towards God and in what it consists: faith towards Jesus Christ: constancy in the exercises of devotion:—strict justice—benevolence, peace, and condescension—forgiveness of injuries—love to enemies—humility, patience, temperance, and self-denial. Can any one, who has ever read the sacred pages with any care, affirm that these are not set before us, as strongly as language can express them? Are they not often repeated? Are they not pressed upon the conscience, in a variety of ways, and elucidated by beautiful meta-

phors and figures ? And they are pleasingly illustrated, I mean the duties of piety and Virtue, in the life and character of the divine author of Christianity. He, indeed, hath set us an indelictive example of goodness—*left us an example that we should follow his steps.*

WHILE it is asserted that the leading and fundamental doctrines of the Gospel are most clearly and repeatedly laid before us, it cannot be denied that some things in it, are hard to be understood. These are revealed as clearly as the nature of the subject would admit. Some things must be in their own nature mysterious and incomprehensible. Such things there are in the volume of nature, and we have no reason to suppose, it would be otherwise in the volume of revelation. They are so sublime as to transcend our scanty powers of mind. They are revealed, however, as far as they are capable of being revealed, or as far as we are capable of receiving them—or as far as may be needful, either for the glory of God, or our own salvation. Prophecies, for example, in the very nature of things, will be obscure. The event only can expound them. We may easily see what the grand design is : but the precise circumstances of the predicted event will remain a secret to us, till the event lay them before us.—We cannot pretend to comprehend the great points of Christianity relative to the Trinity, or a threefold subsistence in the divine essence—the human nature united to the divine to constitute the one mediator between God and man—the resurrection of the body—and the change which will pass upon those who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ

to judge the world. These, we readily admit, are mysterious and incomprehensible doctrines. But their being so, is no proof that they are unreasonable and absurd. To say that whatever is incomprehensible in Religion is unreasonable, is a mark either of inattention or ignorance. God's nature is incomprehensible. His works of creation are full of wonders. And a *revelation* from him to the children of men would be justly suspected, if it contained nothing incomprehensible, and above reason.

You will be pleased to observe also that, besides some doctrines which are beyond our reason, inexplicable difficulties may attend some particular passages of scripture. These difficulties originate not from any defect or impropriety of manner, in which they are expressed; but from our being unacquainted with the customs or usages, to which an allusion is made. These passages are not numerous. And our salvation depends not on our rightly understanding them. No essential duty or doctrine of the Gospel depends on a DOUBTFUL text. What is necessary to instruct us, in things divine, and to guide us safely to God and happiness, through the dangers, snares, and temptations of human life, is clearly made known unto us, and repeatedly urged by all suitable arguments, and the most serious and weighty considerations.

THE scriptures, therefore, are as a light to our feet, and lamp to our paths: a light shining in a dark place, with a steady brightness—able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ—And——

istly. *ONE way* rightly to understand them is to interpret them by themselves. They are their own best interpreter. It is one of the most rational principles can be adopted relative to understanding the inspired writings to make them expound themselves. They are to declare their own meaning. No explanations of men, decisions of councils, or tenets collected into creeds are to be admitted as perfect guides, in things pertaining to our salvation. Men may be wise and learned: Councils may be judicious and pious in their intentions, but after all are liable to mistakes. This is not said to detract from the wisdom, piety and learning of men—or of venerable councils. A wise and candid Christian will honor their opinions—carefully weigh them, and be diffident of himself: will be modest and pay all due deference to the opinions of others, especially men of study, erudition, and piety. But still we must all think for ourselves, and must adhere undeviatingly to the scriptures, as our only infallible guide. We must stand or fall to our own Master. Another man's faith cannot save us, or his want of faith destroy us. We are, in things divine, to call no man Master, or Father, for one is our Master even Christ; and one is our Father who is in heaven. *But be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And call no man Father upon the earth; for one is your Father which is in heaven.* No man has any right to interfere, by compulsive measures, in another man's religion. Reason, argument, and persuasion and a pious example are the only weapons to be employed to spread the glories of that mild and benevolent system of Religion, which Jesus

of Nazareth instituted. The *first* rule of rightly understanding the Oracles of God, is to make them their own expositor. This is the maxim of protestants. It is a just and important maxim. We are not to put upon them, the interpretations and constructions of imagination, or fancy; or to suppose that we have any impulses or INSPIRATION in the mind to give us, the *spiritual* meaning of them.

2dly. *ANOTHER method* rightly to understand the Scriptures, is to take them according to the general, established, and well known import of the words used. All learned men, who alone can be competent judges, in the case, agree that they are well translated. And through the peculiar care and blessing of divine Providence they have been preserved pure and entire, during such a length of time, and so many revolutions of literature and of states and kingdoms. The men who were engaged in, and by *authority* appointed to the work of translating them into the English language (and the translation of them was a most arduous work) were men of great integrity, extensive learning, and, in the judgment of charity, undissembled piety. Opposite sects have all allowed them to be a faithful and just translation. When we, therefore, take them into our hands to peruse them, we should understand them precisely, as they are written, in the common import of the words, according to the plain rules of grammar, and the necessary construction of sentences. An attention to these things is absolutely necessary, in order to a true understanding of them. We are not to seek after any hidden, mystical sense of the words or sentences.

The very letter and meaning of the scriptures is to be strictly attended to. We are to take the words used in the sacred, just as we would, in any other good writings. For the inspired writers always used words properly, and had good sense. They were not guilty of obscurity or self-inconsistency. Their sole end was to state and convey the truth, which they were commissioned to deliver, with propriety and fulness. This they did most admirably, and with great beauty and energy. The *true* meaning of scripture, is its very life and power, *its spirit*. *The words that I speak unto you*, says Christ, *they are spirit, and they are life*. They reveal true, spiritual and saving doctrines: doctrines all-important—doctrines that lead to life eternal.—

3dly. A *THIRD* way rightly to understand the scriptures, is carefully and critically to observe the connexion and subject matter of discourse, or the occasion—the characters to whom or of whom the words are spoken. It is not to be expected that readers of the Bible will attain to a right understanding of it, if they overlook the connexion and occasion; and take single and detached passages by themselves, and shape them into a conformity to their own pre-conceived opinion or scheme of doctrines. The right way not to be deceived by our own reflections, or the artful insinuations of such as lie in wait to deceive, is to bring our opinions or tenets, our principles, whatever they may be, to the scriptures; to examine them by their light; and to make them bow to their decision. And not, as is too often done, to bend them to our tenets and

principles. We are to search them, that we may thence take all our articles of faith, and maxims and rules of conduct. Learned and unlearned ought to do this; and to reject whatever will not bear the test, when applied to them. TO THE LAW AND TESTIMONY ought to be our Motto as Christians or believers in a divine revelation. If any of our religious opinions be contrary to scripture, we are bound by our regard to their authority to abjure them. And that we may not inadvertently be led into error and delusion, we are to consider as accurately as may be, the connexion, the occasion, the design of the inspired penman, to whom, and of whom he is speaking: comparing one passage with another: that which is figurative and less plain, with that which is unfigurative and more obvious: examining all, with diligence, by the general and ruling principles of the Gospel: with an honest desire to discover our duty and the will of God, even, if our favourite notions, (as almost all sects and individual Christians have their peculiarities of belief and practice) should be found to be directly repugnant to scripture. Thus we shall rightly understand scripture. Thus we shall be led into all truth and duty.—It appears, then, with an evidence exceedingly bright, that all our opinions, whether gleaned from authors uninspired, or taken up by reflection, or fallen into by accident, should be tried by the word of God. *But whoſo looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man ſhall be bleſſed in his deed.*

4thly. A FURTHER way rightly to understand

the scriptures, is to divest ourselves, as far as is possible, of all prejudices, and to read and hear them, with a sincere and honest intention to know the truth. *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word which is able to save your souls.* Perhaps to divest ourselves, wholly, of all wrong and corrupt biases is impracticable, what no person was ever yet able to do, after his most vigorous endeavours. Sinful prepossessions cleave to the most candid. We may be prejudiced many ways, and not be sensible of it, against the only true system of Religion. There is but one right way of belief and worship. Truth is uniform and one. There is one God, one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith, one baptism—one hope. Many different denominations of Christians may hold essentially to this one true system, and still drink in many small errors, unessential and circumstantial things, about which, they may violently contend to the loss of charity. We are, then, to do all that in us lies to get into this right way: not only to think we are right, but actually to be right. For this end, we must be faithful and impartial: faithful to God and our own consciences, and impartial in our enquiries; or be anxious lest our fondness for a party lead us into error, or into tenets which are subversive of the very foundation of the Gospel. We are to take heed how we read, as well as how we hear.

5thly. *If we would rightly* understand the inspired writings, it is incumbent upon us to use all the helps in our power. We are to exercise our own rational faculties. Religion is the most reasonable thing in the world, as well as most im-

portant. About what therefore can our reason be better or more worthily employed? For what was reason, by which man is so remarkably distinguished from the brutal herd, given us, if not to use it, to learn the duties, and doctrines of Religion, and to aid us in searching out the truth, and substantial happiness?—

THERE is a great variety of helps or advantages to gain the right sense and meaning of Scripture, for which we ought to be sincerely thankful, and which we ought most wisely to improve. We can read them in our own language. And by the wise institution of common schools, in our favoured Land, almost all classes of people are able to read them. They have, by a wonderful Providence, been handed down to us pure and uncorrupted to a sufficient degree. Many judicious and excellent Commentaries have been written upon them by pious and able men, which we may consult at pleasure, or as we may have opportunity. And here it would be a criminal omission, not to observe, that public worship on the Lord's day, to which we may constantly repair, is designed to open, explain, and apply them. And when any are in doubt about the true way of worship, or of understanding the Scripture, the regular and appointed Teachers of Religion may be, and ought to be resorted to. For the Priests lips were to keep knowledge. And they will esteem it a happiness to instruct the unlearned—to confirm the unstable—and to guide the doubtful.—Such people as have a real desire to know the truth, an honest heart to enquire after the right way of the Lord, will not fail to apply and use all

these helps. Plain is it, that no person can, with any consistency or honest impartiality, profess to be seeking the true way of the Lord, who doth not use and improve all these helps and advantages.—It may here be remarked, that it is a work of much labour and care, painful study and diligent enquiry to understand the scriptures. Knowledge, whether human or divine, is not easily acquired.—And ignorant and uninformed people are the most confident and self-sufficient.—It is to be regretted that it is so. But fact and experience verify it. Many too, shut their eyes upon the light, through prejudice. Vicious and profane persons hate the light and will not come unto it, lest their deeds should be reproved.

6thly. *A FURTHER way* to understand aright the inspired writings, is to seek to heaven for light, guidance, and instruction. We are not to lean to our own understanding, or confide in our abilities or learning. Man is a poor, imperfect frail being. He has prejudices, which he knows not. He is at all times prone to err, through the corruptions of his nature. Sin has brought a thick cloud over his mind. He needs divine illumination. The most acute and learned need this, as well as the unlearned and weak. The divine assistances are to be *prayerfully* sought. *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.* would we, consequently, understand aright the holy Oracles, we must not only peruse them, with industry and care, but devoutly and fervently implore the God of all grace to open them to us, to spread a divine light over them, that they may instruct, warn, and quicken us. We

should seek to him, who gave them to us, to enable us to perceive their true beauty and glory, and to conform our hopes, hearts, and lives to them: to be animated by their promises—warned by their threatenings—comforted with their hopes; and guided to heaven by their precepts. The teachings of the holy spirit are to be *devoutly* implored, that they may be savingly profitable to us. Rightly understood, and duly improved, they are able through faith in Jesus Christ, to make us wise unto salvation. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* Divine grace must sanctify us by them, and them to us. The teachings of Christ, as the true prophet are requisite to open the mind, to remove prejudices, and to enable us to see the beauty, glory, and importance of them. *Being born again, says the Apostle Peter, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man, as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.*

7thly. A *RENEWED heart* is the best help to understand aright the sacred writings. A holy temper of heart will dispose us to sit, like Mary, at the feet of Jesus to receive with joy his instructions. If we have this, we shall feel most sensibly while we read and hear—read the written, and hear the preached word. This will enable

us to see the beauty and glory of the divine character—the excellency of the Mediator's character—to behold the equity of Providence, the riches of divine grace, the wonders of a Redeemer's love, and give us a lively view—of all the truth, duties, doctrines, and ordinances of the Gospel. A very different sense of scripture has the sinner from the sinner, the penitent believing Christian, from the thoughtless and profane sinner, the sanctified from the un sanctified heart. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* This doth not mean that an unrenewed person cannot understand the true meaning of scripture, or the doctrines of it. For, then, it could be of no benefit or use to him. What cannot be understood, cannot work any good effect upon the heart or life. To assert that none can understand the word of God, unless *inspired* by the same spirit, which gave it, is inconsistent with every principle of reason, common sense, and scripture. For it, that is, the scripture, addresses itself to all, good and bad, saints and sinners.—Finally—

8thly. *In order to understand* the written word of God aright, we must practise what we do know—practise according to its divine precepts. A right and saving knowledge, is a practical knowledge. We must not only be willing to receive all our doctrines and principles from the holy scriptures, but to be guided by them altogether, in our conduct and conversation:—to embrace them as the only rule of faith and practice.—Then shall we be safe. Then shall we

have a guide that cannot mislead us. If any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.—Thus we are to do, in order RIGHTLY to understand the scripture—
—Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scripture.—



DISCOURSE XIII.

The Gospel to be supported by those who enjoy it.

GALATIANS vi. 6.

Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

THE system of doctrines, duties, and ordinances revealed in scripture is exceedingly plain, level to every capacity, and easy to be comprehended. That it is so, is one of its most engaging recommendations. Were it unintelligible, or wrapped up in obscurity and mysticism, this of itself would be a valid plea for rejecting it as an imposture or fraud. So plain is it, in its essential principles, that nothing but a willing mind to hear, receive, and attend to truth and duty is wanting. Were we sincerely and candidly disposed to hear and admit the truth, we should differ but little, in our opinions, about the distinguishing peculiarities and glories of Christian doctrine and practice. The reason, or at least, chief reason, why we omit what is clearly revealed to us as duty by God, is because we in heart are opposed to it. An unwillingness to

believe and do, as we are expressly commanded, is the real difficulty in the way of our salvation. This unwillingness at heart puts us upon making objections against a duty, which is clearly revealed, and repeatedly revealed, raises prejudices against it, forms apologies for the omission of it, and sets to work, most vigorously, all the system of the selfish affections. For what we are really and deeply unwilling to do, or wish not to be true, we can easily work ourselves up to disbelieve.

ON subjects of a moral and religious nature, a man by nourishing prejudices, by false reasoning, by artifice and delusion, can persuade himself to believe any thing, however absurd or impious or contradictory—even to admit that he is inspired,—or may lawfully murder himself and family; or that there are no Gospel ordinances, or *stated* worship of the Deity, or that a divine revelation, which bears all the marks of credibility and authenticity, that could be desired, is only a cunningly devised fable. This being the case, we ought in all conditions, to be most vigilantly upon our guard against the illusions of our own minds; and also against the temptations of the great adversary of souls, who always joins in with those illusions. He artfully attempts to rivet them, full well knowing that this is the most probable way to succeed in his designs to ruin us forever, and to make us the occasion of disturbance and divisions in society. A heated imagination, an erroneous conscience, and selfish affections of the heart, together with bitter prejudices against the truth are the most successful engines ever employed by the adversary of souls to deceive and ruin them. They are dan-

gerous things, more so than can be easily conceived.—Nay, no person can, to a sufficient degree, dread the unhappy influence of an erroneous Conscience—heated imagination—inflamed passions—and intemperate zeal. They have led away thousands from truth and duty, and sealed them down in fatal delusions. We are surprized to find what, we must acknowledge, is found by daily experience, that many, who profess sincerely to believe the truth of Religion, are notwithstanding discovered to be capable of rejecting some of its most important principles, and plainest duties.—Among these plain duties, that of supporting the Gospel may justly be reckoned one.

IN the sequel, I shall attempt to offer the scripture-arguments

I. IN favour of this duty.

II. To consider the manner, in which it is to be discharged.

III. AND to invalidate the objections, which have ever been made against it.

I. THE first thing intended is to offer the scripture-arguments to prove, that it is a plainly revealed duty, that the precious Gospel of our blessed Saviour should be supported by the people, who enjoy it. There is no part of God's revealed will that may be kept out of view, or be omitted to be set before mankind. The whole truth, which he hath made known to us, whether pleasing or displeasing to the human mind, is to be exhibited. We may not stop short of it, or go beyond it. If it be a part of the

counsel or will of God made known to man, in the holy scriptures, that the Gospel is to be supported by those who enjoy it, it may not, with a good conscience, be withheld or denied. A denial of it, it must be obvious to remark, has a great and unhappy influence upon the interest of the Gospel, and the Redeemer's kingdom. It tends to the decay of piety and virtue. What is extremely painful to observe, is that it appears from experience and the history of the Church, in past ages, and in the present age, that those who wish to break up the peace and order of particular Churches, and to foment divisions, pretty generally commence their operations, with a full and absolute denial of this duty. They raise a loud cry, and vehemently declaim against it. They speak of it, in language not only bitter but scornful. They say it is utterly unlawful and exceedingly wicked; nay, and directly contrary to scripture. Mean while, they do not forget to impute to those who receive the support, the worst motives—the most selfish and mercenary; as having no eye to any thing beyond the pecuniary advantages of their sacred calling.

SUCH clamours set on foot against the obligations of supporting the Gospel, as they proceed either from ignorance, wilfulness, or parsimony, so they fall in with the current of the selfish passions of corrupt nature. And as interest is the idol of every man, who is unacquainted with the divine force of Virtue and piety, so whatever affects or touches this idol, nearly affects his heart: readily does he listen and easily makes himself believe what he, in his perverted mind,

concludes to fall in with his supposed interest. The love of money, or an inordinate attachment to property, is the root of all evil. Thence most of the crimes which disgrace human nature, and disfigure the page of history. We full well know, that a man can easily collect arguments, sufficient to convince him, that he is justified in not doing, what he is totally opposed to doing.—

I AM entering on a subject of great moment, affecting in its consequences, the very being and existence of public worship; and of course, the Christian Religion itself. It is a subject too, which is not often discussed, lest what we offer, should be considered either as a censure on people for failures in their duty, or implying a suspicion of their friendship or good will. But there may be circumstances, which may require that the obligations of supporting the Gospel, should be fully stated. They need not be often urged, and are not. But whatever doctrine, truth, or duty may at any time be opposed, or Providence may suffer individuals to rise up and deny: that doctrine, truth, or duty must not be relinquished; but there is a plain call to vindicate it.— Painful as it is to me, to speak where motives of self-interest, and not a sense of duty, may be but distantly inferred to influence me, or where malice and prejudice may accuse me of pleading my own cause, I shall proceed, regardless of reproaches, to adduce the Scripture-proof that the Gospel is to be supported by those, who enjoy it according to the *express will* of Jesus Christ.—

AND, *in the first place*, we argue the obligations of supporting the Gospel, in a decent and honourable manner, from this consideration, it

is the will of God that there should be stated public worship, and an order of men appointed to preside over, and to dispense to worshipping Assemblies, Gospel-truths and ordinances. The office of a Gospel-Ministry is sacred. It is derived from the great head of the Church. *This is a true saying, if any man desire the office of a Bishop, he desireth a good work.* That the work and office of an evangelic Ministry are of divine appointment, has often been proved on particular occasions. And the proof has very often been laid before us, in printed discourses. To enter largely on the proof now, would carry me beyond my design. But a brief stating of the most material parts of the proof, is now necessary, in order to establish the duty of supporting public worship and the Gospel. Is it, then, clear from the word of God that there should be Gospel-Teachers, regularly inducted into the work, in the New-Testament-Church, to the end of the world? To be satisfied on so interesting an inquiry, let us candidly listen to the voice of the Saviour. Hath he, who is the king of Saints and Bishop of souls, appointed and commissioned such an order of men to be the mouth of God to his people? That he actually hath, appears from those large and particular descriptions, in his Gospel, of their work and office. And he expressly declares that the office shall remain in his kingdom till the close of time.—There are many very express and marked passages of scripture, which inform us of the Institution of a Christian Ministry, and of its continuance in the world, as long as the world shall stand. Suffice it just to repeat, as a specimen, the subsequent ones. *He*, that is, a risen

Redeemer, gave some, prophets, some Apostles, some Evangelists, some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the fulness of Christ. Here is an account of what Christ, as risen and glorified, did with regard to Teachers in his Church, both *extraordinary*, such as prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists, and *ordinary*, such as Pastors and Teachers. And how long the institution of such an order of men as Pastors and Teachers, was to be continued: what their business and work were: and the ends of the institution. The ends, were the perfecting of the saints, the unity of the faith and promotion of religion. It was to continue as long as there were any among mankind to be called into the faith and fellowship of the Gospel, that is, as long as time should last.

AGAIN, Christ as head over all things to the Church, commanded his Apostles and disciples, to go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. *Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* As long, therefore, as the world shall stand, so long shall there be a Christian Ministry.—The charge which the Apostle gave to Titus as a Gospel minister, and which is to be given to all, who enter the sacred office of the evangelic Ministry, is a full proof that the office is of divine appointment; and that the in-

stitution of such an order of men, as Gospel Ministers, is not the result of human invention or human policy. The charge is most weighty and solemn. It is awfully serious. We cannot hear it without feeling a reverential awe. *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and dead at his appearing, and his kingdom; preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves, teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.* No words can more expressly reveal to us the certainty that there is, in the New Testament, such an order of men, as Gospel Ministers; and that there are times when people will not bear *sound doctrine*, but will, as if infatuated, run with strange avidity after *self-created Teachers*, or impostors; will multiply them, *having itching ears*; and are unaccountably restless and uneasy till they find *strange doctrines*, and *strange teachers* of such doctrines. They turn away their ears from the truth. And turn unto fables. We need not hesitate to admit the reality of the Christian Ministry, when we find those bearing the office, represented as being called of God—embassadors of Christ—the servants of the most high—New-Testament-ministers, whose work is to publish the laws, and offer the grace of Christ. They are said to be sent of God: they are to speak in his name—they hold up the laws and grace of the Saviour, dispense his truths—deliver his doctrines—administer his ordinances, proclaim his promises—

denounce his threatenings—and in Church-processes inflict his censures, or exercise his discipline. It appears, then, with an evidence, complete and full, that the work and office of the Gospel Ministry are of divine appointment: or that it is the *express revealed will* of God that there should be, in his Church, or in the New-Testament-dispensations, stated Teachers, Pastors, or Ministers; and that they should declare his counsel in his written word, and not the fictitious revelations of a supposed inspiration, or their own opinions or dreams. They are to preach Christ and him crucified: and not themselves.—If there be such an order of men, they must be supported. The people, among whom they labour, in word and doctrine, are obliged to see that they are decently subsisted. Their time and talents are consecrated to God in his Gospel, and they must be, as to temporal things, provided for, honourably. What may be deemed an honourable subsistence, must be determined by the attending circumstances. The age in which they live. The place where they live. The modes of living are very different, in different ages, and places. What may be honourable in one age or place, may be totally inadequate in another.—The divine appointment of the Christian Ministry is a conclusive argument in favour of the duty of supporting the Gospel.—

In the second place, we argue the duty from the principles of justice. Justice between man and man is a great and indispensable obligation. It is a moral Virtue of such high importance as

to be the very pillar, upon which society rests. Injustice towards any man, or body of men is a heinous violation of the law of God. That which is altogether just, he would have us practise. He is a being of strict and impartial righteousness. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness and his countenance doth behold the upright. As all orders of a community ought to exercise honesty in their dealings with others, so it is fit for them to call for exact justice from others. Exterior circumstances alter not the claims of justice. It is a moral Virtue which binds all men. And it is to be observed to those in high as well as low life, to those that are affluent, as well as to those that are indigent, to those who are clothed with *sacred*, as well as civil office—to those placed in seats of honour, as well as to those in the shades of retirement, enjoying the sweets of a private life. Is there a more obvious dictate of justice, than that such as labour for others, or spend their time for their benefit, should receive a compensation? Doth God who is perfectly just and right, require one man to devote his talents and time to another, without receiving a due return? Can a case be named, where, in things temporal or civil, a labour done or service performed, may not righteously claim a reward. But if the labour done or service performed, be, in things religious and divine, is a compensation to be denied? Is a labour, undeserving of a reward, merely because it is a *religious* labour? Will any one, who exercises any reason at all, or who has any sense of the ties of common honesty repudiate the notion of a compensation, because *Religion* is concerned? St. Paul makes an appeal to the principles of strict

justice, to prove that Ministers under the Gospel should not be *unrewarded* for the service or labour of love, which they perform. 1 Cor. ix. 7. *Who goeth a warfare at his own charges? Who planteth a Vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock?* These questions carry their own answer. It is supposed that every *reasonable* person, the moment he hears them is prepared to give the right answer. Three cases, or states of life are mentioned: the soldier who goes a warfare, the planter and dresser of a Vineyard, and the shepherd who watches and tends anxiously his flock. Such *reasonably* look for a reward. They could not perform the work, in common, without a reward. All mankind feel that it is entirely fit that they should receive a *due* recompence for their toils, care, and tenderness. It would be *barbarous* cruelty, as well as *high* injustice, to deprive them of a *due* recompence.

In the third place, the duty of supporting the Gospel may be proved from, not only strict justice, but from this consideration, that the general rules of *equitable* dealings, make it fit and proper that those who labour, in word and doctrine, in the Gospel, should not be cut off from a living among their fellow-creatures. Let me urge this argument. You know that it is impossible for any class of men to subsist upon nothing. Our being employed about heavenly and divine things, does not supersede the necessity of having *temporal* provisions to support us. Food, raiment, and a dwelling, the necessaries and conveniences of life are as requisite for those, who are engaged in the arduous work of the Gospel-Ministry,

as for other orders of men. In order to be workmen that need not to be ashamed, Ministers must study. And they must study much—must read extensively—must give themselves to reading, meditation, and prayer—they must visit the sick—must attend the dying—must console the sorrowful.—The duties of their office are so arduous and various, that they will take up all their time :—employ all their abilities, though the most splendid.—The education necessary must be a learned one. This is expensive. Much previous pains, study, and care are needful, in order to be, as far as human exertions can go, competent to the duties of their office. I say, as far as *human exertions* can go :—for divine grace sanctifies the heart.—Now can any once so far lay aside reason, as to assert that one man is bound to devote himself to the advantage of another, in spiritual concerns, to promote them—to instruct him—without a compensation?—Shall ministers of the Gospel go *unsupported*—their families be *neglected*, and they go *from house to house*, begging their daily bread? The more high and honourable their calling, the more need of a *comfortable* maintainance. Reason always agrees with revelation ; and as fully establishes the duty of honourably supporting the Gospel. Thus argues the Apostle Paul : 1 Cor. ix. 11. *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we should reap your carnal things.* The meaning of this passage is this : think it not hard—think it not a burden—complain not that you support with your substance, those who minister unto you in holy things. It is utterly impossible for any set of men to be fit, or qualified to teach others, without *diligent stu-*

dy, and devoting their whole time to the business of *treasuring up knowledge*. We are not to look for *miraculous* assistances, or that knowledge in religion is to be imparted by divine *inspiration*.— If knowledge in Divinity be acquired by the ordinary methods, as the Apostle supposes, by reading, meditation, and prayer; and if Ministers of the Gospel are to give themselves wholly to these exercises; the necessary consequence is, they must be supported by the people, among whom they preach.—

4thly. THE duty of supporting the Gospel may be proved from the plentiful provision made by divine order, for the temporal subsistence of the Jewish priesthood. This was, indeed, large and honourable. God always provides for the subsistence of those, whom he calls to his work and service. He never lets his Ministering servants go, without a way prescribed for their support: and a very ample one, was, by himself, given to the tribe of Levi. The argument to establish the obligations of a people to maintain the Ministers of the Gospel, from the Jewish practice of supporting the Priesthood, and the Religion of the Temple is conclusive. For it is the very argument made use of by the Apostle. 1 Cor. ix. 8, 9, 10. *Say I these things as a man, or saith the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes no doubt this is written. For he that planteth shall plow in hope: and he that thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope. verse 13. Do ye not know that they which minister*

about holy things, live of the things of the temple, and they which wait at the Altar are partakers with the Altar. It is in vain to object against this reasoning. It is the Apostles own argument.—

5thly. THE duty of decently and honourably maintaining the Gospel, is argued from the *express* command upon its true Preachers, to *study* and to *meditate*. They are, in so many words, commanded to study that they may be workmen that need not to be ashamed. *Study to show thyself a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*;—rightly dividing the word of truth requires great wisdom and care, study and meditation. It requires the wisdom of the serpent and harmlessness of the dove. Ministers of the Gospel are expressly enjoined to *give* themselves to reading, meditation, and prayer, that their profiting may appear unto all: they are to be *able* men; *apt* to teach: *able* to teach. They are most diligently to seek the teachings, and guidance, and illumination of the spirit. The duties of their office are various and numerous, arduous and difficult. They have the ignorant to instruct: the erroneous to reclaim: the gainfaying to confute: the doubtful to convince: the unstable to confirm: the afflicted to console: the unreasonable to treat with: and the scoffing and impudent to encounter. It is impossible, therefore, for them to engage in the secular callings of life as other men, to provide for their own decent and honourable support, and the support of their families. The consequence is, the people, among whom they minister, are bound to support them.

6thly. THE support of the Gospel-Ministry and public worship, is the *express Institution* of Christ. He hath particularly ordained that his Ministers shall be supported in every age of his Church. 1. Cor. ix. 14. *Even so hath the Lord ORDAINED that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.* Preachers of the Gospel are to have a living in their work. It is the *express will* of their divine Lord that they should.—What can be plainer or fuller than these words? No words can. If these can be evaded, so may any that could possibly be used. What duty, or doctrine, or virtue is more clearly enjoined? The words are as full as though Christ had said, “I declare to all, that my Ministers, or the regular Preachers of my Gospel shall have a sufficient temporal support from the people among whom they labour.” When he sent out his twelve Apostles to preach the Gospel, he forbid them to make any provision for their own livelihood, as to *food, clothing, or expences* in travelling, because they should be supported by those, among whom they travelled. Mat. x. 9, 10. *Provide, says he, neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat.*

THEY were to be fully, in all respects, provided for by those, to whom they preached. He told them plainly that they were to be so. *The workman is worthy of his meat.* He has a title to a *due* compensation. It cannot therefore be withheld, or denied without evident injustice, and cruelty. When he sent out the seventy disciples, he informed them that they might rely

on an ample and sufficient maintainance, for their own comfort, and for works of mercy and beneficence. Luke x. 7. *The labourer is worthy of his hire.* This is applied to things spiritual, as well as secular. I ask—for what purpose, did our blessed Lord tell his own appointed Preachers this, *the labourer is worthy of his hire*, if they were to have no compensation, or were to subsist, or to support themselves?—It would have been altogether impertinent and absurd.—But he knew they must be supported—and he was not so unmindful of their happiness, as to deny them a living, while on his own divine work.—One passage more will be cited, and that is the text. *Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.* Here is a PLAIN COMMAND of the Apostle to all, who sit under a preached Gospel, to give a due proportion of their substance, for the support of the Christian Ministry. And he enforces the duty by adding, *be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.*—As much as if he had said—‘ flatter
 ‘ not yourselves, deceive not yourself by any ex-
 ‘ cuses. God requires you to support his Gos-
 ‘ pel, and he will not be mocked. As you sow,
 ‘ you shall reap. As you deal with him, in this
 ‘ matter, so he will deal with you. If you,
 ‘ through prejudice, party spirit—or parsimony
 ‘ decline utterly to impart a proper proportion
 ‘ of your substance to support the Gospel, you
 ‘ cannot expect his approbation.’

THUS it appears to be the *will* of God *revealed* in his word, that his worship and Gospel should be *supported*, in the world, by those to whom the Gospel is dispensed.

2. Our next enquiry is, in what manner public worship and the Christian Ministry are to be supported. The mode of supporting the Gospel is to be numbered among those indifferent things, which are left to the wisdom, prudence, and convenience of God's people. They are at liberty to adopt that mode, which best suits their circumstances—the age—the place—the country—the government where their lot is cast. The word of God has prescribed *no particular* mode. It could not wisely do it, because what may be the *best* mode—the *most* convenient for one people, one age, one form of civil government, or one stage of society would not be at all convenient in another age or place. All such things are left, in scripture, to be agreed upon, as may best suit the circumstances of God's people. And what a disgrace to reason and Religion that there should ever be any contention or quarreling about them! What the majority adopt and agree upon, ought to be cheerfully acquiesced in by the minority, though not so agreeable to them. For no maxim is better founded or more reasonable, than that the majority must govern.—

WHETHER the Gospel shall be supported by a tax laid according to each man's property or by a free contribution—or by a subscription—or by voluntary donations—or by national funds—or by particular funds—or by the legacies of benevolent Christians, is a matter of total indifference:—ought never to be an affair of conscience or dissent—for nothing ought to be, or justly can be, a case of conscience, which is in itself totally indifferent. It is an erroneous con-

science only which concerns itself about modes and forms, mere circumstances. The direction is, *let there be an equality*. What is most equal, just, or righteous is the *preferable* mode. But difference about the manner of supporting the Gospel should never be the cause of separations, divisions, or uncharitableness. And we may fairly conclude that such as are really *willing* to do their *proportional* part, will never greatly contend about the *manner*.

3. THE last thing proposed, is to remove the objections, which have ever been urged against the duty of the text. So plain is the duty that it is, with surprise, that we *ever* hear any attempt to argue against it, on supposition they profess to admit the truth of scripture. All that ever has been offered, as objections against the duty may be comprised in the four following things.

1stly. THE words of our Lord, Mat. x.-8. *freely have ye received, freely give*. It is enough to reply here, that these words, so often abused and misapplied, have no reference to preaching the Gospel, as all reasonable people will see, by only reading them in their connexion. They relate merely to miraculous gifts. And accordingly we find the Apostles never received any pecuniary profit, or reward for working miracles.—

2dly. THE word *hireling* used by our Lord, John x. 13. has been urged as a conclusive proof that no *true* teachers of religion ought to receive any *support*. He calls those *hirelings*, whose only or ruling motive was the reward, and who had no regard to the interest and good of the flock. It is strange what work *designing men*,

and false Teachers have made of this word *hireling*. They never mind the meaning of our Saviour, or look to see how he uses it : but from the very sound raise a *bitter* and *opprobrious* cry against all true Ministers of Christ, and all regular and *fixed support* of such. This single word, *hireling* has put a handle into the power of such people as hate religion ; and they have by it, broken up the peace of Churches—rent them a-funder,—and loaded with vile slander the most virtuous characters.—every one, who looks upon this passage, where our Lord employs the word *hirelings*, will have a full evidence, if his eyes be not fast closed with prejudice, that it contains not the *least* shadow of an objection against the duty of the text.

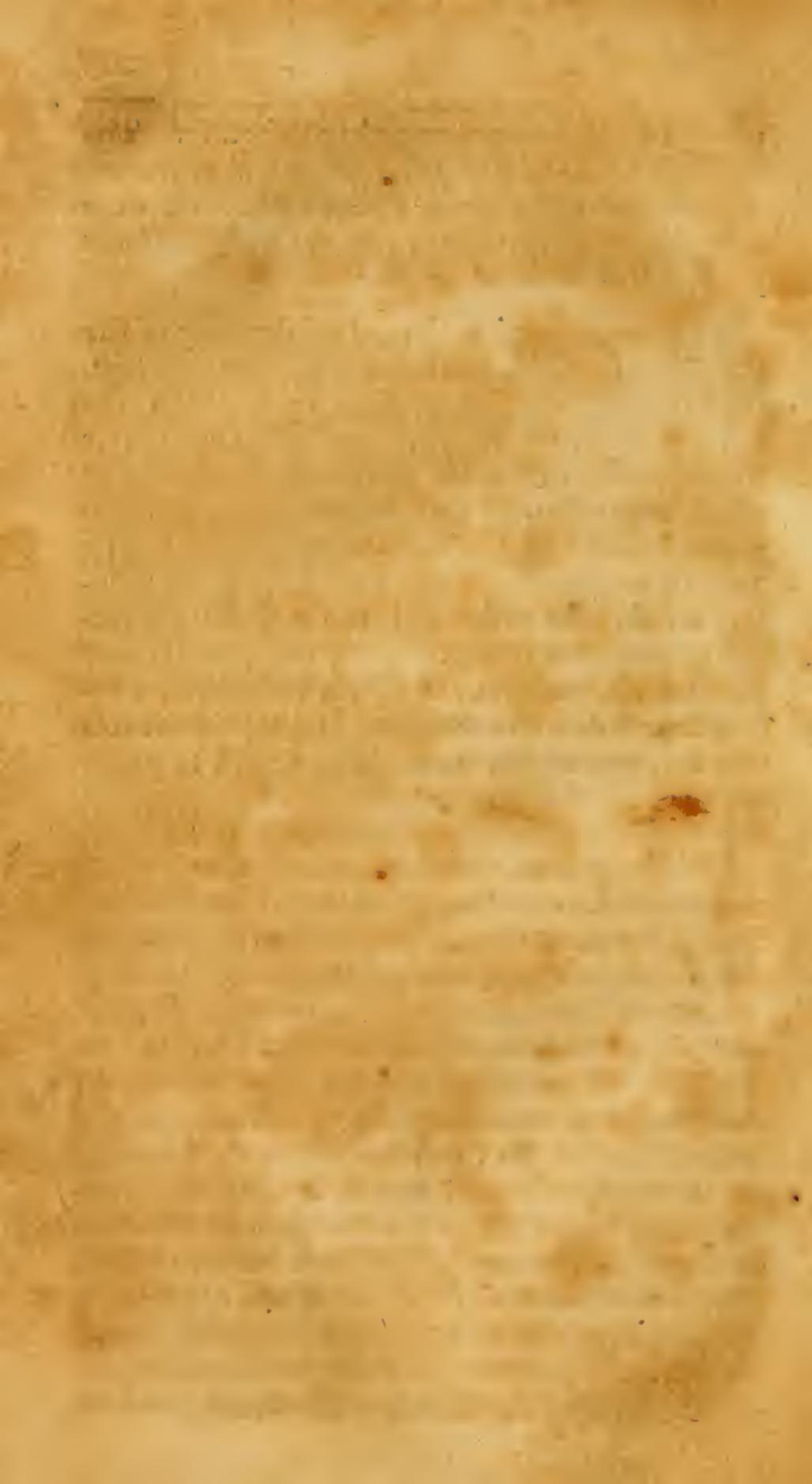
3dly. SOME object and say, that the Apostle Paul *refused* to take any *reward* for his preaching the Gospel, and therefore other ministers, in the ordinary ages of the Church, should never have any *support* or *fixed* maintenance. They appeal to Acts xx. 33, 34, as a proof that Ministers of Christ should have no provision made by people for their subsistence, but should rely wholly on *extraordinary* supplies from Providence. *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel : yea yourselves know, that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and those that were with me :* And 1. Cor. ix. 12—*We have not used this power.* The *power* was that of demanding a support from them. He did not indeed *covet* any man's wealth. But he does not say, that he did not *want* or *call* for a subsistence. In the case of other Corinthians, he actually took the *contributions* of the Churches to support himself among them, lest the *false Teachers* should

raise a clamour against him, and against the Gospel, and so prevent its success. It is a sure mark of a *false* Teacher to deny and reproach the duty of our text. Paul assures us, he *laboured with his own hands lest he should be chargeable*. This boast he makes to the Churches at Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Corinth. But he tells the latter, *he took wages of other Churches to do them service, and that what was lacking to them, the brethren from Macedonia supplied*.—He took wages from other Churches, 2 Cor. xi. 8, 9. WAGES all know are a stipulated reward, or a hire mutually agreed upon.—

4thly. BUT the greatest objection of all, is that true Gospel-Ministers have the *immediate inspiration* of the holy Ghost, miraculous gifts and teachings; and are supplied with matter, both thoughts and words, from God *immediately*, therefore, need no support. If they be *thus inspired* as the Apostles were, I own, they need never study any—or read any—or meditate any, previously, or even have *common* learning—no not to know how so much as to read, or write, or speak: and consequently ought not to have any *stated* reward or maintenance. The more ignorant and *grossly* illiterate the better; for the more *strikingly* will be the evidence that they are only organs, or mere *passive instruments* in the hands of God. If any be so far deluded as to believe themselves *immediately inspired*, we are to commiserate their wretched delusions, and pray that the scales may soon—soon fall from their eyes, and that they may not, with their infatuated adherents, have the fate of *blind leaders of the blind*. That none are now, in this age of the Church, *immediately inspired*, as the Apostles

were, I shall prove in another discourse. The Apostles *spoke as the spirit gave them utterance*. The matter and manner of their discourse were immediately imparted to them, at least, on some particular occasions.

THE arguments in favour of the duty of the text are full, plain, and abundant, *from scripture, from reason, from justice, from equity*. The objections are of no weight. And what a pity it is that so many divisions in congregations should be made, by men who are actuated by *base, dissingenuous, and selfish* views in denying and raising a clamour against so CLEARLY REVEALED a duty.—He who wishes well to the Christian Religion, must wish and fervently pray, that it may please God, to continue in his Churches, a pious, learned, and orthodox Ministry till the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to judge the world. Amen.



DISCOURSE XIV.

THE Apostles, infallible guides in Religion, being commissioned and immediately qualified and inspired by the Redeemer.

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 15.

THEREFORE brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught; whether by word, or our Epistle.

THE word *traditions*, here, means those orders, truths, doctrines, or ordinances which the Apostles, under the guidance and special direction of the holy Ghost, delivered to the Churches planted and formed by them. *Tradition* is what is transmitted from one to another, to guide and direct Christians, either in their belief or conduct. Two ways did the Apostles of our Lord employ in making known the mind and will of God to the Churches which were formed by them, in various parts of the world. And they gathered Churches and settled Ministers in almost all quarters of the then known world. These two ways were by *word* and *Epistles*, by public discourses or by private conferences, and by written Epistles. And the text is an exhortation to the Thessalonian Christians, and in

them, to all Christians in all ages and Countries, where the Gospel in the course of divine providence should be preached, to be firm and unshaken in their adherence to the truths, duties, doctrines, and ordinances of the Apostles, whatever dangers might threaten, difficulties arise, or temptations assault.

THEREFORE, *brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught whether by our word, or our Epistle.* Their word and Epistle taught one and the same Religion, without the least difference or a single contradiction.

WHAT is proposed, in the progress of this discourse, is to prove that the Apostles are INFALLIBLE guides in religion, being commissioned, and immediately qualified and inspired by the Redeemer.

IN order that my meaning in this proposition may be fully comprehended, it will be necessary to state, a little more at large, the idea intended to be illustrated and established in the present discourse. It is this: We as christians, are invariably to adhere to, and abide by Apostolic traditions, using the word, in the sense of the text; or by their precepts and examples. Jesus Christ, the author of the Gospel-dispensation, and head over all things to the Church, invested them with full power and authority to order, to arrange, and to direct INFALLIBLY, in all the concerns of the Churches: in the doctrines which we are to receive, as the articles of our Creed: in the duties to be performed by us, in all our various relations: and in the ordinances to be attended upon by us. They omitted no truth which they were to deliver. They preach-

ed no doctrine, which their divine Master, had not given them in charge to preach. They observed, as a *standing* ordinance, no institution, which he did not *expressly* appoint, or order them to observe. They were, moreover, secured from error both in doctrine and discipline. They never were mistaken or deceived respecting any points of the Religion, which our Lord came from heaven to erect. His kingdom is not of this world. It is like no worldly kingdom. It is injured, and its original purity and glory are defaced, whenever it is incorporated with any civil forms of government. In this kingdom, the Apostles acted altogether under their king. They taught nothing contrary to his mind. They practised, in things divine, or as inspired builders, nothing, which the great Master-builder did not approbate. We are to *build* upon the foundations of the prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. We are safe, then, and only safe, when we take the Apostles for our INFALLIBLE guides in the FAITH, ORDER, WORSHIP, and INSTITUTIONS of our Churches. We are to *build* upon their foundation. They spake as they were *moved* by the holy Ghost. They were endowed with his *miraculous* gifts. They had such evidence of it, as was to them *intuitive*. And they could prove it to others, by the works, which they wrought.—As believers in a divine Revelation, we cannot be consistent with ourselves, if we admit that the Apostles or *inspired* penmen of the New-Testament, were MISTAKEN, or acted WITHOUT authority from their Lord, in any thing delivered by them; or observed *statedly* by them. To admit that they might not

either know the mind of Christ ; or knowing it, were ever neglectful of it, is at once to give up all divine Revelation. If we may say that, in ONE point, they acted as *weak* and *mistaken* men. Others may say they did in *other* points with equal propriety. How then is it possible to know what to hold, or what to give up? The whole must either be retained, or rejected. There is no selecting. If the Apostles, in their example and precepts, had not full power and ample authority, then we are under no obligations to keep, for instance, the *first* day of the week as the Sabbath, or holy time, because *they did*, or to receive any of their doctrines or *ordinances*, or to follow any of their *directions*. Of course, we must reject all the scriptures, except our Lord's own *particular* discourses.—Let us, then, enquire after the authority of the Apostles. In the words now before us, St. Paul commands us to adhere, *strictly* and *exactly*, to what he delivered to the Churches. *Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions as ye have been taught.* There is a peculiar force in the words *stand fast*. The meaning is be firm : be fixed : never give up, deny, or depart from ; but invariably keep to all that you have been taught by us, the Apostles of our common Lord.—To the Corinthian Christians, he has a similar direction. *Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things and keep the ORDINANCES as I delivered them unto you.* The arguments to prove that the Apostles are our *infallible* guides in Religion, being commissioned and inspired by the Redeemer, may be comprised in these six. They were his chosen witnesses to the world.—They received their commission from him.—The divine spirit was their perfect director.—Miraculous works

were done by them.—They required intire submission to their teachings.—And they took care to commit the Gospel to writing—and the Gospel-ministry to faithful men, commanding them to deliver sound doctrine, and to shun all doctrines which they had not delivered.

1stly. They were his *chosen* witnesses to the world. It seems to have been not only expedient, but necessary, that our Lord should have some chosen or special witnesses of his life, doctrines, works, and sufferings. These were indeed open to the view of all. The whole Jewish nation could not but know them. His mighty works were not done in a corner, or before a few partial and interested friends. They were done on the most public occasions, before all classes of people, enemies as well as friends. He did not retire to some private apartment to work his miracles, taking with him two or three particular adherents and then order *these* to publish them abroad. But notwithstanding the open and public nature of his mighty works, it was necessary that he should chuse a certain number of persons to accompany him constantly, through the whole course of his Ministry, to be to the ends of the earth, his faithful witnesses. They were to transmit to the latest ages a genuine account of his holy life, his heavenly doctrines, and the nature and end of the Gospel-dispensation. *These witnesses* he called *Apostles*. And he took them from the ordinary ranks of life, in order to cut off all occasion of objecting against his religion as the work and contrivance of man. They were illiterate. They were, also, destitute of riches. Had he selected his *Apostles* from, among the great, the rich, and the learned,

their success, in preaching his Gospel, would have been imputed to human and natural causes. Once only did he, during his Ministry, send these chosen disciples to preach to the Jews. He kept them with him, to instruct them fully into all the concerns of his kingdom, that they might be under the best possible advantages to testify of him, and his doctrines, and life. But he did not leave the people destitute of the means of knowledge. He pitied them. He accordingly provided for their instruction in the truth, by appointing *seventy disciples* to preach the glad tidings of life eternal, through the whole province of Judea. He chose *twelve Apostles*, doubtless in allusion to the number of tribes, into which the people of Israel were divided. And the conjecture that the *seventy* were appointed, in allusion to the number of the *great council* of the nation, the *sanhedrim*, is founded in probability. The apostles, then, were appointed to *bear witness for Christ* to all the world. They were to testify, every where, to all he *did*, and to all he *suffered* as Saviour: his holy life, his divine doctrines, his wonderful miracles, his bitter passion, his cruel death, his glorious resurrection, his triumphant ascension. They were always about his person. And they were with him, during *that interesting, that marvelous, that instructive* period, of *forty* days from his resurrection to his ascension. During this term, our Lord gave them all the light and information, about their duty, and his kingdom, which they needed. Happy Apostles to converse, for forty days together, with a risen Saviour! He said every thing to them, that was needful, to convince them, to confirm them—to enlighten them—to console them—and to arm them to meet dan-

gers and difficulties in their arduous work. He taught them in all that was requisite they should be taught. *To whom he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* They were eyewitnesses of his ascension. They saw him taken up from the earth. A cloud, miraculously prepared, received him. *For while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.* They were appointed to be witnesses of the truth of these things. Christ tells them, particularly, that they were to bear witness of these things to all the world. *And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.* They only, of all men, were qualified to be witnesses of these things; for they had seen them, and heard them: they had constantly accompanied him, during his Ministry. They knew all those things, as well as it is possible for man to know any thing, which he sees with his eyes, or hears with his ears. Even at the very time of Christ's ascension he tells them, *ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem; and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.*

2ndly. THEY received their commission from him IMMEDIATELY. If we attend to the commission which our Lord gave them, we shall see how clear the evidence is, that they are INFALLIBLE guides in things of Religion, in DOCTRINES, DUTIES, TRUTHS, AND ORDINANCES. They were sent by Christ to proclaim pardon and salvation, and to set up his church among all nations. He told them what to expect, in the discharge of their duty—that the discipl:

was not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord :—that he *that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me* : on the other hand, *he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me*. They bore his name, acted under his authority, and delivered his messages. They preached his doctrines, and not their own opinions. They celebrated his ordinances, not their own institutions. They never went beyond his will, or neglected it. When they speak ; I hear the voice of the Lord. When they acted in matters of church-order and discipline ; I feel, that it is precisely the same as if the Mediator himself *bid us* do the like. During his personal Ministry, he once sent them through the whole land of Judea, to proclaim from city to city the glad tidings of pardon and salvation. They had a *larger* commission after his resurrection. They had power to carry the gospel of his kingdom among *all* nations, and to collect Churches. Their commission is as full as it can be. *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo ! I am with you always even unto the end of the world*. In these words we have the *express* institution of the ordinance of Christian Baptism. Public worship and the Gospel-Ministry, we are here told, are to be continued unto the *end* of the world. They, the Apostles, were to go among *all* nations without any distinction of Jew or Gentile, bond or free, barbarian or scythian. *Wherefore there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision, nor uncircumcision, barbarian, or scythian, bond or free ; but Christ is all and in all*. They

were to bring them all, if possible, to embrace the Gospel. They were to *gather* Churches : to *ordain* Ministers : to *appoint* all the orders of the Churches—to teach them what to believe—to *elect deacons*—and lay down the plan of worship and discipline. The whole forty days their Lord *was with* them, from his resurrection to his ascension, he was *teaching* and directing them. He spake of *things pertaining to his kingdom*. All power in heaven and on earth was his : and he gave them all the authority which could be needful. He failed not to furnish them *completely* for their work. And what he imparted to them, that they communicated, and no more. They made no additions of their own. How remarkable are these words, in their commission, *teaching them to observe ALL things, whatsoever I have COMMANDED you!* They taught nothing of their own. They were the mere instruments or organs by whom Christ spake.

3dly. THE divine spirit was their PERFECT director in ALL things, both as to doctrine and discipline. They delivered the *whole* counsel of God, and nothing but the counsel of God. They kept back nothing ; they omitted nothing through fear of man ; nor advanced any opinions of their own to gain the favour or affection of any man ; or body of men. *Wherefore*, says the Apostle Paul, *I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not skunned to declare unto you ALL the counsel of God.* They never taught any *false* doctrine, or went into any *wrong* practices, or set up any *institutions* without a divine warrant. Their precepts and their example, consequently, are binding upon all Christians. Neither may be disregarded.

Both are to be followed, for they were divinely inspired. No other men, since the holy oracles were compleated, ever were divinely inspired; or ever will be. Those whom God inspires, are *safe guides*: are *perfect* guides in things pertaining to his kingdom. They are *infallible* guides, because our Lord, in the most express manner, promised them such guidance, aid, and constant direction of his spirit, as should be *fully* sufficient:—Such as should effectually secure them from all error in doctrine, faith, and worship. He often promised this infallible direction or aid. And he did not fail to make good his gracious promise. They were never without the special and infallible teachings of the spirit of truth. John xiv. 16, 17. *I will pray the father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever: even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive. verse 26. But the comforter which is the holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*—Here is a full proof that the Apostles had such assistances and teachings from the spirit, as rendered them infallible guides to the Churches; to all mankind. *He shall teach you ALL things, and bring to your remembrance WHATSOEVER I have said unto you.* They could not, accordingly, mistake in any point; or omit: or forget any thing. Again—John xvi. 13, 14. *Howbeit when the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. He shall not speak of himself: but WHATSOEVER he shall hear, that shall HE SPEAK.* The spirit was to guide them into all

truth—to enable them to foresee future events. How full are these promises! If we can believe any thing; we must admit that the Apostles, enjoying those extraordinary and miraculous assistances, are infallible guides in Religion. Those promises now cited, and all others of a like tenor, are peculiar to the Apostles, and in their full latitude apply to no others. No christian or Minister has any right to them, or can apply them to himself, without high impropriety. They prove, as clearly as words can, that the Apostles were secured from all error of doctrine or discipline, and rendered as infallible in their teaching, directing, and guiding mankind, as completely as if *Christ himself* had been personally present with them, to tell them always what to do, and what to teach. Nay, farther, they were commanded not to take one step in their arduous work of spreading the glories of the Gospel-kingdom until these very promises were fulfilled in them; until baptised of the holy Ghost, or endowed with his miraculous inspiring influence. *And behold I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endowed with power from on high.*

4thly. MIRACULOUS works were done by them. All inspired men are enabled to give public and ocular demonstration that they are inspired. Those who claim to be inspired, but have no power to work miracles, are impostors; and ought always to be looked upon by their fellow-men as deceivers. Miracles are the testimony of God himself set to the doctrines and instructions of inspired teachers, as a seal. The

alwise, and infinitely gracious God, who always acts with perfect rectitude, never inspires any to be his messengers to reveal his will, without enabling them to exhibit proper testimonials that he has sent them. For it is at our peril to listen, a moment, to such as claim any immediate communications from him, without evidence. Whom he calls or sends *immediately*, he always empowers to show the needful tokens, lest we should be deceived or imposed upon by fraud or artifices. As inspired men, the Apostles, had power to work miracles. They had power imparted to them, to restore to the maimed, new-created limbs—to heal the sick by a word or command—to eject demons by merely ordering them to depart from those possessed with them—to strike dead with a single word—to give life from the dead—to confer the gift of the holy Ghost upon others by laying on the hands—to foretel future events. Such extraordinary powers were a full proof that God had sent them. By these signs, he authorised them as his messengers. All mankind are, consequently, bound to receive them as such, to submit to their directions, and to follow their example in discipline. We may particularly notice the gift of tongues conferred upon the Apostles. Without this, they could not possibly have been furnished to execute the commission which they had received, *to go and teach all nations*. But they could not teach the Gospel to various nations without understanding their languages. And they could not, by study and human means, supposing them to be favoured with the best, have been such adepts in the various languages, as to preach in them, the glorious truths of the Gospel. But without any study, they could at once, speak to all na-

tions in their own tongues, the great things of religion. What more striking proof could be exhibited, that God was in truth with them, and had divinely inspired them? We are obliged, therefore, to stand fast, and hold to their traditions, their doctrines and examples. Thus says the Apostle to the Hebrews, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at first began to be spoken by the Lord himself, and was afterwards confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the holy Ghost, according to his will.* God bears witness to his servants whom he immediately employs to deliver his messages to the Children of men by miracles. *And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* We are to receive no pretender to *immediate inspiration*, unless God bear him witness with *signs and wonders*. We are never required, as reasonable creatures, to admit any one, as *called and commissioned immediately of God*, unless he be able to prove it to us, by *miraculous powers*.

5thly. THE Apostles demand entire submission to their teachings. They knew that they were divinely inspired and commissioned by the Redeemer; because they had such miraculous powers *constantly*. They could not be self-deceived. They did not mistake a warm and heated imagination, or a spirit of delusion, for inspiration, as many poor deceived persons have done, in various ages of the world; for they had the power of working miracles, to satisfy themselves and all others. We find them, of course, acting a-

greeably to this. They set up their example as a rule, as well as their doctrines. Their example or practice, in things of discipline and of Church-order is binding on all Christians, and as obligatory as their precepts. They absolutely commanded all men, wherever they went, to receive their doctrine as the word of God. They had no hesitancy about this. Thus St. Paul. *If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write, are the commandments of the Lord.* It would be blasphemy in any, but the Apostles to do this. So the Apostle John. *We are of God; he that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.* They had a full knowledge of what was false doctrine, and what was true. So far did they carry this, that if any obstinately refused to follow them, and to receive their doctrines, they withdrew all connexion of a religious nature from them—held no communion with them, but cut them off from the society of the faithful. *If any man obey not our word by this Epistle, note that man, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed.*—Such as dissent, and go off from the plain doctrines of the Apostles are to have a mark set upon them—all intimacy with them is prohibited: *note that man, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed.* The practice of the Apostles is set up also as binding on all christians, in respect to Church-order and discipline. *Be followers together,* says one of them, *of me, and mark them that walk so as ye have us for an example.* Thus in the text. *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught whether by word or our Epistle.* As much as if

the Apostle had said, stand fast in the faith, comfort and hope, doctrine, holiness, and profession of the Gospel—and steadfastly maintain the important points of truth and duty, in which ye have been instructed by us, whether by word of mouth, while we were with you, or by this and our former Epistle, which contain an important part of the faith that is delivered to the saints, as the ONLY standard of DOCTRINES, WORSHIP, and OBEDIENCE.

THE Churches, also, let it be farther and carefully remarked, which were formed by the Apostles under their inspection were patterns for all succeeding ages.—*But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the the Churches of God.* Nay, Christians are commended for strictly adhering to the ORDINANCES of the New Testament-dispensation. *Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ORDINANCES, as I delivered them unto you:* the two great Gospel-ordinances delivered unto the Churches, are baptism and the Lord's Supper.—If any refused to admit Apostolic precept, and Apostolic example, others were commanded to withdraw from them: to treat them as grossly erroneous:—as unfit for communion: as in fact denying the religion of the Gospel. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the TRADITION which ye received of us.* The word *tradition* here is used in a good sense, and means the doctrines, ordinances, and truths delivered by the inspired Apostles. It is a word, indeed, which has been greatly abused. Superstitious people hold to oral-*tradition* as equally

valid with the *written* word of God. And self-confident and impious people call all religion, *tradition*.

6thly. THE Apostles took all due care to commit the Gospel-ministry to *faithful men*, commanding them to deliver *sound doctrine*, and to shun *all doctrines* which they had not delivered and penned down, as directed by the holy Ghost. *And the things that thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses, the same commit thou to FAITHFUL men, who shall be ABLE to teach others.* To faithful men. MEN ONLY are to be public teachers. Faithful men, are men of integrity, sound judgment, and seriousness, in the judgment of Charity.—Again they must be *able* to teach. To be *able* to teach is to be men of great knowledge—men of learning—men of extensive reading and thought:—Unlearned men are not *able* to teach. They only pervert scripture, and expose religion to contempt. An ignorant teacher is an absurdity; yet surprizing as it is, people have itching ears to heap up such to themselves.—Ministers of the Gospel are commanded to feed their people with *sound doctrine*, to give to every one a *portion* of meat in due season. *But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine. Sound doctrine*, is uncorrupted, true doctrine. We may know what *sound doctrine* is, by seeing what the Apostles preached, and most of all dwelt upon. All divine truth is *sound doctrine*. Now if we did not know, or could not find out what *sound doctrine* is, we should never be commanded to preach—or to adhere to—or to contend for it. The Apostles have delivered the *true* doctrines of Religion—have laid down the *true* plan of worship. And they were plain Preachers. We do know, we can easily know, what they deliv-

ered, as the great and essential doctrines of Christ. They command us all, Ministers, and private Christians, to shun all doctrines *different* from theirs. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.* *Strange doctrines*, are such as are not found in scripture, or such as the Apostles delivered not. This command supposes, we can know what *divers* and *strange doctrines* are. For if we could not, it would be fruitless to tell us to avoid them. The Apostles, then, considered themselves as delivering to the world, the only *true* system of Gospel doctrines. They did so. They are consequently, to be wholly relied upon, in all things, pertaining to the kingdom of God. Where we can find Apostolic practice or example, in duties and ordinances, **STATEDLY** observed, we are perfectly safe, and only safe in conforming ourselves thereunto.—I have now offered a variety of arguments to prove to all, that the Apostles are **INFALLIBLE** guides in Religion, being commissioned and inspired by the Redeemer immediately.—I trust the arguments are satisfactory. The subject is not often discussed. It is however a most important one.—And I close the discourse, with this single remark. If the Apostles were not secured by the extraordinary assistances of the divine spirit from all error, in doctrine, discipline and ordinances, and be not infallible guides—if we may not build, with all possible safety, upon their foundation, we must give up all the scripture as *a cunningly devised fable*, and commence unbelievers in any divine Revelation at all.

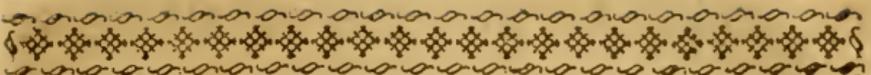
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DISCOURSE XV.

The first day of the week proved to be holy time, and set apart by Christ to be a weekly Sabbath to the end of the world.

A C T S xx. 7.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight.—

THERE is no part of the Christian Religion, but has had, in one age and another, its enemies. There is no duty of it, however plain or important, but first or last, objections have been made against it, by those who were disinclined to perform it. Neither is there any one of all the Virtues of morality, taken in its true meaning and just extent, which has not been opposed by perverse and wicked men, whose vicious lives, or whose loose principles, made it their supposed interest to dispute or deny its obligation.

WE are not, therefore, to be surpris'd, when we find so plain a point as our obligation to sanc-

tify, and observe as holy time, the first day of the week under the Gospel-dispensation, denied, or reproached as a human institution. For there is indeed nothing, in the Christian Religion, either so obvious, or so excellent in its nature, that has wholly escaped censure. This being the case, it becomes us carefully to examine the holy scriptures, to see what they enjoin upon us respecting all the parts of our duty to God, as well as to man and to self.—In the present discourse, I shall, in dependance on divine help, make it my business to state, and to dwell upon the evidence from scripture, to prove that the first day of the week is holy time, and set apart by Christ, to be a weekly Sabbath to the end of the world.—

In the arguments, which may be adduced and illustrated, the divine authority of the writings of the Old and New Testament, will be taken for granted. Such only as believe in them, it is expected, will yield to the force of arguments drawn from them.—It is proper, likewise, just to remark here, before we enter upon the proposed proof, that if we reject the Old Testament, we may as well, and must if self-consistent, reject the New. For if one be divinely inspired, the other must be also. If one be false, or spurious, the other is also. Both, therefore, must stand or fall together, because they are intimately connected:—and so intimately connected, that both are either true or false. This every one will allow, who has carefully and diligently read and compared them, or taken proper pains to see their connexion. This connexion has been evinced by several very able and judicious writers.—Let it be farther remembered, that nothing in

the Old Testament is done away, but the positive or ceremonial part:—The moral part is as much in force, now, as ever. It never indeed can be repealed.—We have our Lord's own words to bear us out in this assertion. He tells us most expressly, that *he came not to destroy the law and prophets but to fulfil them*—or to confirm them.

As the subject before us has been a good deal debated in the world, and is of a most important and interesting nature, it is hoped the hearer will give not only a candid, but a critical attention. The more critical, the better; for I am persuaded, that no part of truth or Religion will suffer by the closest inspection, or most severely critical examination.—We want and wish for no assistance from superstition to befriend the glorious cause of the christian religion. If it cannot stand upon its own broad basis, and do not recommend itself, by its own superlative excellence and reasonableness, let it fall; and let its enemies triumph.—We invite them to examine:—We urge them to a free and fair enquiry.—

IN the words now read, St. Luke, the writer of the history of the Acts of the Apostles, gives us an account of public worship, as conducted by the inspired Apostles; the time when it was attended upon, and the different exercises of which it was composed. The time when, was the first day of the week, or what has generally been called, the Christian Sabbath. The Preacher, who was the apostle Paul, delivered a discourse to the professing Christians, who had assembled together to keep as holy time, the first day of the week. The Lord's Supper was celebrated as a divine ordinance. They broke bread sacra

mentally. St. Paul administered the sacramental supper. And they had such comfort and sweet experience of God's presence and blessing, that the exercises of public worship were protracted to an unusual length.—*Here* we have the example of the Apostles, and their converts to the Gospel, for keeping as holy time, the first day of the week.—The first day of the week appears from these words to have been the common time for public worship. For the historian speaks of their coming together, not as an occasional, but *stated* assembling. The very manner, in which he speaks of their meeting for public worship, must satisfy every candid mind, that it was a *stated* or *common* time. And most certainly the Apostles would not have ventured of themselves, or from their own power, to set apart, and to observe as sacred, a day for public worship. For this, they had a special order from him, who is head over all things to the Church. Their example in observing, as sacred time, and for public worship, the first day of the week is as binding upon us, as an express precept.

MANY excellent and pious books have been written upon the sanctification of the Sabbath—the manner in which it is to be sanctified has been often well described—directions how to do it have been given—motives to induce people to keep it holy unto the Lord have been enlarged upon—and the change of the Jewish into the Christian, the seventh into the first day Sabbath has been, by learned Divines, clearly proved.—Much indeed hath been said and written concerning the Sabbath; and well said and well written. But the enquiry we propose now to consider, is whether it be the *mind* and *will* of God, that under the

Gospel-dispensation there should be any *distinction* of days, or any time set apart as *holy*? This is seldom discoursed upon. It is however a very interesting question, and worthy of a careful attention.—When I cast my eye upon some few writers, who have employed their time and abilities to disprove the morality of the Sabbath, and to diminish the regards of Christians to it, I feel a deep sorrow. How unhappy that the mind should be puzzled and confounded by such writings! And how hurtful to religion is every attempt to dissuade people from esteeming the Lord's day, as *holy* time. For if the Sabbath be once generally looked upon, as a human device, it will of course be neglected.—One writer, in a system of moral philosophy, which he saw fit to publish, has laboured to make it appear, that the Sabbath is not a divine institution. This single thing will tend much to injure the Churches, and corrupt the public morals.—

IN order to do justice, as far as we are able, to the subject before us:—we will begin our enquiry with the original institution of a Sabbath, or a seventh proportion of time, set apart from the common concerns of life, to religious purposes.

1stly. A SABBATH is a day of sacred rest. The meaning of the word is rest; and it necessarily presupposes labour and toil as preceeding it. A Sabbath day is a day of rest—a rest in God, or devoted to him, to his fear and service. The great question is when was such a day *first appointed*? Reason teaches us that we ought publicly to worship and serve God, the fountain of life and being. If it teach us this, it will teach us that some particular time, or day should be

appropriated to the important duty. It cannot inform us what portion of time, or what day. After we are told that God has set apart a seventh proportion of time, it consents to such a portion or part of time as altogether suitable. We cannot suppose that when God made man, that he would leave him without any assistance or direction about the time, when, he should worship and serve him. As he made him a rational being, so he would take care to favour him with all necessary guidance and instruction about his duty to him. And we accordingly find he was particularly attentive to him, to fix his duty, and point him to his only happiness. For man is only happy, when intent upon duty. If we turn to the Book of Genesis, ii. 1, 2, 3. We shall find that the Sabbath was appointed immediately upon finishing the great work of creation. As soon as God had made the heavens and earth, and had formed man in his own image, he instituted the Sabbath, not for his own, but man's benefit. *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made: and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it, he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.* There are three words here used respecting this seventh day. God *rested* on the seventh day: he *blessed* it, and *sanctified* it. No one can be so absurd and fool'ish as to imagine that the Supreme Jehovah wanted rest, because fatigued with the labour of Creation. With infinite ease, did he speak the whole Universe into existence. And it might have been instantly done, or all in a moment, in the twink-

ling of an eye, as well as in six days, if it had been the divine pleasure. He had important ends in view, in employing six days in the formation of the heavens and earth, as he hath in all his conduct. *The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, nor is weary.* As therefore he was not fatigued or worried with labour, he needed no *rest* as to himself. The word *rest* here cannot mean eternal rest, or his own divine happiness, because in this sense of the word God always rested; for he was completely blessed from all Eternity. His happiness is the same from everlasting to everlasting. The meaning of his *resting* on the seventh day— *blessing it—and sanctifying it*, is setting it apart to religious uses, as a day in which his blessing may be hoped for eminently. To sanctify a day, is to distinguish it from others—to consecrate it to holy purposes. And his resting on the seventh day is an example to man, after six days of labour, to set apart to religious uses, the seventh. There are some circumstances respecting the original institution of the Sabbath worthy of notice. It was appointed as soon as God had ended the work of creation. It is the very *first institution* or *express* law of God. As soon as he had formed man, he gave him the law of the Sabbath: and he gave it to him because he had finished the work of creation. This is particularly expressed. The very institution of the day pointed out the use of it:—it was to lead man's thoughts to the author of nature, to remember with gratitude and reverence the works of creation—to fix his mind upon God as the only object of religious homage and praise—and to keep him from Idolatry, and impiety. It is was necessary that man should have a TIME ordained for worship-

ping and particularly glorifying his Maker. He was planted in Paradise. All Creation was filled with the glory of the Lord. It spake forth in silent language his praise. But man was not to be an idle spectator of the wonders of the divine workmanship. His business was to adore and rejoice in the fulness of his portion: to eye with rapturous delight the power that formed him, and spread around him in such rich profusion the beauties of nature. The Sabbath was ordained to furnish him with the *stated* opportunity, and to remind him of the duty of worshipping his Creator. God saw that he needed such an Institution, though perfectly innocent; and though brought into existence in a state of complete maturity of reason and judgment. The Sabbath was appointed before sin had entered the world, and defaced the divine image in man. If man, in his primitive state of rectitude, and when sin had found no place in his heart, needed a day of rest in God—or a seventh part of time to be consecrated to the great exercises of religious homage, how much more does he now, in his fallen state?

THERE is but one objection that was ever raised, against the belief that the Sabbath was appointed at the close of creation, before man apostatized, and that is that the account here in Genesis ii. 1, 2, 3 of the appointment of the Sabbath, was inserted by way of anticipation; or that Moses mentions it in his narrative too soon. This is the same thing as to charge the sacred historian with inaccuracy. It is to say, he was incorrect, and made an unhappy mistake. And if the Sabbath was not instituted in Paradise, he indeed is extremely incorrect, and injudicious to mention the appointment of

it more than two thousand years before it took place; as he did, if it were not instituted till the Children of Israel came out of Egypt, as is alledged by some. The only reason they offer for supposing the Sabbath is *here* spoken of, by way of anticipation, is the silence of the Scripture upon the subject, till we come down to the departure of the Children of Israel out of Egypt. They pretend not that it was unnecessary. That man needed it not.—Besides, whoever duly attends to the manner, in which the fourth Commandment is worded, will be compelled to admit that it refers to this original paradisaical institution of the Sabbath. The reference is very obvious. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labour, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man servant, nor thy maid servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, Sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.* In these words, Moses refers us back, in the plainest manner possible, to the *original* appointment of the Sabbath, at the finishing of the work of creation.—It is true that we find no *express* mention of a Sabbath observed from Adam to Moses, a space of two thousand and five hundred years. But that there was one observed is probable. For it is not likely, that a merciful and gracious God would leave man for so long a period without setting apart some stated time for his worship, by his *express* authority. He revealed his will, in small degrees, from period to period, in the early ages of the world. There

were pious people THEN to serve him. For he always had a seed to serve him, in the world, and to bear testimony to the truth. They undoubtedly maintained public worship. And they had stated times and seasons for it. For we read, *then began men to call on the name of the Lord.*

THE account given us of the patriarchs is very short. But there are several things, which make it appear altogether probable, that they observed a day of sacred rest. It is said, Noah sent the dove out of the Ark at the end of *seven days*: and again at the end of other *seven days*. This intimates at least that he measured time by weeks; and that the end of each week was regarded by him, with some peculiar solemnity. Cain and Abel offered their sacrifice in *process of time*: the original is, in the *end of days*. While the Children of Israel were in Egypt, and *there*, for the first time, observed the passover, Moses commanded that, on the first day of unleavened bread, there should be a *holy convocation*, a day in which they were to do no manner of work, and were to convene to worship God. And this holy convocation, is called elsewhere the *Sabbath* Lev. xxiii. 24, 32, 39. Moses speaks of this *holy convocation*, as if they knew what it meant; and had been accustomed, in the house of their bondage, to observe it. About a month after giving the law from Mount Sinai, the Manna fell, as heavenly support to them, in the wilderness; and on the sixth day there fell double the quantity, as on other days. The people were surprised at this event, and could not account for the reason of it. Moses explains it to them, in these words, *This is that which the Lord hath said; to-morrow is the rest of the holy Sab-*

bath unto the Lord. We know not that God had spoken to them of the Sabbath, but when he had completed the work of creation. Moses addresses them, reasons with them, and reproves them, as if they were well acquainted with the Sabbath. Some have doubted whether they observed any Sabbath in Egypt. Their tyrannical Masters it is true greatly oppressed them. And most likely, forbid them to rest on every returning *seventh* day. The long time they were in bondage, had mostly destroyed no doubt the remembrance of the Sabbath. But some of them kept it, it is natural to suppose, as well as they could. God in a very solemn manner, renews the appointment of the Sabbath, in the fourth commandment.—It may be of weight here to ask, how the nations in general, in the first ages, and so down through all generations, come to divide and measure their days by *sevens*, or by *weeks*? That they do, and have done, all history declares. But no planet or heavenly body directed them to this; or suggested the hint. The celestial bodies measure out years, months, and days; but not weeks. Is not this a circumstance strongly indicative of the original Institution of the Sabbath—and division of time by weeks; that after six days of labour, a day of rest is to be observed?—The learned Grotius tells us, that two of the most ancient writers now extant, speak of the seventh day as sacred. And it is certain that one day in seven has been distinguished among many heathen nations, ancient and modern, with religious ceremonies and festivals. But how comes this? Must it not be conveyed down, from generation to generation, by tradition? Does it not then lead us to a belief, that there was a Sabbath appointed, when

the world was made? And can we suppose that pious people, from the creation to the flood, and from the flood to the time of Moses, had no *fixed* day to assemble together for publicly serving and worshipping the Deity? Is this reasonable? Is it probable?—It appears then that the Sabbath was instituted, when God had finished the work of Creation, and was observed, in the world, from Adam to Moses.

HERE it is proper to remark, that there is nothing in the fourth Commandment to militate against observing as holy time, the first day of the week. It directs us to keep as holy time, every seventh day. *Six days shall thou labour, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.* The seventh part of time is here consecrated to God. *The seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God*, a day to be kept holy to God, different from all other days. Every day indeed we ought to remember him who is the source of all good. But the seventh after six working days is, in a particular manner, to be kept holy unto God. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.* We never could know from the fourth commandment, where to begin the Sabbath, or where to end the six working days; or when to begin to work or to rest. All that this commandment does, is to appoint for holy uses, the seventh part of time, or one day in seven. And so far, it is moral and not positive. There is a fitness, in the reason of things, that some part of our time, or days should be especially devoted to God, and religious worship; how great a part, or when to begin, or end our day of sacred rest, is left for God to decide by his own appointment; and accordingly is *positive*. It will then be asked,

how the Jews could know, what day to keep as the Sabbath day, or when to begin, or to end their six days of labour? There was another precept pointing out the precise day. Exo. xvi. 23, 25, 26. *And he said this is that which the Lord hath said, to-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord.* This is the first place that we have any mention of the Sabbath, from its institution at the close of creation, which is *express*, though there are some intimations of it, as before observed. The people, three days after they left the banks of the red Sea, where God so gloriously wrought for them, murmured at Marah, because of their thirst. They then came to ELIM, and thence to SIN, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And here they murmured again, for the want of bread; concluding that they were all to perish with hunger. God, again, by a standing miracle supplied them with food—he rained bread from heaven.—On the sixth day, they were to gather twice as much as on other days, as a supply for the seventh—which was the Sabbath.—Here the day was fixed, *when* to begin their Sabbath.—When, they had reached Sinai; the moral law was given to them in awful solemnity:—and one part of it, contained the due observation of a seventh part of time. It is then, as fully proved as any thing can be, that the christian Sabbath is, according to the fourth commandment, as much the seventh day, as the Jewish Sabbath. It is observed every seventh day, the seventh from our first working day, as well as theirs. When, therefore, we keep the first day of the week, as holy time, we do, in no sense, go counter to the fourth commandment. To object against the

first day Sabbath, as a departure from this commandment, bespeaks great ignorance.—And Christ, when he instituted the first-day Sabbath, did not abolish, weaken, or destroy the fourth commandment.—I have dwelt the longer upon the original institution of the Sabbath, in Paradise, because if we can prove that God hath actually set apart a seventh portion of time, from the beginning, it will happily open the way, to establish, beyond all contradiction, that under the New-Testament-dispensation, we have a Sabbath: and if we have, it must be the *first* day of the week, as will be evinced from other arguments.

2dly. WHEN God set apart the people of Israel to be a peculiar people unto himself, he directed them to devote, one day in seven, to him as holy time. In giving them the moral law, as an epitome of all their duty, he took care to insert the law of the Sabbath. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.* The due observation of the Sabbath is placed among the great and essential points of morality. God blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. The people were told it was the Sabbath of the Lord their God. It was his day. He had a special interest in it; a peculiar property. It was a day, in which he was to be honoured, the work of Creation commemorated, and their deliverance from a cruel servitude duly noticed. It is prefaced thus, I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt and house of bondage. It was a day to be observed by them to distinguish them from other nations, as worshippers of the true God, and to preserve them from Idolatry. The most rigid rules were prescribed for sanctifying it. The most severe penalties were annexed to

the breach of it. A Sabbath-breaker was among the most vile and abominable characters. The whole day was to be devoted to God and Religion. When they kept the day as holy, they were prospered. Calamities and judgments were inflicted upon them, when as a nation, they neglected God's holy Sabbath. All the prophets who were raised up, one after another, called them to observe the Sabbath, warned them against any contempt of it, and placed the sanctification of the Sabbath upon a footing of equality with the moral Virtues. As the priests were the guardians of the ceremonies and rites of their religion, so the prophets were the restorers, and guardians of moral duty. Their placing the due observation of the Sabbath so high, as a moral duty, is a full proof how they viewed it, and how God viewed it. A violation or profanation of the day was to be punished with awful severity. We find that God's giving them the Sabbath, is enumerated among his great and signal mercies to them; the wonders of his Goodness, Nehemiah ix. 14. *And madest known unto them thy holy Sabbath.* If a mere ceremonial rite, would it be called *God's holy Sabbath*? God's giving it unto them, or instituting it, is spoken of, as an instance of his distinguishing kindness. The prophet Ezekiel represents it under the notion of a *sign* between God and his people. Ezek. xx. 12, 13, *Moreover also, I gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign between me, and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do he shall live in them: and my sabbath they greatly polluted.* Here the Sabbath is spoken of, as God's Sab-

bath, and a sign between him and his people : as a mean of their religious and moral improvement ; of their sanctification. The sin of profaning or neglecting it, is represented as most heinous ; and as calling down upon the people the heavy displeasure of the Almighty. Sabbath-breakers were a class of transgressors peculiarly odious to him. See, in what terms of profound respect, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the Sabbath : and how high, in the scale of duty, he placed the due sanctification of it. *If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words :—Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father ; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* Do the prophets ever speak of mere ceremonial laws or observances in this manner ? I appeal to every person, who knows any thing at all about the scriptures. Be pleased only to remark a moment. The people are called upon not to trample under foot the Sabbath—not to find their own pleasure upon it—not to speak their own words, that is, converse about worldly subjects as on other days, not to do their own ways. It is spoken of as God's day, by way of eminence, the holy of the Lord, and honourable.—Again ; the man who keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, is pronounced *blest*. *Blest is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it : that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it.* Isaiah speaking of Gospel-days says that public worship is to be weekly attended upon—and on the Sabbath,

as the appointed day. *And it shall come to pass from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come before me, saith the Lord.* This is a prophecy of Gospel-days. That it is so, every one will be satisfied, who reads it in its connexion. And no words can more *expressly* declare that there shall be *stated* public worship under the Gospel-dispensation; and that it is to be observed *weekly*—and upon the *Sabbath*, as the *appointed* day.—The people of God, then, under the Jewish dispensation were to keep the Sabbath, as a day of sacred rest, holy unto the Lord. When they neglected it they were frowned upon—when they strictly observed it, they were smiled upon—it was kept during the whole of that dispensation, till the introduction of christianity.—It was kept from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to Christ. The great original reason for setting it apart for holy purposes, in the beginning, was to remember the Creator and his works: to have a *set* time to worship and serve him, who is the author of all our mercies—and to cultivate a holy temper of heart, and prepare for a holy happiness after death. The superadded reasons for the people of Israel to keep a sabbath, a weekly day of sacred rest, were their deliverance from a cruel bondage, by the miraculous interpositions of Providence, and the distinguishing kindnesses bestowed upon them—as a people separated to God from the rest of the world. *And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.* These are the particular reasons why the Jews

were to keep the Sabbath day.—The particular reasons why the Jewish Sabbath was to be kept, have long ago ceased, even when that dispensation, under which the Jews lived, was abolished. Therefore the Jewish Sabbath is done away. But there are particular reasons why Christians, under the Gospel-dispensation, should keep a weekly Sabbath; as well as why the Jews, under their dispensation, should keep a weekly Sabbath.

3dly. THERE is the same propriety that Christians, under the Gospel, should keep a day of sacred rest, weekly, to remember the work of redemption, as that the Jews should, to remember their deliverance from oppression and servitude in Egypt; and much greater, as the former is infinitely more important than the latter, and as the one was only a type of the other. The great reason of the original appointment of a seventh portion of time to be consecrated to religious use, was to commemorate the work of Creation. That there was a Sabbath appointed, in the beginning, none can deny, who are capable of understanding the plainest words, and are not resolved to pervert them; and has also been satisfactorily evinced, I trust, in another part of this discourse. To this primitive institution of the Sabbath before the FALL of man, the best expositors suppose our Lord refers, when he says, *The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*—We cannot forbear to remark, here, that, in these words, our Saviour does not intimate, in the most distant manner, the abolition of a seventh portion of time to be devoted to pious ends. He expressly says the Sabbath was made for man, for his comfort and benefit—

that he might have a rest. If it ever were really for the good of man, that there should be a weekly Sabbath, it is always for his good—as necessary at one time as another: and under one dispensation as another. Jesus Christ, our blessed Redeemer, does not hint to us that the surpassing excellence of his religion would render a weekly Sabbath needless—or that all days were to be Sabbaths:—or that his people would be so holy, as to be above keeping any time as holy.

BESIDES, it is altogether pertinent to argue, as is always done by the friends of the Christian Sabbath, that there is such a day to be kept holy, weekly, to the end of the world, from the *greatness* of the work of Redemption. If it were fit to keep a Sabbath, weekly to remember the work of Creation, it is more fit to keep one in memory of the work of Redemption. Christ, as God, made all things. By the word of his Almighty power he spoke the heavens and the earth into being.—And he appointed a Sabbath to commemorate those works, which are great and marvellous.—But his work of redemption is still more marvellous. Its dimensions cannot be measured. We can only exclaim in devout admiration, O the height, the depth, the length, and breadth of it. All heaven admire and adore. Man may well stand in pleasing astonishment. It is so great and wonderful as to be called a new Creation. And the perfect felicity procured for man by it, is called new heavens and a new Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. When Christ, as Creator, rested from the work of the first Creation, he instituted the Sabbath to commemorate it. When he, as Redeemer, rested from his work of redemption, he instituted *a day of rest* to be kept by all his followers,

in memory of it. This is the very argument of the Apostle, Heb. iv. 10. *For he that entered into his rest, he hath also ceased from his own works as God did from his.* Christ rested from his work, when he arose from the dead, which was on the *first day* of the week. His humiliation was then finished, and his exaltation begun. *The rest* which remains for Christ's followers is a sabbatism or keeping a Sabbath; a Gospel-Sabbath is then the emblem of the heavenly Sabbath.—God's people of old were to keep a Sabbath in memory of the work of Creation: And Christians are to keep a Sabbath in memory of the work of Redemption. Christ, then, has a Sabbath in his dispensation. For he is the Lord of the Sabbath. But how could he be the Lord of the Sabbath, if there were none. If, then, God's antient people of the Jews, were by an express command to keep the Sabbath as a memorial of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage; and if that deliverance were a type of our deliverance from sin, by the work of redemption, it will follow that Christians should keep a Sabbath, weekly, as a memorial of that work.—This is a common argument in favour of the reality of a Sabbath, under the Gospel-dispensation, to be kept to the end of the world; but is as forcible as common. The enemies of the Christian Sabbath may cavil at it, but can never, by all their art and sophistry, overthrow it.—With it, I close the present discourse. Only requesting the hearer, to weigh all that hath been offered, or that shall be, in the next discourse, in the balance of cool deliberate reflection and examination. If the New-Testament have no Sabbath to be sanctified by the people of God, too long have we already, been attached to a human institution. We must bid it vanish.

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE first day of the week proved to be holy time, and set apart by Christ to be a weekly Sabbath to the end of the world.

A C T S xx. 7.

AND upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight.

I DO not know that I can introduce this discourse, more pertinently, than in the words of a pious writer.—“ Let any man, saith he, show me in the law of the Sabbath, either weakness or unprofitableness, and I yield and bid it vanish. But it hath and will have, as much strength and force as any law can have, from the author, the consent, multitude, custom and express approbation of all ages. Profit it hath too; and that very great; as hath been experienced by serious and well-disposed minds in every age of the world. It is of importance therefore not only to the well being of a Christian, but even to the very being and keeping up of religion in the world.”—If I wished to know the state of religion among a people, or in the heart of a good

man, one of my first questions would be, what attention or regard is paid to the Sabbath. The profane denier or neglecter of the Sabbath cannot have any real love to Religion. If he imagine himself to be among the number of the friends of God and the Saviour, he must misjudge concerning himself, and be in a great delusion. A profanation and denial of the Lord's day bespeak an unrenewed heart.—It is hoped the audience will renew their attention, while the subject before us is resumed.—I proceed to state and to dwell upon the arguments, from scripture, to prove that the first day of the week is holy time, and set apart by Christ to be a weekly Sabbath, unto the end of the world.

WE have already, in the former discourse, illustrated three arguments to establish this important point.

1stly. THE Sabbath was instituted when God had finished the work of Creation, and was observed in the world from Adam to Moses :

2dly. The people of Israel were to observe and keep it holy unto the Lord :

3dly. If they were to keep the Sabbath as a memorial unto God, of their deliverance from servitude in Egypt, then Christians are to keep a Sabbath as a memorial of the work of redemption, of which deliverance from Egyptian bondage was only a type.—We proceed, now, to argue the institution of the Christian Sabbath from what—

4thly. Is said in prophecy, of a Sabbath to be observed in Gospel-times. The most remarkable passage to this purpose, is the following, *The stone*

which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing, it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it. These words, all expositors antient and modern, refer or apply to the day of our Lord's resurrection. When he arose from the dead, and the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea resigned its charge, he was declared to be the head-stone of the corner. He was the stone, which the builders refused. What may convince all that these words are to be thus applied, is that the Apostles thus apply them. And while we interpret Scripture, as they do, we are infallibly right. Our Lord's resurrection from the dead was evincive of his power ; of the truth of his mission :—and it was on the first day of the week.—This is expressly declared by the Evangelists, and was never denied. And this is the DAY which the Lord made, or constituted, set apart for special uses, which must be the meaning of the word here. *This is the day which the Lord hath made ;* made,—how did he make *this day*, the day of Christ's resurrection ? All time is his, The day is his ; the night also ;—darkness and light are his. If the *first day* of the week be the Lord's day, in no higher or different sense, how could it be said, with any propriety, *this is the day the Lord hath made ?* The day of Christ's resurrection is then the Lord's day, in some eminent, or peculiar way ; is a *day* he hath made different from any, and all other days. *We will rejoice and be glad in it.* The reason why God's people or Church were to *rejoice and be glad in it*, was that the Lord had made it, or appointed and instituted it. It was to be religiously celebrated and observed. Here, then, we have a plain ac-

count, in prophecy, of a Sabbath or day to be religiously observed by the people of God after Christ's resurrection—and upon the VERY DAY;—the first day of the week. For he arose from the dead on that day. This must have great influence to convince all, who are willing to be convinced.—Can any shut their eyes upon the light, which is exhibited to us from this passage. Isaiah, at the very close of his prophecy, says, speaking of the Gospel-dispensation; *And it shall come to pass from one Sabbath to another shall all flesh come to worship before me saith the Lord.* This certainly implies, that in Gospel-times there shall be a weekly Sabbath, as a stated season of worship for all nations, who enjoy the Gospel.—Again, the same prophet speaking of the Gospel-dispensation, says, *blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting.* This man is a blessed man. He is happy in himself, and shall be blessed of God. The meaning of this prophecy of Gospel-times and blessings, is this. Under the Christian dispensation, there shall be a *weekly Sabbath* to the end of the world; and blessed is the person who duly observes it.—It is impossible for us to deny the Christian Sabbath, if we understand these prophecies of Gospel-times and blessings, in their plain and natural sense.—It cannot be the meaning of these prophecies, that the Jewish Sabbath was to be kept, because we have an express account of the abolition of the seventh day-Sabbath. All may be convinced that the seventh day Sabbath is abrogated from Rom. xiv. 5 and 6—compared with Col. ii. 16, 17. *One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks, and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.—Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days which are a shadow of good things to come, but the body is Christ. And Gala. iv. 10, 11. Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years, I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. In all these three different passages the Apostle puts the Jewish or seventh-day Sabbath upon the same footing with the rites and ceremonies of that abolished dispensation. Their seventh-day Sabbath, their meats and drinks, and laws about clean and unclean meats are all put together, and declared to be shadows of good things to come. We have the substance, that of which they were the types or shadows. We are not therefore to cleave to the shadows. They cannot be binding on us. We are no more obliged to keep the Jewish Sabbath, than any of their ceremonial laws and institutions. The ceremonial laws and ordinances are expressly abolished, and called rudiments of the world. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world: why as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances. Touch not—taste not—handle not: which all are to perish in the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men? which things indeed have a show of wisdom in will worship and humility, and neglecting the body, not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. The levitical laws or Mosaic rites are stiled weak and beggarly Elements, and Chris-

tians are forbidden to observe them. *But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly Elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?* The whole Jewish dispensation is done away. It was but introductory to a more perfect system. The ceremonial institutions are called *carnal ordinances*. Which stood, says the Apostle, *only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation*. The Apostle in all these passages, has reference only to the rites of the ceremonial law. He tells us, as plainly as words can express, that the Jewish dispensation, with all its rites and ordinances, is abolished. Circumcision—the Passover—the legal Sacrifices—the observation of the Jewish feasts—their holy days—months—new moons—their Sabbath—their priesthood—their laws about meats and drinks are all done away. These were the weak and beggarly elements, the rudiments of the world, the carnal ordinances, of which the Apostle speaks. And the passages of Scripture above cited have no reference, not even the remotest, to the Gospel-dispensation, to the Christian ordinances, or Christian Sabbath. And to apply those passages to the Gospel institutions, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Christian Sabbath, is to pervert them, in the grossest manner. Some, I am sensible, cite these passages of holy Writ to prove that no particular day, under the Gospel, is to be kept as holy time; and no ordinances to be observed. This however is a horrible perversion of them. For the right way to understand Scripture is to attend to the connexion and subject-matter of the discourse. And that St. Paul is only speaking of Jewish days,

meats and ordinances, every one may be fully convinced, who will take his Bible and read them. Because we are released from obligations to observe the Jewish Sabbath, and Jewish ordinances, will it therefore follow that we have no Christian Sabbath, or Gospel-ordinances? Certainly not. Such a conclusion can be deemed just by no man, till he have resolved to pervert all Scripture, which militates against his own particular tenets.—No person, who is willing to receive his principles of religion from Scripture, understood in its plain sense, can believe that the Apostle in Rom. xiv. 5, 6 rejects the Christian Sabbath—when in the whole chapter, he says not a single word about the Christian Sabbath or Christian ordinances.—We proceed to observe—

5thly. THAT Jesus Christ himself distinguished, by peculiar marks of honour, the *first day* of the week—the day of his resurrection. That he intended there should be a *weekly Sabbath*, in his Religion, to be observed as holy time, even as long as the world should stand, is fairly inferred from his mentioning the Sabbath in the manner we find he did, in the following passages. *And he said unto them, the son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.*—But how could he be Lord of the Sabbath, if there were to be no Sabbath in his Religion, or under the Gospel-dispensation? *And he said unto them, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.* How absurd would it be to say, the Sabbath was made for man, for his comfort, rest, and moral good, or his benefit, if there were to be no Sabbath from that time to the end of the world, or under the Christian dispensation?

Speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, and giving his followers the necessary warnings, directions, and instructions, our Lord says, *But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath-day.* But if there were to be no Sabbath-day under his dispensation, his spiritual religion, how comes such a direction as this, from the mouth of our Lord? The destruction of Jerusalem was many years, after his resurrection. And he knew when it would be—how long it was to be after his religion had been instituted. And he directs Christians, his disciples to pray that their flight might not be on the Sabbath day. Did he mean the Jewish Sabbath? If he intended to have no Sabbath in his spiritual religion, why did he not say so? Why has he not intimated or given some hint that there was to be no Sabbath in the Gospel? Here was a fit opportunity for telling his disciples, that there was to be no Sabbath under the Gospel. Did he forget it? It could not be the Jewish Sabbath, for that was done away.

FURTHER, none can deny but that he put marks of peculiar honour on the first *day* of the week, the day of his resurrection. Why did he do this? Had he not a design or meaning in it? With him, as acting in the character of the only Mediator between God and Man, nothing was contingent or accidental. He was pleased to appear, from time to time, to his Apostles, on the *first* day of the week. John xx. 19. *Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them peace be unto you.* After seven days more had

elapsed, on the next *first day* of the week, he appeared again unto his disciples:—he blessed them, and comforted them; verse 26. *After eight days, again, his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst of them, and said peace be unto you.* This was the second time he set apart and honoured the *first day* of the week, the day upon which he arose from the dead, by meeting with his disciples, comforting and blessing them. Upon the *first day* of the week, he poured out his spirit, in such copious effusions, on his Apostles, at Pentecost. That Pentecost was the *first day* of the week, is manifest from Levit. xxiii. 15, 16. On *this day*, all the disciples were of one accord in one place Acts ii. 1. To be of one accord in one place is to be there by agreement. They were not there by accident, but by previous appointment. The day of Pentecost, as the word signifies, is fifty days after the Passover, that is, on the *first day* of the week. They met to perform public worship, and preached. The holy Ghost, in his miraculous powers, was then given to the Apostles, which is called being *baptized with the holy Ghost and with fire.* Moreover, Christ poured out his spirit, in the gift of prophecy, most remarkably, on his favorite disciple and Apostle John, on the *first day* of the week—the *Lord's day*, Rev. i. 10. Now if we allow that Christ had his design in thus honouring, above all other days, the *first day* of the week; we shall be satisfied that he set it apart for religious purposes, as *holy time*, to be observed as a *weekly Sabbath*, in his dispensation, to the end of the world.—But,

6thly. WHAT proves, beyond all doubt, the

institution of the *first-day Sabbath*, is that it was sanctified as a *day* of public worship, by the primitive Churches, under the order of the Apostles. They usually assembled, on that day, for the great purposes of public worship, of celebrating the holy Ordinance of the Supper, of prayer, of preaching, hearing the word, and singing hymns of praise. They came together, on that *day*, by the order of the Apostles. For no man can suppose that the Apostles would administer the Lord's Supper, and preach to them, and attend upon the other acts of public worship, if they, that is, the Churches had presumed to meet, without their order or direction. Besides, no person of common sense, can imagine all this was mere accident—or that the Apostles were rash and heady in it—or did what they did, without the mind and spirit of Christ. It was new times with them. They were in a critical situation. Every word, every action would be noticed. Enemies were on all sides. They would not, therefore, allowing them to have common prudence and discretion, proceed one step, without Christ's order and direction, without the mind of the holy Ghost. And we are safe, and only safe, when in our religious principles and practices, we are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. *And upon the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them.* Here is our warrant for keeping the *first-day Sabbath*. Here is a plain account of its institution presupposed, and that the Jewish Sabbath was changed into the Christian Sabbath.—Who, after this, can deny the institution of a Christian Sabbath? Who can, in the face

of plain scripture, say that the New-Testament knows no *holy* time—no *Lord's day*—no *Sabbath*? We may as well reject any duty and all duty, as to deny and disown the *Lords day*.—Again, works of charity and mercy, are peculiarly works proper to the Sabbath. And in all the Apostolic Churches, the charitable contributions were to be made, on the *first day of the week*, in preference to any other day. But why? plainly, because the Churches were then met together to attend public worship. And they were to make their collections on *that day* by the order of the Apostles 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. *Now concerning the collection for the Saints, as I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.* If then, we say, that all days are *alike holy*, and that no one is to be honoured as *holy*, in a particular manner, we resist the holy Ghost. Christians were ordered by the Apostles to keep as holy time, the *first day* of the week. They were COMMANDED to meet together for public worship. Heb. x. 24, 25. *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, as so much the more as ye see the day approaching.* Upon the *first day* of the week were they to assemble to worship God and honour the Redeemer—to pray—to preach, and to hear the word.—The *first day* of the week is then the Christian Sabbath, and to be sanctified as such, to the end of the world.

7thly. ANOTHER consideration of no small importance to prove that the *first day* of the

week is holy time, and was set apart by Christ to be a weekly Sabbath, to the end of the world, is that, in the New Testament, it is expressly called the *Lord's day*. Rev. i. 10. *For I was in the spirit on the Lord's day*. Very frequently is the Christian Sabbath denominated the *Lord's day*. This is, indeed, the New Testament-name for the day. With Christians, in the early ages of Christianity, it went by this name. And so we now often call it. If it be asked, how do we know that the *Lord's day* means the *first day* of the week? Is not God the proprietor of all time? Is not every day equally his, and every day a Sabbath? Nothing can be a greater departure from reason and common sense than to put such questions. It must be as clear, as the Sun in the firmament, that St. John designed to inform us on what *particular day* he was favoured with those wonderful visions, which are contained in the Apocalypse. But admit that the *Lord's day* meant any day indifferently, one as much as another, then his calling the day on which he received his visions, the *Lord's day*, gives us no information at all concerning the day. It would be saying, I received the visions, on the day, I did receive them. The absurdity of this must be perceived by the weakest mental eye. No man can be so blind, as not to see how ridiculously silly it would have been for the beloved disciple to have talked in this manner. What is intended by the *Lord's day* is exceedingly obvious. We know perfectly well what is intended by it, as well as we can know the import of any word, in the New Testament, or in any ancient language. In the first ages of Christianity, the whole Church used this expression, the *Lord's day*, to denote the *first day* of the week. In all

the writings from the Apostolic times, we find the phrase employed to signify the *first day* of the week. I appeal to all the *Christian Fathers* up to the days of the Apostles ; and to all men who have ever read any antient Church-history ; —or any of the early writers in favour of Christianity, that this is the universal, invariable meaning of the expression the *Lord's day*. The early writers in defence of Christianity, speak of the *Lord's day* in terms of the highest esteem and respect—as *the first of days—the best day—the queen of days*. And the duties and exercises of public worship, they call *LORD'S DAY SOLEMNITIES*. And the very word can import no less, than that the first day of the week was set apart by our Lord, as his Sabbath—as a day to be kept holy—and as distinguished from all other days—to be sanctified to the end of the world, as it weekly returns, as the Christian Sabbath—a day to be devoted wholly to God and religion, and to be spent in the private and public exercises of Religion, except so much of it, as may be taken up in works of necessity and mercy. We say the *Lord's Supper*, to distinguish it from our common meals, an ordinance by which his sufferings and death are commemorated. We say the *Lord's prayer* : to denote by way of eminence one particular prayer—the prayer which he taught his disciples, and which is an excellent model of prayer. And to call every day the *Lord's day* would be as great an absurdity, and abuse of scripture, and of words, as to say that every meal of ours, from day to day, is the *Lord's Supper* : and every prayer we offer to the throne of grace, the *Lord's prayer*. The Sabbath is God's day by way of eminence ; and he has put

his name upon the *first day* of the week to teach us how to spend it, and what use is to be made of it: that it is holy—that it is to be devoted to him—and that we may not do our own work, or find our own pleasure in it.—Where, then, is the person that dares deny the christian Sabbath? That there is really therefore such a day, a time set apart, in which to perform public religious duties is very certain from the *first day* of the week, being called the *Lord's day*.

8thly. A FURTHER argument, that there is really a *Christian Sabbath*, is taken from those passages of scripture, which represent the happiness of heaven as the constant keeping of a Sabbath. Heaven is an eternal Sabbath. It is a state of perfect rest, devotion, bliss; and holiness. A rest which God hath prepared for his people. It was customary among the Jews to represent future happiness under the idea of a Sabbath, and to expound many of those passages in their law, where the Sabbath is mentioned as typifying or prefiguring the heavenly state. The rest of the Sabbath is an emblem of the rest of heaven. The duties of it are to fit us for the employments of heaven. The worship of it, is to prepare us for the exalted services of the temple above, where there will not be one cold heart—one false worshipper—one dissenting voice. *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God*, a keeping of a Sabbath. But where would be the propriety of representing heavenly happiness, as an eternal Sabbathism—an eternal rest, if there were no Sabbaths to be observed on earth by Christians? None can suppose that the joys of a blessed immortality would be represented by an old abrogated Jewish rite. But if there be no

Sabbath under the Gospel, or day of sacred rest WEEKLY to be observed, they are so represented. And to say that under the New-Testament every day is a Sabbath, is to assert not only what is very unreasonable, but to confound language; and to affirm what is altogether contradictory to the whole New-Testament.

9thly. THE last argument, which will be urged to prove the reality of a Christian Sabbath, is that the whole Christian Church, with very few exceptions, have kept the *first day* of the week, as holy time. However differing in other things; and they have differed very widely on many important points, still the different communions of God's people, from age to age, since the time of the Apostles, have been intirely agreed in this, that there is a *weekly Sabbath* under the Gospel dispensation, to be kept holy unto the Lord, and to be devoted to religious worship. This must satisfy every candid mind which has no prejudice, that the spiritual religion of Jesus Christ hath a *holy Sabbath*, even were there no old-Testament-Sabbath, or were the fourth commandment expunged from the decalogue. That the fourth commandment is of perpetual obligation, and never was abolished has been the common belief; and is founded on arguments, which can never be overthrown. Men may cavil at and object against them. But it is one thing to cavil at, and another fairly to answer an argument. It is one of the ten commandments. And we may as well take away any other of them, or all of them, as this. It is of a moral nature. And what is of a moral nature is of perpetual obligation. It was, with the rest, given by God himself from Mount Sinai

amidst thunder and lightening, fire and smoke. Moses, in all his directions to the people of Israel, speaks of it in terms of the highest respect, as a branch of the moral law.—The prophets, all place it upon a level with other parts of the laws of virtue, and duties of morality. And it would be exceedingly improper to insert a merely ceremonial or temporary law, in the list of precepts universally allowed to be moral—and of perpetual obligation, and to speak of them all as **THE LAW**—the **MORAL LAW** of the ten commandments. Thus evident is it that the fourth commandment is not to be erased from the ten. And the substance or essence of it, which is, that the seventh part of time is to be kept holy unto **God**, hath been in all the ages of the Christian Church strenuously maintained. In all countries, where the Gospel hath been published, we find from ecclesiastical history, that all Christians, even from the times of the Apostles, a few excepted, have observed the *first-day-Sabbath*. That this is fact, may be adduced as proofs, all the writings which speak of the doctrines and practices of the Church, of the *first—second—and third* centuries. This will not be denied. It is asked, then, what reason can be assigned why, in the primitive purity of the Christian Religion, the *first* day of the week was observed as the Christian Sabbath? How could this be, if it were not an order of the Apostles—if Jesus Christ instituted no Sabbath? For an **ORDER** of his Apostles is equivalent to his own **EXPRESS** institution. Is it supposable that any ambitious and aspiring Christians would, in the times next to the Apostles, set apart one day of the week as a Sabbath? Would they venture upon such an usurpation? And, before Christianity was

corrupted by designing men, is it possible that the *first day* of the week should be *universally* kept as holy time, had not the inspired Apostles set the example? If there had been no Apostolic practice and example in this case, if the Gospel knew nothing of such a day, as we call the Christian Sabbath, the first observers of it were introducing an innovation—an important innovation. And could the innovation universally be adopted? And no one be found to object against it; or to raise a cry against such a piece of will-worship; no tongue, in the strains of pious eloquence to bear testimony against it—no pen be drawn to transmit to posterity a conscientious protest? Can any reasonable person believe this? But it may be asked, did not many *innovations*, and *superstitious rites creep* into the Christian system, *gradually, imperceptibly*—and *without opposition*? Were not the abominations of the Romish Church, brought in, in this manner? And did not some of these *infallible Fathers*, in the papal chair, ordain the Sabbath; as they did innumerable feasts, and fast-days? Certainly not, for the *first day* of the week was observed as a *weekly Sabbath*, six hundred years, before Antichrist arose: observed in all countries, where the Gospel was known: among all denominations: universally even in the age next to the Apostles. This cannot be said of any *innovations* which were ever made.—We then come to this conclusion, that the *first day* of the week has been observed, as the Christian Sabbath, ever since the VERY DAY in which Christ arose from the dead—in all ages—in all countries—in all communions, a few only excepted. A mere handful of professing Christians, hold to the seventh-day or Jewish Sabbath, and from that sin-

gularity are called seventh-day-baptists. Here and there one likewise in one place and another, have called in question the *morality* of the Sabbath.—Can it be possible for any one to believe that the whole christian world, even in the days of the Apostles, and in the purest times, during the long period of seventeen hundred years, have been in so gross and abominable an Error, as keeping the *first day* of the week as holy time, if the Gospel be a stranger to any such institution, as the Christian Sabbath?—When I use the terms GROSS AND ABOMINABLE ERROR, I do not use too strong terms. For a most gross and abominable Error it is, indeed, if there be no institution of the *first day* Sabbath in the Christian Religion, or what is tantamount to it. We are, in this case, guilty of will-worship—of superstition—of instituting in Christ's kingdom a day for religious worship, unknown to the AUTHOR of our salvation. Vilely presumptuous should we be to do this. Did I believe that Jesus Christ had no Sabbath day in his Gospel, I should shudder with horror to look back on the long period of seventeen hundred years, and see almost the whole christian world, in all countries, of all communions, and in the purest times in the Apostles days, plunged into so great and dreadful an Error—guilty of making laws in Christ's kingdom—of usurping his kingly office—and of tearing from him, his sceptre.—Besides all this, how often hath a gracious and merciful God, blessed the Christian Sabbath: poured out, in rich abundance, his sanctifying spirit, on his worshipping Assemblies: comforted, enlightened—instructed—and animated those, who have conscientiously observed the Sabbath? But if it be not a day of his own appointment,

would it not be countenancing human inventions and innovations in Religion, so often to have displayed his power and grace on that day—so often to have blessed it for the consolation of his people, and their edification?—*It hath indeed been one of the chief means of preserving Religion in the world to this day.*

I have now finished the argument in favour of the institution of the Christian Sabbath. And that you, my hearers, may feel that conviction, which it ought to produce; and that justice may be done to it, I will very concisely recapitulate what has been illustrated, and present it to you in one view. The supreme Being, at the close of Creation, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, set apart for religious purposes, a seventh portion of time. And the day thus sanctified and blessed, and which some suppose was the first day of the week, but I conceive not upon sufficient grounds, was most probably observed, from Adam to Moses. The original institution of the Sabbath was renewed by Moses, ratified by the fourth commandment, and observed most strictly by the antient Church of God from Moses to Christ. A greater obligation lies upon Christians to keep a weekly Sabbath in memory of the work of Redemption, than on the Israelites to keep one in memory of their deliverance from slavery and oppression in Egypt. We are expressly told, in prophesy, that a Sabbath was to be observed in Gospel times. The Jewish Sabbath was abolished, or the seventh day Sabbath was changed into the Christian or first day Sabbath. Jesus Christ distinguished, with peculiar marks of honor, the first day of the week, the day of his resurrection.—The first day of the

week was sanctified, as a day of public worship, by the primitive Churches under the order of the Apostles.—The first day of the week is expressly called, in the New-Testament, the *Lord's day*, the common appellation of the Christian Sabbath. The happiness of heaven is represented, as the constant keeping of a Sabbath.—The law of the Sabbath, is a moral law, and as such perpetually binding. The whole Christian Church, from the days of the Apostles, have, a few only excepted, kept the first day of the week as holy time. God hath, from age to age, blessed the Sabbath, or first day of the week, by the communications of his grace and spirit on that day. No men or body of men could appoint a day for public worship, without usurping in Christ's kingdom, to be weekly observed as a Sabbath.—No human appointments or inventions are admissible in the Christian dispensation—and the Christian Sabbath has been one of the principal means of preserving, in the world, to this day our holy religion.—These are the reasons why all Christians are to observe, as holy time, the first day of the week. These reasons appear to me abundantly sufficient to justify us in the religious observation of the Christian Sabbath, as it is usually called, and have done so to thousands of pious Christians and Ministers much wiser and better than myself, even to almost the **WHOLE CHRISTIAN WORLD**. That man who denies what, all the wise and good, great and learned—all Christians in all ages, deem sacred, and fully contained in the holy scriptures, had need to look well to his arguments. He ought, in all modesty and diffidence, to ask himself, “who—and what am I, “that I should rise up against, and condemn the “**WHOLE CHRISTIAN WORLD**, a few only excepted?”

PERHAPS it may not be improper here, to pay a moment's attention to a question which has been sometimes asked, as an objection to the Christian Sabbath: it is this, why have we not an *express* and *formal* account of the abolition of the seventh-day or Jewish Sabbath, and the institution of the Christian or first day Sabbath in the room of it? In a point of such acknowledged importance, would it not be reasonable to expect some very *express* and minute instruction? It would be sufficient to reply, who are we, that we should undertake to say how minutely or *expressly* a point should be revealed; or that we should dictate to infinite Wisdom what kind of information to give us? But it is apprehended there are very obvious reasons why we have not a minute and explicit account of the change of the Jewish into the Christian Sabbath. Every thing in the Gospel dispensation is gradually opened. Consideration is had to the weaknesses and prejudices of the Jews. Christ, with admirable wisdom, adapted his instructions to the minds of his hearers: opening one thing after another, in a happy succession, as they could bear it, or comprehend him. So did his Apostles. And they followed a perfect example. It is sufficient, entirely so, if, in the end, we have COMPLETE and FULL instruction. And that we have on the subject before us, I trust is clearly proved by the foregoing reasoning.

HAVING finished what I intended on this important subject, I shall make the application, in the words of a late amiable writer—"If, says he, addressing himself to people on their abuse of the Sabbath," you will proceed in profaning it, give me leave to say you will be more inexcusable

than ever. You are answerable to God for your contempt of his institutions, and all the injury you hereby do, to your own souls, to the souls of others, and to the credit and interest of Religion. May I not hope, some of you are resolved, never more to abuse or mis-spend sacred time? that you and your houses will more carefully sanctify the Sabbath, and more steadily serve the Lord? Give me leave to add one general remark on the whole subject of Sabbath-Sanctification. In order to judge of the character of my acquaintance, and their real state towards God, I have always observed and enquired, *how they kept the Sabbath*. I look upon the religious observation of it, as a good proof of their piety; and a neglect of it, as a melancholy proof, that they are insincere in heart, whatever they may profess; and by taking in the whole of their conduct, as far as it hath come to my knowledge, I think I have not been deceived in my sentiments concerning them. Those that have strictly observed the Sabbath, have been, in other respects, *the best Christians*: those that have been careless herein, have shown by other instances in their behaviour, that they have not *had the root of the matter in them*. So that upon the whole, I must be of the same mind, with that pious Divine, Mr. Bolton, "it is a thousand to one that a strict observer of the Lord's day is sincere towards God; and as great odds, that a Sabbath-breaker, however he may deceive himself, is a *hypocrite*."—I conclude this discourse and subject with the words of Nehemiah, after he had described his zealous attempts to promote the sanctification of the Sabbath, *Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.* AMEN.



DISCOURSE XVII.

The Parable of the Tares.

M A T T H E W xiii. 24—31.

Another Parable put he forth unto them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field, but while men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the Tares also. So the Servants of the householder, came and said unto him, sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field, from whence then hath it Tares? And he said unto them an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest, I will say to the reapers; gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.

THERE was something, in the manner in which our blessed Saviour taught his hearers, peculiarly pleasing and inimitably beautiful. Being the great prophet in his Church, he reveals unto us the will of God for our Salvation, not only in a clear, but in the fittest manner.

He spake as never man did, not only as the Religion which he preached was more heavenly and divine, than the world was ever before made acquainted with, but as the power and force with which he spake exceeded all that is human. *And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* His address was no doubt the perfection of propriety. His words were not calculated by any splendor to create surprize, but, being well chosen and plain, were adapted to carry conviction to the conscience, and to move the heart. He had, as is very apparent and is generally remarked, an admirable talent at moralizing and spiritualizing upon incidents and objects around him. And he did it, not with the formal airs of affectation, or appearing to invite others to take notice of his superiour sanctity—or to come and see how good he was. It was perfectly easy for him to converse on divine subjects. Whenever a fit opportunity or occasion offered to diffuse religious instruction, he failed not to embrace it. And when he undertook to illustrate any divine truth or doctrine, he seemed to be at home, and in his element—about his proper work and business. He showed that he was a teacher come from God by the heavenly truths which he delivered, as well as miracles which he wrought. He opened the nature of his kingdom, and of the Gospel by natural and easy similitudes. His Parables are well chosen and happily expressed. They will indeed bear the closest and most critical examination. They have been admired by the best judges, and will be admired as long as there shall be genius, learning, or taste in the world.

The greatest scholars have been the most pleased. And, the fact is, the Religion which he taught would be worthy of the attention of all, were it considered in no other view than as a friend to peace, literature, and civil happiness. For it can never long consist with barbarism and general ignorance among a people. Ignorance is so far from being the parent of Christian devotion, that when very great, it totally destroys it. The bitter and implacable foes, therefore, of the Christian Religion, who wish its utter extirpation from the earth, and exert themselves mightily to accomplish their wish by impious scoffs and low raillery, will never be able to succeed, till they have banished learning. There may be superstition, where science is gone, but no true Religion. And the more ignorant and uninformed a people, there will superstition reign in horrors proportionally greater.

THE Chapter, out of which our text is taken, is full of the most judicious and instructive Parables or similitudes.—There is no other Chapter in the New Testament, so filled up with them; this being altogether composed of them. It contains eight in number—that of the Sower and his seed, which our Lord himself at the desire of his disciples expounds;—that of the Tares, which he likewise explains;—that of the grain of mustard seed;—that of the leaven put into meal;—that of the treasure hid in the field;—that of the merchant-man seeking goodly pearls;—and that of the net which was cast into the Sea, and gathered of every kind.—Our Saviour retiring from the house in which he was, went to the side of the Sea of Tiberias, which lay near his own Country. Great multitudes

were collected about him to hear his doctrine and learn his character. They pressed so near him, that he thought it most convenient to enter into a ship, which lay there, that he might be in better circumstances to address the mixed multitude, who stood on the shore, and who were all attention to every word which he spake to them. He, as a wise instructor, adapted his discourse to their several capacities and employments. Some of them, probably, were husbandmen, others merchants, and others fishermen. He taught them, heavenly doctrines, by taking Parables from their respective occupations, or from those things, with which they could not but be most intimately and familiarly acquainted.—Parables are representations or similitudes taken from objects of sense, which are plain and obvious, to illustrate and impress upon the mind, things spiritual and divine. And commonly there is one *leading idea*, which the speaker or writer has in view, to explain and enforce. The circumstances in the Parable are to be accommodated to this *one* or *principal thought*. If we would rightly understand our Lord's Parables, we must not lose sight of the remark now made. Infinite mischief has been done to religion by compelling every small or minute circumstance of a parable to speak forth a distinct idea, or doctrine.—

IN the subsequent discourse, my intention is to expound the Parable of the tares, or to make some observations upon it, of a practical nature, and such as, it is apprehended, are just.

THE word *Tares* signifies any noxious and hurtful weeds or plants, which spring up among, or mingle with the rich and precious grain, and not any one particular and distinct weed, or poi-

sonous plant to the exclusion of all others. All know how detrimental to the Crop such weeds or poisonous plants are. They take away nourishment from the precious grain, and render it less vigorous while it grows. They diminish the harvest in proportion to their number and strength. Accordingly they are a nuisance in the field, grieve the heart, and in the same measure as they prevail, cut off the hopes of the husbandman. And the more fertile the soil, the more luxuriant will be their growth. They make the labour, which hath been bestowed upon the field, of none effect. And it is always with deep regret, that man beholds lost labour, or unaccomplished exertions.

In the Parable of the Tares now before us, we have several truths of very great importance to us both as individuals, and as collected into a Church-State, as minister and people, speaker and hearer.—

In the first place, the kingdom of heaven, in this Parable, is the Gospel preached, or the dispensation of the doctrines of Religion.—The state of things under the Gospel is very often, in the stile of our Lord, called his kingdom, or the kingdom of heaven. It is presumed no arguments will be needful to prove that the kingdom of heaven here means the State of things under the Gospel-dispensation. This, it is well known, is the common meaning of the expression. In the primitive Apostolic times Christianity had two names of nearly the same import, the kingdom of God—and the kingdom of heaven. These two phrases were brought into common use by John the Baptist, who came to introduce the Messiah, under the signature, of the voice of one

crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord.—In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He took the phrase from the following passage in the prophecy of Daniel. *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.* There is an obvious propriety in calling the State of things under the Gospel-dispensation *the kingdom of God*. It is from him as the original source. It aims at his glory ultimately in all its parts. When finished, it will be given up to him, and HE be all and in all. He, from all Eternity by his unsearchable wisdom, devised the illustrious plan of salvation which it contains. He from motives of overflowing goodness reveals it. He by his power will make it successful. His son, the Messiah, is the prime Minister in it. His spirit sanctifies, and gathers subjects into it.—*Inward Religion* is also happily described by the name of the *kingdom of God*. It is God's kingdom in the soul: is heavenly in its nature: is heavenly in its tendency—and will issue in all the riches of heavenly glory. It comes down from God, in a very important sense, for it is the wisdom that is from above; and is therefore a divine principle, and when completed, it will terminate in God, in the enjoyment and beatific vision of him, who is the sum of all existence and blessedness.

THE sower of the seed is our Lord himself, and those, who are in all the ages of his Religion or Gospel kingdom, commissioned and employed

by him. *The seed sowed* is the word of the kingdom. During our Saviour's personal Ministry, he was assiduous and active in his divine work, patient and persevering under all discouragements and want of success. Herein he was a perfect pattern to all the servants of his household, who are called to minister in holy things, or to sow the seed of the word. That he has ministering servants, and that it is his will there should be, to sow the seed of the word, and to dispense holy ordinances, is as plain as any one principle of his Religion, and cannot be disputed by any, if they would be self-consistent, who seriously believe in divine Revelation. While our Lord was performing his own personal Ministry, he met with great and unjust opposition. He was reviled and abused by those, whom he came to save, whose good he sought with attentive care, and to whom he displayed all the sweetness of a tender and benevolent mind. Very often, indeed, he saw the seed sowed without the desired fruit, and all his exertions to render man happy, repaid with cruel ingratitude. But he went on with his work, as a divine Teacher, with a fortitude, which we cannot help admiring, and which ought to be continually in our eye, as an object of imitation.—*He that soweth the good seed is the son of man.*

In the next place, another observation upon the Parable of the Tares, is that we can have no PURE CHURCH on Earth. It is not necessary for a Church, in order to be the true Church of Christ, to be *pure*. If so, we never could have a true Church, for there never was a *pure* one yet, nor ever will be, as long as man is imperfect and un-

able to lift up the veil, and see what is in the heart, infallibly. There will always be Tares among the wheat, false among true professors—the hypocritical among the sincere, the vile with the precious. The field where the seed is sowed is the world: the good seed are the Children of the kingdom, but the Tares are the Children of the wicked one. By a *pure Church* is meant a collection of real Saints without one hypocrite, or false-hearted professor. The invisible Church which Christ, at the last day, will present in triumph to his Father, will be *pure* or spotless, in the highest sense; there will be no hypocrites in it, or any remains of sin. Speaking of this true invisible Church, says the Apostle, *that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it, unto himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.* Nothing unclean or impure can be admitted into the New-Jerusalem or Church of the first born, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. *And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.* An unanswerable proof against the notion of a *pure Church*, is that none can know the heart. It is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? It is one of the prerogatives of the omniscient God to look into the hidden mysteries of the heart. Before him all things are open. The darkness and the light are both alike with him. His eye pervades the whole immensity of space. It can penetrate the thickest veil of hypocrisy. No fair disguises can screen us from his all-seeing view. *All the*

ways of a man are right in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits. He searches the heart, and tries the reins of the Children of men. Before we can have a *pure Church*, we must not only know our own hearts, so as never to be deceived or mistaken about them; but we must likewise know the hearts of others. But the Psalmist exclaims, *who can know his errors, cleanse thou me from secret faults.* And he prefers to his Maker the following petition: *Search, me O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* In order to have a *pure Church*, those who admit persons to Church order and privileges, must have the power of *discerning spirits*, or they cannot shut the door against hypocrites and deceivers. But this power none have. It was peculiar to the Apostles, and to them only upon some special occasions, For Peter when he baptized Simon the Sorcerer, believed him to be sincere. He knew not the baseness and perfidy of his heart. None of the Apostolic Churches were *pure* in the sense now under consideration, designing and hollow-hearted men there always will be, among the sincere, as a trial of their graces—of their faith, patience, and meekness. There was a Judas among the Apostles. One traitor was found even in our Lord's own select family. He professed no doubt, as much zeal and love to his Master, as the rest of the disciples. His other fellow disciples, who were with him all the time, never once suspected his sincerity. So artfully did he assume the appearance of a friend to the cause, in which they were all embarked. But yet he was all the while insincere. He became an Apostate from the truth, and betrayed his Master

with the token of friendship. His name is odious. And has come down to us, loaded with infamy. And it will still descend as an epithet of the most finished treachery.

How unreasonable then to look for perfection in any, or a *pure* Church! Untold mischief has been done to Religion by the pretenders to a *pure* Church. They usually divide and break up the peace of Churches. Censoriousness occupies the place of Charity. Meekness, humility, condescension, and brotherly love fall before a mad and intemperate zeal, self-confidence, ignorance, and high pretensions to superior sanctity.

THOUGH no *pure* Church is to be seen on earth, and the idea of it, be a vain and delusive one, yet all the real friends of the Gospel ought to strive to have the greatest purity in doctrines—in worship—in discipline, in ordinances, and conduct. That Church is the purest, which is the most scriptural in its doctrines, ordinances and worship, discipline, and manners. Churches should take the greatest care to be built upon the only foundation, the order and faith of the Gospel, rejecting all human inventions and traditions, having the word of God for their only rule of faith and practice.

How happy would it be, if we had no Tares to defile and dishonour the cause of God, and to injure the precious grain! They often spring up, where good seed had been sown and where least expected. Every thing on earth is changing. Misfortunes and evils arise from quarters, where comfort and happiness were most looked for. While we deplore the mutability of all human things, we may learn the most useful lessons; and

one of the most useful is the folly of trusting our own hearts, or the stability of others. Tares are found sowed in the field. *In the parable of the sower*, the seed means the doctrines of the Gospel. *In the Parable of the Tares*, the seed sown seems to mean pious and upright members of the Gospel-kingdom; or *secondly*, truth, as truth is instrumental in saving and enlightening the soul. The *Tares*, mean then, not hypocrites only, but errors, heresies, and divisions among the professing people of God. One of the clearest proofs of human depravity is the proneness of man to wander into the wilderness of error and delusion. Though conscience and reason be on the side of what is right and just in doctrine and practice, yet the corrupt passions or evil dispositions of the heart lead to all that is wrong. The good man drops tears of grief over abounding errors and immoralities—the want of union, of charity—of peace in the Church of God. We do not see eye to eye. Before there will be a full uniformity of opinions on the doctrines of Religion, we must wait till the openings of celestial day, when that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect is come. But it is exceedingly comfortable to think, however many tares there are in the Church here below, there will be none in the Church above in heaven. No enemy will gain entrance there, to sow them. In the Church triumphant will be no tares, or errors, or evils. In its harmony there will be no interruption. In its doctrines no dissent. In its worship no coldness. And in its peace no end. But here in the Church militant, there will be hatred, variance, strife, hypocrisy, and errors. Tares will infest the field. And it is worthy of particular notice, they are always sowed by an enemy, open or

concealed. *But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed Tares among the wheat, and went his way. The enemy that sowed them, says our Saviour, is the Devil: He does it by his agents. In the original it is an envious man: one who hates Religion; and the order and peace, purity and harmony of the Church; one who hates Christ and his ordinances and doctrines, and wishes to make mischief and spread confusion. The enemy comes into the field and is active and zealous to sow Tares, what may corrupt and poison, the grain, or hurt the harvest. The enemy is sly and concealed in doing his mischief—he came in the night, while the men slept, sowed his Tares and went away. The servants are astonished when, in process of time, they discover the evil. But when the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the Tares also. In nature's soil evil seed soon springs up. And so it does when sown in the garden of the Lord.—False doctrines or errors soon spread, being agreeable to the vicious inclinations of the heart.—Often what is most pleasing and promising at first turns out, to our great mortification, far otherwise. When we hoped for a plentiful harvest, and the ground was highly cultivated, tares appeared also. This teaches us to rest our hope in him, who changes not; and whose favour is life. How artful is the enemy of our souls, and of the peace and welfare of the Gospel-kingdom! He is full of devices—of subtle devices. And his instruments and agents to carry on his designs, are usually chosen with skill.*

In the third place, We notice in this parable of the Tares, the great tenderness and care of the Householder for the precious grain. A rash pro-

posal was made by his servants to go and gather up the Tares. They were honest in this proposal, and doubtless viewed it best to root out the Tares immediately. But though the proposal were well meant, yet it was mis-timed. We admire the honesty and faithfulness of the servants. But they could not perform what they were willing to undertake. It is impossible to keep hypocrites, false professors, pretended friends, errors and heresies—delusions and false religions, visions and impulses from mingling with the Children of the kingdom, or to prevent the tares from being among the wheat. *So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field, from whence then hath it Tares? He said unto them an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou, then, that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.* Thus wonderful is the tendernefs of Christ for the pious and upright. He dearly values his friends and the truth. He will preserve and bless them, and in due time own it. He always had his Church in the world, and always will have. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it—No antient or modern heresy or superstition shall destroy it. They may injure it. They may exceedingly distress and persecute it. But no weapon formed against Zion, however much at present it may, shall eventually prosper. There is no enchantment against Israel, or divination against Jacob. Error may come in like a flood—the love of many may wax cold, and infidelity may diffuse, far and wide, its poison.—But the cause of God will live and remain, in spite of all persecution or opposition from Earth or hell. The wheat must

not be rooted up. Jesus Christ will protect and defend his true Church, in the darkest times. If tares be sown while men sleep, they shall not be permitted to destroy the valuable grain. "While Ministers, while Magistrates, while Parents, says one, sleep, the enemy sows tares."

In the fourth place, another observation which I shall make upon the Parable before us, is that a period of separation between *the tares and the wheat* is fixed by our Lord. He here gives to all his people, in all ages and places, most needful and excellent instruction and counsel, in their Church state. A rule is here laid before them of prudence, meekness, and wisdom. No rash expedients have his countenance. No undue severity is admissible by him. As he was all meekness and benevolence himself, so he presses, with all the weight of his authority and ardour of persuasion, the same temper upon all his disciples. They are to be meek and lowly in heart as he was. *Judge not*, says he, *that ye be not judged*.—Be more ready to take the beam out of your own eye, than the mote out of your neighbour's eye. Let a bitter censorious spirit never be exercised. Condescension, forbearance, humility and meekness are the temper of the Gospel. But we are not to be indifferent about truth, and duty. We are to *hold fast* the form of *sound words*, the Apostles doctrines;—and to *contend earnestly* for the faith once delivered to the Saints:—to be firm and courageous in our Lord's work. But we are not to go and gather up the tares to the danger of the wheat—both must stand till the harvest. A day is appointed, in which exact justice shall be distributed, and a perfect discrimination will be made of characters

and principles. The day is that of the harvest. And the harvest is the end of the world. *Let both grow together until the harvest. And in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. The harvest is the end of the world: the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire: so shall it be in the end of the world. The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity! and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.* There is an inimitable beauty and grandeur in this account of the end of the righteous and wicked, in the day of judgment.

OUR blessed Saviour, so much disregarded by impious men—some denying his divinity—some his humanity—some his doctrines—some his spirit—and some his ordinances, will preside in that awful solemnity. Angels will be his attendants. They will be employed as agents in carrying on the important transactions of that day. The judge will appear in all the majesty of God. For he will come in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels. All things will be brought to light. The hidden things of dishonesty will be in open day. Such forms of guilt will be revealed, as shall strike horror into the mind. Clouded characters will clear up. The rotten hearts of false professors will be seen—Errors will be unmasked—and all characters pass in review. A full and perfect separation will be made by him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire. We cannot make the separation between the tares and the

wheat. It must be left with him, who is the head of the Church, to dispose of all, according to their works.—And he shall render unto every man according to his works.—

THE last observation to be made on this Parable, is the different fate of the *tares and wheat*; the righteous and wicked. Truth and duty will be at last triumphant, and honoured with a glorious reward. Error and all evil will be frowned upon and rejected. Nothing but Virtue will, in the final result of things, be recompensed. All vice, in all its multiplied forms, will be condemned. With the wicked there shall be weeping and wailing forever. They must be cast into a furnace of fire. They will be rendered as miserable as they have made themselves sinful. The more vile the more miserable. The greater their turpitude of heart and the more their sins of life, the heavier will be their condemnation. All things that offend, and that work iniquity shall be gathered out of the kingdom of Christ. The angels will be honoured with the office of making the final separation. And the righteous will be rewarded forever, and the wicked will be punished forever. Our Lord solemnly affirms this. And we may believe him with all possible safety. The wheat shall be gathered into the barn, and the tares be burnt with fire—be always miserable. *The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom ALL THINGS THAT OFFEND, and which do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*—strong expressions to denote remorse and anguish. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. That there will be as wide a difference in the situation of persons, in anothe-

er world, as there is in their moral characters in this, is altogether consonant to the dictates of sober reason, and is clearly affirmed in the following words, *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner. But he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* If such language as this can be explained away, so as to get rid of the doctrine of the perpetuity of future misery; any could, which might be used. Besides, it is perfectly consistent with reason, that a discrimination should be eternally made, between Virtue and Vice, right and wrong, between the precious and vile. If there should not, it would infringe upon all our ideas of justice. It is, of course, unreasonable to imagine there will not be such a discrimination. The judge of all the earth will do, all that is right to be done; and nothing but what is so. The wicked, therefore, will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.—Can any thing be more absurd in itself, or contrary to reason and nature, or repugnant to revelation, in its whole drift, than to suppose no difference will be made by the Lord of the Universe, between the *tares and the wheat*—that both will be gathered into one place—and no separation be made.—Certainly there is not. How unaccountable is it, that any, while they hold to the divinity of the scriptures, should affect to believe that all the human race, the wicked as well as righteous, are at last to be admitted to the joys of a blissful immortality?—After persons have cast off a belief of the scripture, we are not to be surpris'd that they should embrace any error—or even deny a future state of rewards and punishment, and adopt, as one article of their Creed, the mortality of the soul. For when persons leave

the plain truths and principles of the Gospel, they are on dangerous ground, and no conjecture can be made, how far they may be permitted to proceed in delusion, and vain imaginations, in error and vice—they may not stop till they have landed in absolute scepticism—or atheism. Hence we are exhorted to be *stedfast*—to be *immoveable*—to *abound* in the work of the Lord. Hence too we are cautioned against instability of principle—*Meddle not with them that are given to change.*

HAVING made the observations upon the Parable of the tares, which seemed to be naturally suggested from it, it remains only to close the discourse, with some practical improvement.

AND our subject may very properly put us upon a close and impartial examination of our hearts and ways, that we may know to our satisfaction, whether we may rank in the number of the Children of the kingdom, the precious grain. The field is the world: the good seed are the Children of the kingdom, belong to Christ's kingdom on earth, and are heirs of his kingdom of glory, but the tares are the Children of the wicked one. In all our inquiries into the state and temper of our hearts, we are carefully to guard against self-flattery. Man loves to think well of himself, and ill of others. In general, he is confident that he is right in principles and conduct, and that others, who differ from him, are wrong. Pride, self-will, and sinister motives have too much influence over all, both in forming their principles, and regulating their conduct. A fair outside, and a specious appearance catch many, who have not patience to investigate truth and duty, or dis-

cernment to descry danger, or to detect the insidious arts of the designing. *He saith unto them an enemy hath done this.* We are to be upon our guard, lest we be led away by the enemy of our souls, and to see that we be true, sincere, and upright—that we act upon pure and worthy motives—that we keep near to the Saviour of the world in duty—that we abide in his doctrines—that we live up to his laws, then shall we have the comforts of his spirit, and at last, the rewards of faithful followers will be conferred upon us.—What great tenderness has he for all his true followers, the Children of the kingdom. Whatever evils are permitted to happen, he will watch and guard them—will protect them in the midst of all dangers, however alarming, and support them in the darkest hours. He has an eye to pity them, and an arm to save them. He is the good shepherd that giveth his life for the sheep. And his sheep know his voice, and a stranger they will not follow.—

2ndly. WE learn from what hath been said, how restless and uneasy the enemy of God and man is, except he be plotting evil. *The tares are the Children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the Devil.* He is as a roaring Lion going about seeking whom he may devour. His devices are as subtle as numerous. Concealed and out of sight, he employs his cunning to ensnare and beguile souls—to ruin the incautious—to sow tares, errors and heresies, false principles and divisions. *And while men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.* He is ever active to do all the mischief, in his power, to the truth, to religion, and to the cause of God. His policy is deep laid. The factors or agents whom he em-

ploy's, are commonly selected with great skill. He is a liar from the beginning ; and his attacks are generally begun with misrepresenting the truth, and varnishing over error. His kingdom, indeed, has always been supported, in the world, by delusion and Idolatry—BY IMPULSES, OR SUPPOSED DIVINE IMPRESSIONS upon the soul ; changing himself into an angel of light, is of all others, his most subtle device, and the most successful. People are usually seduced from the right ways of the Lord, by being made to believe, either by corrupt writings, or by artful deceivers, that error is truth—that superstition is real piety, and enthusiasm a more spiritual way of serving God—In days of prevailing error and irreligion it is a rich consolation to the serious mind, that God reigns : that the enemy of souls can carry his corrupt designs against piety and Virtue, no further than he is permitted. The wrath of man shall praise God, and the remainder thereof he will restrain. Wise ends are to be answered in all events that take place, in divine Providence. While it is our duty to bewail the evils we behold, our vigilance, and prayerful exertions should be awakened, lest we be led away with the error of the wicked.—

To conclude all, Let us be persuaded to make it our chief concern in life to practise all the great and interesting duties of Religion :—to avoid all vicious and evil courses :—to be preserved from errors :—to cultivate the benevolence and Charity of the Gospel :—to be stedfast in our adherence to him, who died for us :—and to abound in the work of the Lord, that so we may be the Children of the kingdom, and with the righteous shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom of our heavenly Father.—

DISCOURSE XVIII

No immediate inspiration or miraculous teachings of the divine spirit since the Canon of scripture was closed, or since the Apostolic age.

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 8.

CHARITY never faileth; but whether there be propheties they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away.

FEW things have been productive of more confusion and mischief, in society as connected with religion or in Churches, than a pretension to the immediate inspiration or miraculous teachings of the divine spirit, or to a special intimacy with the invisible world, in the ordinary ages of Christianity. But strange as it may seem, some have risen up in every age and almost or quite every Christian Country, who have pretended to an immediate call from heaven, and immediate inspiration of the holy Ghost. The same call and the same inspiration or miraculous influence precisely as the Apostles, though perhaps, not in so full a measure. Such pretenders too have never failed to collect followers; some more and some less. As the consequence,

they have broken up the regular and stated worship of God, the peace and order of society as far as they prevailed: have made divisions and separations in Religion: and been the direct cause of errors, hatred, animosity, confusion, and impiety. To compute the degree of mischief done to the best of all causes, that of Virtue and piety, by such pretenders, is beyond man's power. For nothing, like this, tends so directly to destroy all rational piety, and to throw a discredit on the Redeemer's interest and kingdom.—— What will be attempted, therefore, in the present discourse, will be to prove, by clear and conclusive arguments from scripture, reason, and fact, that there has been no immediate inspiration or miraculous teachings of the divine spirit since the Canon of scripture was closed, or since the Apostolic days.—Then some objections will be invalidated;—and some cautions offered to prevent any abuse of the subject;—After which a very brief improvement will follow, and close the whole.

THE chief thing intended, is to prove by clear and conclusive arguments from scripture, reason, and fact, that there has been since the Apostolic age, no immediate inspiration, or miraculous teachings of the divine spirit.

THIS subject is of high importance in regard to the interests of morality, as well as of Religion. For all pretences to heavenly Visions—dreams—immediate impulses from the holy Ghost—miraculous gifts—direct and special communications with the world of spirits—and messages from the exalted Mediator usually terminate to the disadvantage of Morality, as well as dishonour of pure Religion. Whatever in-

deed injures the one, equally injures the other also. Because both are most intimately connected. There can be no Religion of the right kind without morality. And Morality, which is not supported and strengthened by religious principles, is not to be depended upon.—What I have to prove is that all pretence, in the ordinary ages of Christianity, to any immediate inspiration or miraculous influence of the divine spirit is ill-founded—can be nothing short of gross delusion and imposture—is mere fanaticism*—and the surest mark, which can be exhibited, of false Teachers, and mistaken notions of Religion.—Before I proceed to the proof of this, it may be necessary, in order to prevent misapprehension and all wrong ideas of the subject, to state, in as plain words as can be used, what kind of divine aid or influence the Christian Minister, and the people of God may look for and hope to enjoy; and what they actually experience. That the good man, whether Minister of the Gospel, or private Christian may depend on, and hope for the gracious assistances, or kind influences of the holy Ghost, in the way of means, is certainly a scripture-doctrine: a great support and rich consolation in times of distress, darkness, and doubts, and can be witnessed to by joy-

* WHEN I use the words fanaticism and enthusiasm in this or any of these discourses—I do not mean to have implied in the most distant manner any censure or dislike of the warm and rational fervours of Piety, or deep and serious engagedness about the all important concerns of Religion. This is sometimes the implication. When it is; a real injury is done to the cause of God and truth.—On this point, I am much pleased with the following remark of Archbishop SECKER, Vol. 1. Sermon x. page 228. “It is an extensively mischievous practice, when men join in loose harrangues against enthusiasm and superstition, without putting in due cautions to distinguish them from the most rational feelings of love and marks of respect to our Maker, Redeemer and sanctifier which Christianity bath enjoined.”

ful experience.—I believe as fully in the doctrines of the gracious influence, of the spirit of God, as I do in the divinity of the scriptures, or reality of Religion. And this gracious influence, is distinguished, with most evident propriety, into the awakening—regenerating—confirming—and indwelling influence of the holy spirit. *Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God alone giveth the increase. By grace are ye saved. You hath he quickened.* The grace which saves the sinner is free, rich, sovereign grace. God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and compassion on whom he will have compassion. It is divine influence which awakens the soul, in conviction of sin. It is divine grace which regenerates the soul. Divine grace sanctifies it more and more, in the use of the appointed means and ordinances of God, prayer and other divine institutions. And divine grace meetens it for glory at last. The internal call of the spirit, is the sanctifying work of grace on the soul.—And the faithful Minister of the Gospel, in diligent study, prayerfulness, meditation—reading the scriptures, and collecting and comparing divine truths, may lawfully hope for and rely on the gracious assistances, influences, and motions of the holy spirit upon his soul. He may hope for divine help to enlighten his mind, to impress upon it a deep and affecting sense of divine things, to warm his affections, to fix his attention, and to enable him to speak forth the words of truth and soberness—to deliver the whole counsel of God in the written word, and to speak as a dying man, to dying men. This assistance or gracious influence, he at times experiences. And this is all he can hope for, or that the word of God allows him to pray for, or that any one in these

days, ever hath. The matter he is to deliver is in the holy scriptures, which he is carefully and duly to collect, and arrange, and unfold. He is faithfully, diligently, and painfully to study the truths, and doctrines, therein contained, and to set them, as far as may be, before his fellow-men, in a clear and plain, in a striking and affecting light. This is all the influence of grace a Gospel-Minister is to expect, or pray for. All beyond this, is beyond the word of God, and beyond reason; and is either delusion and error, or fanaticism, and a heated imagination.—It may be added that regular, learned, and faithful Gospel-Ministers never pretend to any thing further, to any thing more than this GRACIOUS INFLUENCE now explained. And this, we contend is only to be hoped for, prayed for or expected, in a close, diligent, painful study—reading—meditation—and seeking to understand aright the holy scripture, to learn the revealed truths of God. We profess to go by nothing higher. We allow of no other rule of faith and practice. To the LAW and TESTIMONY is our Motto. We say, examine all—try all—prove all by this standard. By this, all we say—all we teach is to be scrutinized. We disown all idea of any IMMEDIATE INSPIRATION of miraculous gifts and influence. We come to you, my hearers, only with a *thus saith the Lord* in his written word. We come only in the fulness of the *blessing of the Gospel of Christ; knowing only Christ Jesus and him crucified*, not in our own fulness, or sufficiency, or inspiration. We disclaim openly all pretensions to an IMMEDIATE CALL from heaven, as the Apostles had; we pretend only to an internal call of the spirit consisting in a sanctifying work on the soul; between

these two calls, there is as wide a difference as between any two opposite ideas. And in all ages of the Church since the days of the Apostles, and among all denominations of Christians the miraculous teachings or inspiration of the holy Ghost are never pretended to, except by either designing Impostors, or self-deceived enthusiasts. All pretence of this nature is held by all orders of Christians, with the above exception, to be imposture, and delusion.

In the first place, the scripture states the difference between the SANCTIFYING GRACE, and EXTRAORDINARY GIFTS and MIRACULOUS INFLUENCE of the holy Ghost. It dwells on this distinction as a most important one: particularly in the three first verses, of this chapter, out of which the text is chosen. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling Cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries, and have all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.* Charity here is the same as true love to God and man, which is the sum and essence of all Religion. The SANCTIFYING GRACE of the holy Ghost implants this in the soul, when the sinner is born again of the spirit of God. The implantation of this in the soul is regeneration—is the new-birth—or spiritual renovation. And this *sanctifying work* of the spirit upon the soul is altogether different from the miraculous gifts and influence of the spirit; and infinitely above them.

The Apostle in stating this difference, puts the *miraculous gifts* as high as they possibly could go, *speaking with the tongues of men and angels—the gift of prophecy—understanding all mysteries—having all knowledge—a miraculous faith, that could remove mountains—bestowing all one's goods to benificent purposes—and giving the body to be burned* in defence of religion. The extraordinary gifts and miraculous powers of the holy Ghost were common at the first setting up of Christianity. What they were, we are plainly told—so plainly that we cannot be ignorant. They were immediate inspiration,—*propheying—speaking with tongues never before studied—healing the sick by a word—raising the dead—and some other extraordinary things.* Of these we have a particular account in the preceeding Chapter. The Apostle opens the Chapter with informing us that he is about to treat of *spiritual gifts.* These never mean the SANCTIFYING OR RENEWING GRACE of the spirit, but always the extraordinary, miraculous powers of the spirit, common in the first age of Christianity, but which have long since ceased. *Now concerning SPIRITUAL GIFTS, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.* Speaking of the miraculous and extraordinary gifts of the holy Ghost, the Apostle says, *the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit; to another the gift of healing by the same spirit: to another the working of miracles: to another prophecy: to another discerning of spirits: to another divers kinds of tongues: to another interpretation of tongues.* These are the extraordinary gifts of the spirit, common in the Apostolic age, and called the BAPTISM of

the holy Ghost, by John the baptist, by Christ, and by his Apostles. *This was the manifestation of the spirit given to every man to profit withal.*—Every man, that is, who had these spiritual gifts was to use them for the profit and edification of others. And he knew he had them, by being enabled to work miracles, to actually heal the sick—to foretel future events—to speak with tongues never before studied, and to raise the dead. For actually working miracles is the only way a person can know himself, or show to others that he has SPIRITUAL GIFTS. These miraculous gifts have now no existence in the Christian Church. They ceased when unnecessary. And inspiration ceased when the canon of scripture was completed. These miraculous gifts and inspiration the Apostles and first Christians had. This is clear from the whole scripture. And accordingly, Mark xvi. 20, it is said, *And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* Again—Heb. iii. 3, 4. *How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs, and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the holy Ghost, according to his own will.*

2dly. That these signs, or extraordinary gifts and miraculous powers of the holy Ghost were to cease, and not to abide in the Church is declared in so many words in the text. *Charity never faileth, but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away.* The Apostle uses a variety of very lively and ex-

pressive terms to shew that ALL miraculous gifts of the spirit were to cease, and not to continue in the Church. They shall fail. They shall cease. They shall vanish away. No language can prove to us that no such gifts are possessed by Ministers and Christians, in the ordinary ages of Christianity, if this do not. They are to be done away—to be no more. But the graces of the spirit, or holy tempers of the Gospel are to continue forever.—*But now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.* Immediate inspiration, or immediate Calls from God ceased then, when the Gospel-State of things was fully arranged, and the holy Scriptures finished by the Apostles.——

3dly. Miraculous gifts and endowments, immediate inspiration and calls were unnecessary after the Scriptures were finished, and the Gospel kingdom was full arranged, and therefore were discontinued. At the beginning of the Gospel kingdom, they were absolutely necessary to prove the truth of Christ's mission—and the mission of his Apostles,—and to spread among all nations the glad tidings of the Gospel. No evidence of Christ's mission, could be so good, suitable, or powerful with all orders of men, as miracles. They were a species of proof adapted to all capacities, and suited to work conviction upon all minds. The unlearned as well as the learned could judge of them. No brilliancy of genius, or extent of erudition was necessary to see their force. All persons, who had the external senses, eyes and ears, could judge of them. But when once confirmed and established, Religion needs them not. And if it need them not, they will not be repeated, or continued. For God does nothing

in vain ; neither will he exert his almighty power when it will answer no good and valuable purpose, much less where it would manifestly be of very great disservice to the cause of truth. Besides, the Apostle prefers the *graces* or sanctifying operations, far before the miraculous gifts of the spirit.—*And yet show I unto you a more excellent way.*

4thly. If any Christians or Ministers of the Gospel in the ordinary ages of Christianity have the extraordinary gifts or miraculous teachings and powers of the holy Ghost, his immediate inspiration, they would be INFALLIBLE GUIDES in things of religion, both doctrines and worship. They would be so, as much as, and precisely in the same sense as the Apostles. But to admit that all real Christians, or true Gospel-Ministers are *infallible guides* in the Church, would be to admit a principle dangerous to the very existence of all religion, and which would inevitably overturn the whole Gospel. To admit that Christ's true ministers, or that private Christians are *immediately inspired*, as the Apostles were, is to admit that they are *infallible guides*. Then we can no more dispute them, or object against any thing they preach—or say—or do than we can against the holy Apostles. Every word they speak under this inspiring influence of the holy Ghost, is authentic. Every tenet which they advance is as true as the FOUR GOSPELS, and has the broad seal of heaven upon it. If this be the case, we ought to obey them, and to receive every word they say, as fully as we do the holy Scriptures, or the Saviour himself. This being the case, all they deliver is inspired truth—the revealed will of God ; and it is at our peril to

disbelieve. But can this be so? Then *these inspired* Christians or Ministers can make, or unmake Scripture at pleasure:—can abolish ordinances—can erect a new *dispensation*—can act in God's stead.—Then all must bow before them. Churches must fall: human learning must fall—ordinances and stated worship of God disappear, if they say so.—But such pretenders to immediate inspiration and miraculous gifts must prove their pretensions. We deny them. We boldly affirm that there is no such thing on earth as any person or persons, man or body of men having the immediate inspiration and miraculous gifts of the spirit, as the Apostles had. We have a right from scripture to say so. If any pretend to have, we demand of them to prove it. They must not say so, unless they can show it to us. We challenge them to come forward and prove it. We dare not, out of reverence to the scriptures, and the author of our holy Religion, take their word for it. It would be impiety in us to do it—horrible wickedness to countenance or credit such high pretences. They must prove their claims, as the Apostles did, by *WORKS*—by *MIRACLES*. No other proof is admissible. When they do this, we will bow before them. We will credit them. But until they do, we are bound to hold them as *deceivers* and *impostors*. All pretence now in this age of Christianity to *immediate inspiration*—to *miraculous powers and teachings*, where no evidence is given, to confirm such pretence, is blasphemy. When your own Ministers of the Gospel pretend any such thing, my hearers, that moment reject them as imposters, as deceivers, or believe them under an awful self-delusion. This is a point of the highest

moment ; we do well to attend most critically to it ; and once for all fix our opinion.

5thly. Another proof that the extraordinary gifts and inspiration or miraculous teachings of the holy Ghost, have ceased is, that they would, if continued, defeat their own purpose. They would intirely supersede all study, and learning—all diligence, and pains to understand the Scriptures, or to acquire useful knowledge. They would then befriend an indolent temper and nourish pride and self-conceit. They had not this effect upon the Apostles, but the opposite, because they were *peculiarly* raised up to propagate over the world, a new religion. They had not time to study or learn the various languages of the nations among whom they were sent to preach the Gospel. They had every thing to call forth all their exertions. But we are in a very different situation. And he that hath eyes to see, must know that we are.—Besides, make the supposition, that miracles were constantly repeated, the question is asked, how could we distinguish them from the common stated operations of the laws of nature? If you saw every day the dead raised, as you do the sun rise and set, and heard the dumb speak—or perceived a voice evidently from heaven, how could you know what is a miracle, and what is not? The continuance of miraculous gifts in the Church, would defeat itself—would bring all things into confusion—would open a door to all vain-conceited, self-opinionated men to do mischief—would render useless the word of God—would take away the *chief reasons* for reading it—would feed pride—would promote self-importance—and be a source of endless contention.—With what important airs would the pretender to immediate in-

piration come forth to mankind, and demand, as a tyrant over their consciences, implicit obedience!

6thly. If persons have this *immediate inspiration* and miraculous teachings of the holy Ghost, they could not be tried by the written word of God. They would be above it—might add to it—and take from it, at will. They might set it wholly aside. The consequence would be the scriptures never could be completed. But we know they are completed. How do we know this? Where is the text which tells us this? How do we know but that there may be more *revelations* from God, by dreams—visions—impressions extraordinary upon the mind—by immediate inspiration?—We have clear, full, and undeniable proof, in these remarkable words at the end of scripture. *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophesy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the prophesy of this book, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He who testifieth these things, saith surely, I come quickly. Amen, even so come Lord Jesus.* Here is a plain, proof, that no person since the Canon of scripture was closed, is inspired to reveal to us, or to tell us, by the spirit's infallible teachings, the will of God. No person therefore has been *inspired immediately* since the Apostolic age. We may not add to, or take from the *revealed will* of God. But if any be inspired immediately, or speak as the holy Ghost moves them—if what they deliver, under such supposed inspi-

ration be immediately handed in to them, both matter and words, as in the case of the Apostles, they may of right add to, or take from the standing revelation of God's will. And we are as much obliged to hear them, as to hear Moses and the prophets, Christ and the Apostles.

7thly. THE scripture declares to us, it is a SUFFICIENT rule of itself, in all matters of belief and practice. While I plead the intire sufficiency of scripture, I am pleading its honours—I am pleading a most important protestant doctrine against all human additions, supplements, traditions and commandments. It has then every doctrine—every truth—every duty—every promise—every hope—every threatening—every motive—every call which can be needful, or useful to furnish for all good works on earth and happiness in heaven. It has whatever is requisite either for the edification of the faint—the conviction and conversion of the sinner, the benefit of man and glory of God in the way of instruction, direction, exhortation, or command. There is no superfluity or defect in its ordinances, its laws, its prospects, its invitations, its warnings, its offers, and consolations. If it should please the Supreme Being to give us a Revelation at all of his mind and will, and of our duty and obligations; he would give, a full one—a proper one containing nothing redundant, —a sufficient one lacking nothing—one that would, all things taken into view, the state of the world, the nature of man, and his own divine nature, be the best which could be given. We may foolishly object and say it contains too much, or too little—is vague and indefinite in its statement of doctrines—is not worded with

legal precision---is too full of narrative, or too sparing. But we are not competent judges when a divine revelation is just as it should be. We must rest satisfied that God is always guided by infinite wisdom, knowledge, and goodness. It was at his mere sovereign pleasure, whether to vouchsafe a revelation of his will to man, or to leave him to the sole guidance of reason in matters of Religion, and to the fatal effects of his Apostacy. But when he determined upon granting him one, he was bound by his eternal attributes, wisdom, knowledge, and goodness to grant one clear, full, and sufficient: to be an infallible guide---to be above all others---and to be always regarded, as the only standard of truth and duty. Would we, then, know who, and what God is---who and what his son, our Saviour is, what our duty is, what the nature of religion is, or any part of it---what doctrines are to be admitted, what the divine ordinances are, we are to consult and hearken to this infallible guide. All controversies are to be decided by it. All schemes of religion to be examined by it. All our consciences to be regulated by it. All our hopes as Christians, all our views and inward exercises---all impressions that may, from time to time, be made upon our minds are to be tried by it.---That it is a sufficient and perfect rule---the PRIMARY rule by which all spirits, or supposed light are to be tried is plain from the following passages. *The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes: the fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and*

*righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey or the honey-comb.—Thy word is a light to my feet, and a lamp to my paths.—O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day.—How shall a young man cleanse his ways, by taking heed thereunto according to thy word.—If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.—The words that I speak to you, they are life and spirit.—Lord to whom should we go for thou hast the words of eternal life?—And that from a Child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.—All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.—Is it possible for language more fully to declare that the scripture is intirely sufficient for our direction in the way to happiness, or our only infallible guide? That they are so, is likewise evident from their being represented as a treasure, as precious, as sweet, as light, and glory, and the HOLY scriptures, and from our being commanded not to make it of none effect by our traditions, and not to add so much as one word to it, or to take one word from it, in the affecting passage cited, under the last argument. Now if the word of God, as we usually term the scriptures, be such a full, sufficient, and perfect guide in things of Religion, in faith and practice, in doctrine and duty, then it will follow that since the canon of scripture was closed, no one man, body of men or person on earth has been *divinely inspired* as the Apostles were immediately, or favoured with the miraculous*

teachings of the holy Ghost. If we have a full and complete standing Revelation, there can be no need of any miraculous teachings, or immediate inspiration. If we have a guide above the word of God, it must be because that is an imperfect and defective rule. There cannot be two perfect guides, scripture and spirit. One or the other must be superior; be the primary and only infallible guide. They cannot be both equal in authority. If, then, any have the inspiration of the holy Ghost, or only speak as they are moved and impelled or driven thereto, the word of God is made of none effect, is wholly set aside, and is to be understood and interpreted by that spirit. There is then no immediate inspiration of the holy Ghost in this age of Christianity.

8thly. The last argument which will now be mentioned to prove that no person or body of men since the scripture was completed by the Apostle John, in his Apocalypse ever had the immediate inspiration or *infallible* leadings and guidings of the holy Ghost is that we are commanded to try the spirits whether they be of God or not, and from the directions given to Ministers of Christ, to study, meditate, and read, and the frequent descriptions of their qualifications to minister in holy things. We are expressly commanded to try the spirits whether they be of God or not. *Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* We are here forbidden to believe every pretence to an immediate call from God, as a true Gospel-Teacher. For there are *false* prophets. We are not to admit or wish success to every pretender to the honourable work of a Gospel Minister.

Why, *because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* Their object is to deceive and lead people from the truth. By their fruits we are to know them. We, as Christians, are to try them and their doctrines. What rule of trial is given us? There must be an *infallible* one. The very command to try them, necessarily implies that we have a rule, by which to do it, a true, an *infallible* rule. We have so: and that is the written word of God. It will be readily acknowledged by all, it is presumed, that *false Teachers and false prophets* have always been in the world, to perplex and disquiet the minds of God's people, and to sow discord among brethren. And certainly there is no rule by which to try, detect, and discard such, but the written word. Here we must hold. Here we must build, or we are gone. We have no certain guide WITHIN us to direct us in the trial of the spirits.—Further, Gospel-ministers are commanded to study—to read—to pray—to be wholly devoted to study—to hold fast the form of sound words—to oppose error—to be workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth—to give a portion to all in due season:—their qualifications likewise are largely described—they are required to make full proof of their Ministry—to take heed to themselves and their doctrine, that they may as instruments, save themselves and them that hear them. But if they have the miraculous teachings, light, guidance, and immediate inspiration of the holy Ghost, how absurd would all this be! how useless! It would be folly in the extreme.—The conclusion of the whole is that no man, no sect, no Communion of Christians, no body of men no person male or female, have now, or ever had,

ſince the canon of Scripture was cloſed, or ever will have to the end of the world, the IMMEDIATE INSPIRATION, or miraculous teachings, leadings, and guidance of the holy Ghoſt, as the Apoſtles had. Conſequently all pretenders to this, are either DECEIVERS or DECEIVED.---It will be ſufficient to add here, that in the various ages of the Church, ſome have riſen up with pretences to immediate inſpiration, and have unhappily diffuſed abroad fanaticiſm and deluſion.---It would be eaſy to mention many inſtances of a ſtriking nature. But this would ſwell this diſcourſe to too great a ſize. Every one who will be at the pains, or has leiſure to conſult any good eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, will ſee for himſelf the follies, the errors, and the blaſphemies of ſuch pretenders. While we remark this, we cannot but lament the evil done to the cauſe of Chriſtianity by them. As a gratification of ſpiritual pride, man is prone to avow that there ſubſiſts between him and the inviſible world, a peculiar intimacy, that extraordinary CELESTIAL communications are made to him. The ignorant, being fond of what is marvellous, or has the air of being extraordinary, embrace the wild notions broached by pretenders to inſpiration, and heedleſſly follow them; admire them;---and reſort to them, contrary to all reaſon---and to the tender entreaties of the wiſe and reflecting. Time has always diſproved ſuch claims to miraculous teachings. And the deluſions, excited by them, die away. Happy is it for man, that this is the caſe.---

IN the Roman catholic Church, there has been often, among ſome of its orders, on particular occaſions, where intereſt was greatly concerned, high pretence to miraculous powers.

And the common people, in Roman catholic countries being extremely ignorant, have fully believed in the existence of such powers. But when their pretended miracles have been closely inspected, and critically examined, they have uniformly been discovered to be mere cheat, and imposture. The *man of sin* is to be known by lying wonders. The pretence of miraculous powers is a mark of Antichrist. Many of the Romish writers describe with much pomp of language the number and greatness of their miracles. St. Paul speaking of Antichrist, says, *Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.* Lying wonders—fictitious miracles characterise the superstition of the Romish Church.

THE immediate inspiration of the holy Ghost ceased, when the canon of scripture was closed. But it is generally believed that the *power* of working miracles was continued some longer, and gradually was withheld, till at length, in the age, or age but one next to the Apostles, it was wholly withdrawn from the Church, as unnecessary. It is the general opinion that the age of miracles ended next, or next but one after the Apostolic age. It is impossible however from ecclesiastical history, to determine precisely the very point of time, when the power of working signs and wonders ceased. But from the arguments above alledged, it seems that *divine inspiration* ended when the scripture was compleated. I make a distinction between *divine immediate inspiration*, and the other extraordinary gifts of the holy Ghost. And such a distinction, it is apprehended, is founded in reason. It might be

necessary that the one should be continued longer than the other. The general opinion is well expressed by a justly celebrated ecclesiastical historian, who refers to several learned authors, as witnesses. “It is easier, says he, to conceive than to express, how much, the miraculous powers, and extraordinary gifts, which were displayed in the ministry of the first heralds of the Gospel, contributed to enlarge the bounds of the Church. These gifts, however, which were given for wise and important reasons, began gradually to diminish in proportion, as the reasons ceased, for which they were conferred. And accordingly when almost all nations were enlightened with the truth, and the number of christian Churches increased daily in all places, then the miraculous gift of tongues began gradually to decrease. It appears, at the same time, from unexceptionable testimonies, that the other extraordinary gifts, with which the omnipotence and wisdom of the Most High had so richly endowed the rising Church, were in several places continued, during this,” the age next after the Apostles. And perhaps we may, upon sufficient testimony, believe that miraculous powers were not wholly withdrawn from the Church till, in the third Century, though it was seldom, indeed, that any were enabled to perform miracles, in this age.—With respect to the *miraculous Cross*, as it is called, which the Emperor Constantine solemnly declared he had seen in the air, about noon, I cannot believe that God, interposed by such a stupendous miracle to establish the wavering faith of the Emperor.----I join in opinion with those who consider this famous Cross as a vision presented to the Emperor in a dream, with the remarkable inscription, *hac vice*, that is, *in this Conquer*.—

THE SECOND thing proposed, was to invalidate the objections which may be made on this subject.---There is but one thing which can be said to favour the idea that Christians and Christian Ministers are endowed, in the ordinary ages of the Gospel, with divine inspiration, and the immediate miraculous teachings of the holy Ghost, and that is, these are often mentioned in the word of God. Pretenders to *immediate inspiration* and a *heavenly call*, in an extraordinary manner, as the Apostles and first heralds of the Gospel had, keep themselves in countenance, and deceive themselves by applying all the promises, which were peculiar to *these*, to themselves. There are, we know, many texts of scripture which speak of a *miraculous faith*—of direct inspiration—and of other extraordinary *spiritual gifts*. These we contend, and for the reasons and arguments adduced and illustrated in this discourse, were peculiar to the Apostles, and Christians in the Apostolic, and next ages.—When Jesus Christ, first opened his Gospel kingdom, he endowed his disciples with the power of working miracles. *As ye go*, says he, *preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand—heal the sick—cleanse the lepers—raise the dead—cast out devils—freely ye have received, freely give.*—But in process of time these miraculous powers, as it would be natural to expect, considering what human nature is, and always has been, were grossly perverted to mercenary and selfish purposes. Simon the forcerer wanted to purchase them with money, in the Apostle's day, that he might aggrandize himself, and make *gain*. And in about an age after this, they were actually made merchandize of, if credit may be given to the most respectable witnesses.—Christ told his

inspired Apostles that they had no need of study—that the holy Ghost, by its movings on their souls, would impart to them what they should deliver, or preach, and especially when arraigned before civil magistrates. *But when they, continues the Redeemer, shall deliver you up, take no thought, how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given to you, in that very hour, what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your father which speaketh in you.—* Again, *But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought before hand what ye shall speak; neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the holy Ghost.* This promise hath no reference, not even the remotest, to Ministers of the Gospel, in the ordinary ages of Christianity, but was spoken immediately to the *special* disciples or Apostles of our Lord. To them therefore it belongs, and to no others. They were, on particular occasions, immediately supplied from the holy Ghost, both with words and thoughts. They therefore were forbidden to take thought before hand, or to study, and premeditate. Premeditation or study was altogether unnecessary for them. The spirit of God immediately gave them the matter to be spoken, and the language in which it was to be spoken. For ministers of the blessed Jesus, or private Christians to take this promise to themselves in the ordinary ages of the Gospel is an awful perversion of scripture—is presumption—is meddling with that, to which they have no right. The great reasons why they are not *thus inspired*, or why they have no interest in this promise, have been largely considered in this discourse: and, I trust, made clear to all, who have eyes to see, or ears to hear.—

A MIRACULOUS faith is spoken of, in these two following passages. *And the Lord said, if ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycaminè tree, be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the midst of the sea; and it should obey you.*—And though, says the Apostle Paul, *I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains.* This kind of faith was peculiar to the Apostles, and Christians in the first ages. A faith of miracles is totally different from a saving Gospel-faith. If we make them one and the same, we confound two things which are wholly different, contradict the scripture, and shew our own ignorance. If we would rightly understand, and not pervert scripture to our own destruction, as many do, we must look at the occasion, connexion, the persons of whom, or to whom the words are spoken, or the promise made. The root of almost all delusions, and pretences to immediate inspiration, or miraculous teachings and gifts is, persons now apply to themselves, what was only true of, or applicable to the Apostles, and primitive Christians; or Christians in the age of the Apostles. This misapplication of scripture has been a fruitful source of error and mischief in religion.—

HAVING removed the objections which might occur on this subject, I shall add a caution or two, which all ought to remember.—

1stly. AND we ought always to beware of taking scripture contrary to its intention, and making it speak any thing we please; and never confound the *sanctifying grace*, with the *extraordinary gifts* and *miraculous powers* of the holy Ghost. The *graces* of the spirit, and the *gifts* of the spirit are altogether different—there were

the *gifts* in the Apostolic days, where there were not the *graces*, or a holy heart and holy life. And in the ordinary ages of the Gospel, there may be the *common gifts* of the spirit, where there are no *spiritual* and *holy* tempers of heart. Gifts are highly to be valued—are not to lift up the possessor of them, with spiritual pride; but are imparted for the good of the Church. But the *best gifts* are far short of the least spark of *sanctifying grace*.

2dly. BE cautioned about your notions of a Gospel-Minister, and his qualifications. He is not qualified for the office and duty or work, by *any miraculous gifts* or *immediate inspiration*. None can pretend to this except from ignorance—or pride—or self-conceit—or delusion.

3dly. STAND in horror at the bare idea of any one pretending to any guide in religion superior to the word of God; or laying claim to miraculous gifts and inspiration.—Bid him who pretend this, to prove his pretence by the necessary arguments—ACTUALLY WORKING MIRACLES:—or retire in haste from him as a deluded man, or base impostor.—*And then if any man shall say to you lo! here is Christ: or lo! he is there; believe him not.—For false Christs, and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders to seduce if it were possible even the elect.*

A VERY brief improvement will conclude the discourse.—

HENCE learn the duty of trying the spirits. *Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* What friendly advice is this! How absolutely necessary!

Try them. Try all who pretend to come with a new religion—a new faith—a new order, who profess to be *immediately inspired of God*. Such there have been in all ages. To the law and Testimony : here is your rule—a certain rule—an infallible rule---a rule which can never change. Be always armed against imposture. Again——Learn hence the danger of enthusiasm or impulses, visions and impressions on the mind of an extraordinary kind. We are all liable to be deceived by them. Many have been to their ruin. We may be. There is something strange something unaccountable in human nature that falls in with what claims to come from the God of all grace, as a special communication, or direction. No man can tell what fanaticism, or a heated imagination, or an erroneous conscience will do. We may all be given up to believe a lie—strong delusion may be sent upon us. We may be amazingly confident in error. Fanaticism may be called a kind of religious delirium. While then you are under advantages to form your religious sentiments, be anxious to do it, on the subject now discussed—and the Christian system in general.——May the good spirit of God lead us into THE TRUTH as it is in Jesus. Amen.

DISCOURSE XIX.

SINLESS perfection unattainable in this Life.

I JOHN i. 8.

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us.*

THE great foundation-principles of the Christian Religion are so plain in themselves, that it would be natural to conclude, that none who admit its reality, could be found who should be able either to controvert or deny them. For the principles of Christian doctrine, which are really necessary to salvation, are not only few in number, but most clearly revealed, and repeatedly urged. To these the Apostle refers when he says. —*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the Oracles of God. These first principles of the Oracles of God are the truths, which are obviously essential to the very existence of all Religion. There are, according to the Apostle, what may be termed with strict propriety the first principles of the Oracles of God. These may be easily comprehended by all, who pay any due attention to the important subject of Religion.—Every art indeed or*

science has, and must of necessity have what may be pertinently termed *first principles*, on which all the rest are built, and from which they flow. These must be clearly understood, before we can arrive at any considerable degree of excellence. No where is this more eminently the case, than in the science of Religion, the most valuable and interesting of all the subjects, to which mankind ever paid their attention, or which they were ever called, in duty, to examine. But on no subject, however, through the depravation of the moral powers of the soul, are they so liable to fall into pernicious errors. Such, it is conceived, is the notion that a *sinless perfection* is *attainable* in the present state of being.

THE words now read, and selected for present meditation, most expressly declare that no one since THE FALL ever reached, or can in this life reach such a state, in which he can with truth say, that he commits no sin in thought, word, or deed. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. To say that we have no sin,* is to say that we do not offend in heart or conduct against God or his law; against the Saviour of the world or his Gospel; against the laws of sobriety and morality; against our duty to our neighbour or ourselves. *To say that we have no sin,* is to say that we are entirely free from any remains of corrupt nature, any evil passion or propensity, and totally pure as the angels of God in heaven, according to the measure of our rational powers and faculties.—Now if we say this, *we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* Being puffed up with spiritual pride we are deluded by our own vain imaginations, *and the truth is not in us.* We are ignorant of the true doctrines

of the Gospel. We are building up ourselves with a hope, which will mock and disappoint us, in the end; and when Eternity shall open upon us, we shall find we were far off indeed from sinless perfection.

THE Apostle, in the foregoing verses, having said that *God is light*, that is, a perfectly holy and happy Being, assures us that we cannot have fellowship with him, if *we walk in darkness*;—and that in order to have communion with God, and an interest in the all-cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, we must *walk in the light*, the light of truth and duty. *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanseth us from all sin.* But lest this expression, *cleanseth us from all sin*, should be perverted, he adds, *if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin, as it wholly expiates or washes away the guilt of sin. The good man is justified from all sin, but he is sanctified but in part.—The completeness of our justified state, as Christians, is urged in the next verse. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* But lest this phrase, *cleansing us from all unrighteousness*, should be misunderstood or misapplied, he immediately subjoins, you are not to conceive that you, when freely and fully pardoned, have no remaining sin in your hearts: *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

His word is not in us. We know nothing of divine truth as we ought to know.——

AFTER thus introducing and opening the words—what is proposed

I. Is to prove from scripture, reason, and experience that sinless perfection is not attainable in this world.———And———

II. THEN, some objections will be obviated.

I. THE first thing intended is to offer the arguments from scripture, reason, and experience, to prove that sinless perfection is not attainable in this life.———

WE should naturally conclude that no person, in his right mind, could believe that he himself or others were perfect, wholly free from all remains of sin, if there were any just views of the strictness of the divine law entertained. But there have been found some, in the various ages of the Church, who have professed to have arrived at the state of such exalted goodness as to be as perfect and pure, according to their natural capacities, as the angels of God in heaven.— But most full and express is the word of God in declaring, that there is no such thing as perfection in grace in this world. The passages of divine truth, which declare this, are so plain, that it is astonishing that any one, who hath a real belief in the divinity of the scriptures, should ever be able to persuade himself, that sinless perfection is among the attainments of Christians in this world.—

THE text, we conceive, is so express as to be incapable of being construed by the ingenuity of man, or the arts of sophistry, to another mean-

ing. A talent at perverting scripture, which some possess and delight to exercise, frequently surprises us with its efforts; and that is misapplied and distorted, which we should suppose impossible to be misapplied. *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* To say or believe we have no sin, or have attained to a state of perfection in Grace, is to impose upon and delude ourselves:—and that in a very high degree. *We deceive ourselves.* And not only so, *but the truth is not in us.* We do not speak *the truth*, or believe *the truth*, or know *the truth*. We misapprehend the nature of Christ's spiritual Religion, and its plainest and most important doctrines.—Again, *if we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* Than this no language can be more strong or peremptory. If we say we have not sinned for any given time, or never have sinned, we are justly chargeable with imputing to the God of truth a falsehood, and his word is not in us—we are destitute of a right knowledge of his law, perfections, word, and will. If *any person say* he hath not sinned, suppose for one day, week, or month, he *makes God a liar, and his divine word is not in him.*—The Apostle James perfectly agrees with the beloved disciple on this subject. He remarks thus: *For in many things WE ALL offend—WE OFFEND ALL.* If this be so, no mere man since the fall, now is, has been, or will be sinlessly holy in this life. No man can be found who doth not offend in many things. No one but daily doth break the divine law in thought, word, and deed. If any one can be produced, who does not offend *in many things*, then the Apostle James does not speak true. His words are; *in many things we offend all.* To offend is

to do wrong. All then do wrong in many things. St. Paul likewise is most exprefs and full in declaring that there is no finlefs perfection on earth. His words are, *for we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.—But now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face, now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.* Here we are told the present state is an imperfect state, and that the future in heaven is a perfect state, perfect in knowledge, in holiness, in all that is excellent. The Apostle carefully distinguishes the present and future state of the good man. On earth his knowledge is low, small, and defective; in heaven it will be full, glorious, and perfect.

IN the old Testament the same doctrine is explicitly revealed. Both the old and new-Testament speak one and the same doctrine, and both rest on the same divine authority.—Eccle. vii. 20. *For there is not a just man upon earth that doth good and sinneth not.* Not one man on earth is there, who is perfect in goodness. No person is so shielded with the armour of Virtue, as never to transgress any moral rule. No one perfect in piety and morality can be produced or ever could.—*For, 2 Chron. vi. 36, there is no man which sinneth not.* How full and positive are these words! Sinlefs holiness, then, is never found on the earth, in a mere man, since the original defection from God. It is a plant which grows not in these climates of sin, sorrow, and pain, disappointments, and burdens. It is only found in the peaceful regions of heaven. *I have seen an end, says David, of all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad.—Job says, that*

our barely attempting to justify ourselves, and only professing to be *perfect* is a full proof of our perverseness, and sinful pride and ignorance. *If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me : If I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.*—Thus full is the word of God in declaring that sinless perfection is unattainable in this life.

2dly. WE argue that sinless perfection is unattainable in this life, from the purity, spirituality, and extent of the divine law. Suppose any man, in his high ideas of himself, would pervert and misconstrue all the plain and direct scriptures now cited to prove that sinless holiness is not among the attainments of the most eminently pious and virtuous characters, still if he had any just knowledge of the divine law, of its strictness—of its demands, and of its spirituality, he could not so far deceive himself as to say, he commits, or has no sin. The law of God is holy, just, and good. It is exceedingly broad or strict. It is, like its glorious author, transcendantly excellent. It reaches to the inmost recesses of the soul, to all the thoughts, wishes, intentions, purposes, and motions of the heart, as well as to the outward actions of the life. It allows of no evil desire, propensity, or irregular wish or action. It requires all holiness in all kinds and degrees; and expressed in all proper ways to God;—to man;—to self. It requires perfect love to God:—perfect benevolence to man:—and to all beings of a moral nature. And this love is to be acted out, in all its proper ways, in exact measure, proportion, and perfection. It calls upon us to be as perfect in our measure as our FATHER who is in heaven is perfect. *Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

THE law of God cannot but be perfect, and demand of us perfection; full and entire conformity to it, in heart, in word, in deed.—Can any one pretend to have this perfection? No person can pretend to have, who hath any just sense either of himself, or of the pure nature and strictness of the divine law. He who says that he conforms *perfectly* to this law, in heart, speech, and behaviour, must be considered as ignorant of the very nature and strictness of the divine law, and of what *perfect* conformity to it means.

3dly. THE nature of God and his glorious attributes, prove to a demonstration the folly and presumption of any professions of, or pretences to, a perfect conformity to his will, and moral glories. Sinless holiness is being entirely, fully, and perfectly conformed to the divine will and moral character of God. It is having no wrong ideas of him—his law—character—attributes—word—glories—and ways: no wrong ideas of Jesus or the Gospel: or of any of its duties—precepts—calls—offers—doctrines—and ordinances. And in addition to all this; having a full belief of, and perfect conformity in heart and life to THEM ALL. For example, as high, and exalted, and reverential thoughts of God, of his majesty and glory, as we ought to have: as much love to, fear and reverence of, trust in, and dependance on God as we ought to have:—as much love to the Redeemer, reliance on his atonement, and gratitude for his grace, as we ought to have. But, my brethren, who alas! has a deep sense enough of so much as one duty—one moral obligation, one attribute of the Deity—either his wisdom, power, omnipresence, holiness, mercy, or grace, much more of all!—He who says he is perfect, or hath a full, com-

plete and perfect conformity to God, to his glorious moral character—to his will: to his son, his Gospel, in heart, in life, in word, and in thought, is impious and profane, is presumptuous, and ignorant of the very nature of duty and the divine character.—

4thly. AGAIN, the extreme deceitfulness of the human heart, and difficulty of knowing it fully, prove that sinless conformity to the law of God is not among the attainments of Christians in this life. If it be true that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, it will follow that no mere man doth perfectly obey the law of God in this life, but daily doth break it in thought, word, and deed. *But*, says the prophet Jeremiah, *the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his way, and according to the fruit of his doing.*—Under a sense of the difficulty and impossibility of fully knowing all our secret sins: David cries out, *who can understand his errors, cleanse thou me from secret faults.* Does any one perfectly understand all his errors:—all his secret faults:—all the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of his own heart? If so, the word of God is not true. What vanity, what presumption, what spiritual pride, and ignorance to pretend to know all the windings, and turnings, and deep iniquity of the human heart—and all one's own most hidden sins; and to be perfectly free from all evil in heart, and life, in conduct and passions! Who dare say he has fully explored the deep mysteries of iniquity—the plague of his own heart?

—And that he has as great a sense of the evil of sin, as he ought to have?—

5thly. A FURTHER argument to prove that sinless perfection is unattainable in this life, is that it would render null and void, some of the duties and exercises, in which the essence of piety and godliness consists. He who is perfect, must say, if self-consistent, that he knows all duty, every duty, the whole extent of duty in all conditions, in all circumstances whatever. He must also fully know all doctrines, all divine ordinances: that he has, a full and perfect sense of every moral, social, relative, and religious tie; and lives up completely and perfectly to them all. With him is no defect, not even the smallest, in piety or morality. There is no omission of duty. There is no want of fervour and sincerity. There is no deficiency in faith, in repentance, in Godly sorrow for sin, in hope, in Charity, in meekness, in humility, in benevolence, in alms, in justice. There is no corner of the heart but what is completely purged of all deceit, malice, envy and hypocrisy.—We may add,—further, if we have no sin, we need no pardon, no repentance, no Saviour to wash away present guilt, no prayer to God to keep us at present from Satan's devices. If we have no sin in thought, word, and deed, we can have no mourning over sin at present, and need not seek for renewed forgiveness. But our blessed Master has taught us to pray—*forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* But if we have no sin, we have no *debts* to be forgiven. The perfectly righteous need no repentance. They may be sorry that they were once sinners, but not that they are now vile and unworthy. *But the sac-*

rifices of God are a broken and contrite heart ; a broken and a contrite spirit, O God thou wilt not despise. If we have no sin, we can offer no such sacrifices. The man who is sinlessly holy may say, "I was once a sinner, but I am not a sinner now. I could once say God be merciful to me a sinner ; but now I can say, God be thanked, I am not as other men are, I have no sin." What impiety, what insufferable spiritual pride in this language ! And before any one can feel thus, he must be destitute of all humility, self-abasement, and just sense of God, and of himself.—

6thly. A PRETENCE to sinless perfection is contrary to the experience of saints recorded in scripture. The faith of assurance is attainable in this life. But this is a very different thing from perfection in grace. The good man in the exercise of grace is afraid of being deceived, of mistaking the nature of religion. He sees so much remaining sin, so much depravity, want of more ardent love to God, so many failings in duty, that he wonders how God can pardon him. He feels that he is the chief of sinners, unworthy even to stand before God, and that his holiest duties need to be sprinkled afresh with the all-atoning blood of Jesus, and that he deserves to perish in his sins unpitied. He feels his own unworthiness of eternal life.—The more grace any one has, the more he wishes it to be increased. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness more and more. From day to day, he sees more and more of his sins, their number, their several aggravations, and the extent of the divine law. He never thinks that he hath done enough for God and religion, or can do enough, or now does

enough. He rejoices, if he may be honoured, though it be only as the smallest means, of advancing the cause of God in the world, even at the risk of his own reputation, or the scoffs of impiety. He knows that he is bound to love God with all his heart, with all his strength, with all his soul; and his neighbour as himself; and to be wholly conformed to the divine will, and duty: to worship God with all the ardor, purity, and sincerity of which his nature is capable.

So far from having attained perfection, those who have the most grace and the deepest experience of religion, have innumerable sins daily to confess, many failings and deficiencies in duty, cold and dead frames, and much remaining corruption over which to mourn, and of which to repent. And the more holy any are, the more humble will they be, the more sensible of their sins, of their hypocrisy, their want of faith, of love, of hope, and of every grace; and of course the more ready will they be to cry out as St. Paul did, *O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this body of death!* So eminent a Christian as St. Paul was, utterly discarded the notion of sinless holiness being among his attainments. And it is a common opinion that this remarkable man had made higher advances in holiness, and really felt more of the power of Religion than any one that ever lived, or was ever received to heaven from this Apostate world. He says, *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend, that for which I also am apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth towards those things that are before. I press towards the mark for the prize of the*

high calling of God in Christ Jesus. If so holy a man and distinguished an Apostle, if the best Christian that ever was, peremptoriily assert that he hath not reached to perfection, though it were the mark which he had set before him, what presumption in any to pretend to surpass him, and to have attained it! He says of himself, what indeed is true of all good men. *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal sold under sin. For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate that do I. I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* Here is remaining sin in St. Paul. There is, with respect to him no such thing as entire freedom from it. He mourns over it. He cries out in bitterness to be freed from it. There was a time, indeed, when he thought he was perfect, but that was in his ignorant pharisaical state. *Circumcised, says he, the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law a pharisee. Concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness of the law, blameless.* But after he was converted to christianity, he saw and bewailed his imperfections and remaining sin. When he thought he was perfect, he was a poor deluded, self-boasting, and self-righteous Pharisee.—In the pharisee who went up to the temple to pray, we have an instance of a man who thought himself perfect. But our Lord thought very differently of him. He was a singular instance of a self-righteous spirit. *Two men went up into the temple to pray: the one a pharisee and the other a publican.—The pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners,*

unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tythes of all that I possess. And the publican stood afar off, and would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying God be merciful to me a sinner. Here was a man boasting of his perfection: and another who saw, felt, and confessed his sinfulness. *God be merciful to me a sinner.* Persons of the most knowledge, longest standing and deepest experience in Religion, are the farthest from supposing that they are perfect.—

To all these arguments to disprove the doctrine of the attainableness of sinless perfection in this life, it may be proper to add all THE PROTESTANT PUBLIC CONFESSIONS OF FAITH, wholly disavow the idea. It would be tedious to mention them all.—As a specimen, we appeal to the shorter catechism of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster convened, to draw up a concise CONFESSION OF FAITH. In answer to this question “is any man able in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God?—They judiciously and scripturally reply: “no mere man since the fall is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but daily doth break them in thought, word, and deed.”—I shall close this branch of the subject with the words of Mr. Mason.

“It is very extraordinary, says he, that this sinless perfection is pretended to by persons among whom we should least of all expect to find it; persons of low, narrow, contracted minds; who discover very little of the genuine spirit of the Gospel, humility, meekness, and charity; and seem never once to suspect themselves capable of any such thing as spiritual pride,

false zeal, and heart-delusion.—But these pretences to sinless holiness carry in them so much ignorance, rashness, presumption, and secret pride that they contradict themselves, and evidently demonstrate the falsehood of what they assert; unless it can be proved, that there is nothing sinful in those forementioned principles and dispositions, from whence they evidently spring.—So that he who says *he has no sin*, not only maketh God, but maketh himself *a liar*. And such a palpable extravagance as this, must needs throw a great discredit and strong suspicion upon any that espouse it.”

II. THE second thing proposed, was to remove some objections or cavils, which have been raised on this subject.—The objector does not fail to remind us that the scripture often speaks of, or mentions the words, *Perfect* and *Perfection*. In reply we grant it, and remark that it uses them in three senses; or that there are three sorts of perfection—*absolute*, *indefectible*, and *relative* or *moral*. The *first* is peculiar to God, the *second* to angels and saints in heaven, and the *third* is possessed by good men on earth.—How unfounded all claims to the *second* sort of perfection, that is, sinless holiness, are, we have largely considered. The *third* or last kind of perfection, usually termed *relative* or *moral*, is a gracious sincerity. And this is all the perfection attainable in this present world. The faith of assurance is the highest attainment of christians on earth. And but FEW comparatively ever arrive at this. How happy those who have! To attain this, every exertion should be made.—In the last sense of the word *perfect* or *perfection*, good men in scripture are said to be *perfect*: that is, sincere upright

men, free from hypocrisy. Thus Job and others are called *perfect men*.—*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.* Here the *perfect* man is the upright man. *That the man of God*, says the Apostle, may be *perfect*; not sinlessly holy, but furnished to all duty.—All may know very easily that the word *perfect*, when applied to pious believers or righteous men, is used for gracious sincerity.—Scripture must expound itself; it is its own best expositor.—

2dly. BUT says the objector, the Apostle John, declares, *that he that is born of God cannot sin, for the seed of God remaineth in him.* The meaning of this evidently is, that those who are born of God, do not, and cannot sin and live as others do *allowedly, habitually* and with *such strength of heart.* On the other hand, they mourn over sin, hate it, and lament all remains of it in themselves and others.

3dly. THE pleader for sinless holiness in this life, quotes Rom. vi. 7. *For he that is dead, is freed from sin.* What St. Paul means, he himself tells us verse 14—*for sin shall not have dominion over you.* If then we will permit the Apostle to be his own interpreter, we cannot mistake his meaning. Verse 12. He says, *let not sin REIGN in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it, in the lusts thereof.* Here he most plainly informs us that by being freed from sin, he means freedom from its *reigning* power, and from its guilt. Every true believer is freed from its *reigning* power, and its *condemning* guilt. For there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. The believer is justified and accepted of God on account of the Mediator's righteousness, and shall

never come into condemnation. He receives the son of God as his only Saviour, his teaching prophet, atoning priest, and ruling king. Being sanctified by the power of divine grace he gives himself up to the duties of a holy life. Trusting for pardon to the merits of his Redeemer, he imitates him in all his imitable perfections.—There is, upon the whole no plea for the attainableness of sinless perfection *in this life, either from scripture or experience*, which has any solid foundation.

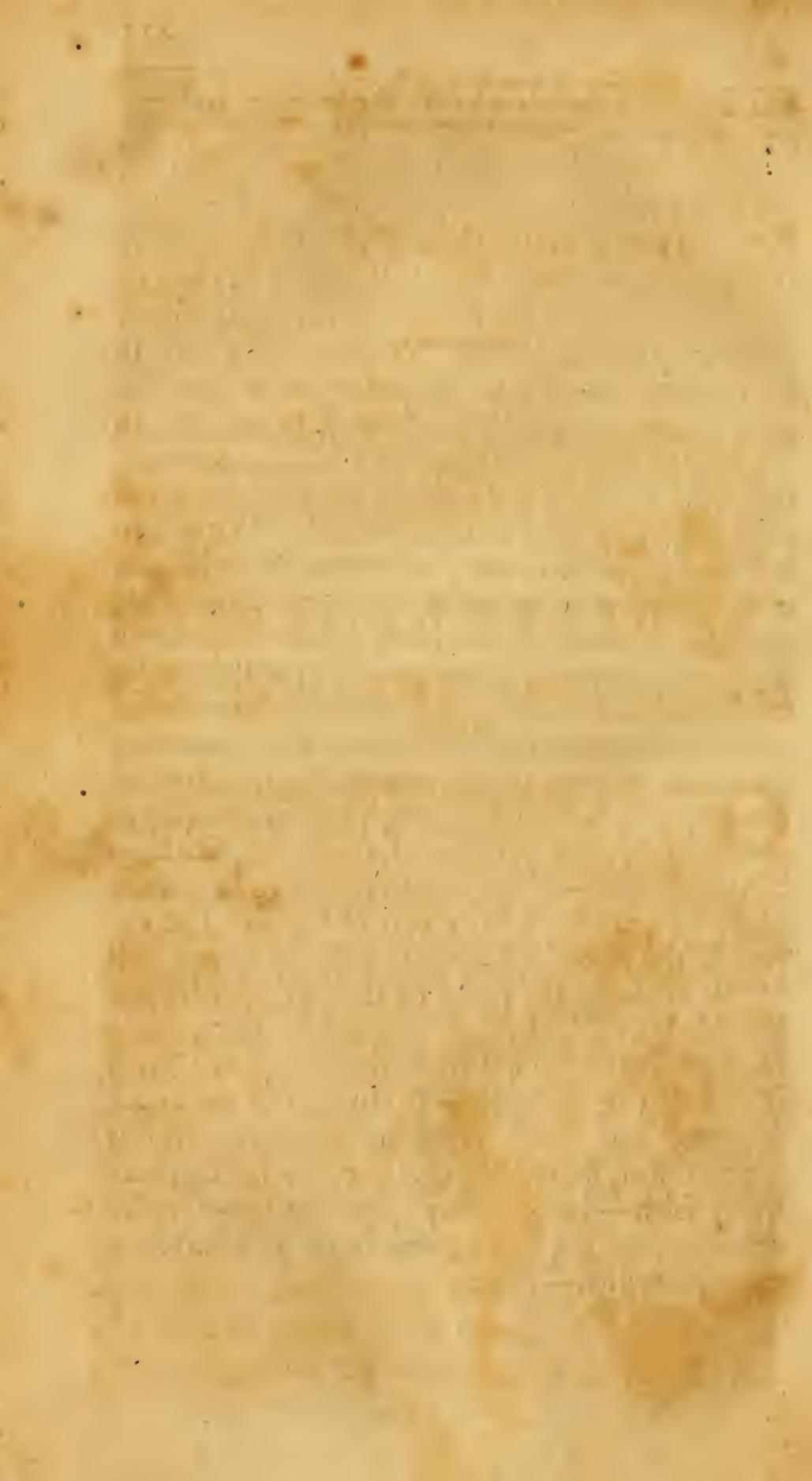
WE shall now make some improvement of this important subject.—And *the first remark* is that every thing, in the word of God, and in the frame of nature, conspire to show us that this is a state of trial and probation, and was never designed, in divine wisdom, to be a state of perfection and retribution. Perfection and unfinning obedience do not seem to comport with a state of probation or trial. A probationary state always presupposes, and is introductory to a retribution state. Every thing around us indicates an imperfect and fallen condition. All the calls, warnings, invitations, counsels, exhortations, promises of assisting grace---and even the Gospel-plan of life and peace itself, clearly demonstrate that this is not a state of unfinning obedience. Imperfection, in legible characters, is written on all human things, on all the works and ways of man; on every duty and virtue. The eye sees nothing perfect around us.—Sorrow, pain, losses distress---and groans are the lot of man. These denote imperfection of virtue---declare guilt, or moral evil.—Jesus of Nazareth alone, the author of our salvation was without sin. He was holy, harmless, undefiled. His Goodness was

immaculate. His obedience was indefective. By him sinless holiness was exhibited. For any to pretend to perfection in goodness, is in this respect, to claim equality with him.—Again—

2ndly. WE observe, for the improvement of the subject, that though sinless holiness be not attainable in this life, yet all, without exception, ought to make it the mark, at which they should aim. The question is not, whether the divine law require of man complete or perfect conformity to its precepts in heart and life. This we believe. The divine law cannot abate in its demands, or be less strict. It changes not.—The question is not, whether it be wrong in us, to fall short of duty in any one instance or respect. This is allowed. All defect in moral goodness is criminal, or involves blame. Neither is the question, whether all men should aim at sinless holiness or seek for it. But whether any attain to it, in this life? We contend that none do. We have offered our reasons. We trust they will satisfy all impartial enquirers after truth.

BUT we are not to sit down easy in our religious pursuits, or content ourselves with low measures of grace, or be remiss and negligent, because sinless perfection is unattainable, because this is an imperfect world, or because all have failings, infirmities and a mixture of sin in every duty. This would be an awful abuse, and horrible perversion of the doctrine: would bespeak a very depraved mind.—On the other hand, this subject, and all the word of God teach us to press forward in our Christian course, as those who run in a race: to strive to excel in piety, in every grace, and every moral duty, as those who are engaged in a warfare:—to have constantly in

our eye the example of the Redeemer, and the end of our faith, the glorious prize to be at last enjoyed. *We are to forget the things that are behind*, and reach forth towards those that are before: to rest in no attainments, which we may think we have already reached, either in piety or morality, either in love to God or man, either christian graces or moral Virtues.—We are to go on from strength to strength—from one degree of grace to another—from step to step in the way of righteousness.—We are to give all diligence to make our Calling and Election sure: to be found of God in peace at last. We are to add to our faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; to temperance, patience; to patience, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, Charity.—We are to increase in all spiritual wisdom, in all christian knowledge and experience, cultivating, in a strict and careful attendance on all the means of grace, public worship and holy ordinances, a higher, and higher sense of divine things—of God—of Christ—of the Gospel—of the worth of the soul—of the glory of heaven—of the evil of sin—of the extent of the law—and riches of divine grace, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, which will be at death.—In fine, our warmest prayers, our most vigorous endeavours, our highest aim, should be, that we may have a more lively faith—a more deep repentance—a more animated zeal, a more pious frame of heart, and exemplary life.—Amen.



DISCOURSE XX.

THE Apostle's caution to all Christians—*be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines,* or the danger of instability, and pernicious tendency of error.

HEBREWS xiii. 9.

BE not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.

ONE very good proof of the truth and divinity of the scriptures is their laying before us, the proneness of men to imbibe, on the great subject of religion and morals, pernicious principles and dangerous delusions. A more melancholy view of the vices and corruption of human nature can hardly be exhibited, than the avidity with which it admits, and the obstinacy with which it defends errors, when once received. Hence we so often find our Saviour, who perfectly knew what was in man, cautioning his followers against false doctrines and false teachers. In this, as well as in all other respects, the example of their Lord and Master is imitated by the Apostles, who were inspired and commissioned by him. In almost every *Letter* of their's to the Churches, gathered and formed by them, are

inserted seasonable and solemn cautions against the pernicious influence of errors and dangerous heresies. They likewise direct Christians, in a Church-capacity, which indeed was very necessary, in what manner to treat them. *A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject.* An heretic is one who imbibes principles totally inconsistent with, and subversive of, the very foundation of the Gospel, and causes divisions and schisms in the body of Christ—the Church. Such an one is to be solemnly admonished by the Church of his destructive principles, and unchristian and divisive practices, a *first* and *second* time. And if all the lenient and Christian methods to reclaim him, be ineffectual, and he continue obstinate in his false principles, and endeavours to introduce divisions and strife into the church, after due pains and patience, he is to be rejected from the communion of the faithful.—The Apostle to the christians at Rome, directs them in a Church-capacity to *mark* and *avoid* persons who embrace doctrines different from his; and who *thereby* cause divisions. He is very fervent and affectionate in his address. *Now I beseech you Brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, SELFISH VIEWS and INTEREST, and by good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple.* They delude the weak and uninformed. Well instructed Christians are seldom led away from sound doctrine. Unstable persons are easily seduced. So are the ignorant who have never improved their opportunities and advantages to furnish their minds with just views of the great and essential doctrines of the Christ-

tian Religion. Designing men who *cause divisions and offences* contrary to the doctrine of Christ, always carry on their purposes, with *good words* and *fair speeches*, much subtlety and art, under the disguise of friendship, and great zeal for a more pure religion. They have on *sheep's clothing*, though inwardly they are *ravening wolves*.

TITUS, Bishop of the Island of Crete, is directed how to convince opposers to the true religion: *holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught*, that is, the true Minister of Christ, *that he may be able by SOUND DOCTRINE both to exhort and convince gainsayers*. Sound doctrine, or the great and important truths of the Gospel, are the way to convince and reclaim gainsayers, or the erroneous. *Sound doctrine* is then knowable, what may be learned with much ease from the holy scriptures.—The Christians in the Churches of Galatia are told, that error and false doctrines have a strange kind of influence on the mind, like fascination. And that false prophets or pretended Teachers have almost the power of magic, or sorcery to *bewitch* people.—*O foolish Galatians who hath BEWITCHED you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth and crucified among you*. They had the very best means of instruction in the principles of the Gospel. St. Paul was their preacher. He was surpassed by none of his brethren, in zeal or eminence of abilities. After all, *false Teachers* seduced some of these professed Christians of the Churches of Galatia from the faith and order of the Gospel. He supposed there was something like magical incantation and witchcraft in their seduction. *O foolish Galatians who hath bewitched you*.—

Whoever, in the course of human events, has been an observing spectator of the rise and progress of any gross delusions or great errors in Religion, will not think the Apostle too strong in his language.—Certainly, then, most needful is the caution of the text, *be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.*

WHAT is proposed, in dependence on divine help, in the sequel, is to explain this caution, or to show the danger of instability, and pernicious tendency of error.—And then by way of improvement point out that conduct which becomes Christians, when gross errors and unhappy divisions spring up among them.

THE principal design of the present discourse is to explain the caution, of the Apostle, in these words, *be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines*, or to shew the danger of instability in religion, and pernicious tendency of error.

THE divers and strange doctrines, which the Apostle had in view, in the caution which he gives in the text, no doubt were various false and hurtful errors, which were spread among the Churches gathered and planted by the Apostles, through the insinuations and plausible arts of the Judaizing Teachers. Many of these, half Jews and half Christians, arose, and infested the Churches with the poison of their false notions. Their object in general was to form a coalition between Christianity and Judaism; to have the law of Moses and Gospel of Christ so blended as to form one complex religion. The Jewish converts to Christianity were extremely unwilling to relinquish their own rites and ceremonies. Long was it before they could admit the idea

that their legal rites and sacrifices were merely typical; and of course, were to be wholly abolished, when the Antitype was come. When the substance was come, the shadows were to flee away. The Judaizing teachers strenuously maintained, that the observance of the Mosaic ritual was necessary to salvation. They held that obedience to the law of Moses, as well as faith in Christ, was requisite to our justification before God. These *false teachers* had greatly corrupted the Gospel. Many were deluded by them. And *various strange* doctrines or notions about meats and drinks were adopted. And the Jewish converts to Christianity were tossed to and fro with them: Were *carried about*, or led away with them. The Apostle therefore writes to all the converts from Judaism to Christianity to beware of all notions, which were contrary to the great and essential doctrines of the Gospel, to the *first principles* of the Oracles of God. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.* He wished to have them STABLE and FIRM in their principles: never to listen to the various strange notions, which any should attempt to diffuse among them. *The divers and strange doctrines* against which the Apostle would have Christians be on their guard, are then all false notions and corrupt principles of Religion: all tenets and opinions however various, or surprisingly absurd they may be, which shall arise in the Church, in any age. The *strange doctrines* were principles contrary to what he taught and preached—contrary to the true doctrines of Christ. He calls them *strange* because unknown to the Gospel, not contained in the word of God, and not preached by him. And they were *strange* too because contrary to the obvious dic-

tates of reason. All unreasonable and absurd tenets in religion, may then fitly be termed *strange*. And they are *divers*; many and various. We are then to beware of all the various false principles broached among the several denominations of Christians. Such, at different times, spring up among the respective Communions of Christians. Some ages or periods are more noted for the rise and diffusion of errors and delusions than others. But error, in a greater or less degree, has infected every age, and part of the Christian world. Sometimes, indeed, the pure and strict principles of the Gospel will long obtain among a people. They will have uninterrupted tranquility. The great head of the Church shall remarkably smile upon them. The God of Zion shall long bless them. No tempest rages. No clouds overshadow the sky. The truth is professed, and is ably defended. Men of shining talents, and whose zeal for purity of doctrines and worship is equal to their talents are raised up, in happy succession, to oppose error, and to plead the cause of Zion; who are as polished shafts in the quiver of God; and who are honoured as eminent instruments of promoting the truth.---A few years may produce, in the same place or Country, a melancholy reverse. Truth may be greatly opposed. Errors of a very alarming nature may suddenly arise. Zion may be clothed in sackcloth, and be bathed in tears. Public worship may be deserted. Divine ordinances may be denied or disregarded. The Saviour may be disowned, and the interests of morality be languishing. False prophets then come forward; betrayers of the truth are found to multiply where there was the least ground to fear. Error is most widely and extensively dif-

fused by corrupt writings and corrupt men, under the venerable name of *preachers* of the Gospel, who travel into different and distant parts, with the zeal of pilgrims, and with an engagedness, which if employed in the promotion of truth and pure religion, would work happy effects. An uncommon ardor usually accompanies men, who broach novel tenets, and set out with an intention to disseminate them extensively. Pride and party views aid that ardor. An unwillingness to sink into contempt, and an ambition to keep themselves in countenance produce wonderful exertions. The man, who undertakes to spread errors and delusions feels that his reputation is concerned in his success; every proselyte adds strength:—every advance gives courage. And it is a remark well-founded, that we seldom find fanatics in religion, and the propagators of false principles deficient either in impudence or ardor. Men who have thrown off the strict and pure doctrines, in which they have been educated, or which they have for many years professed, and have denied all religion, or adopted erroneous and false principles, commonly become obstinate and stubborn, self-confident and censorious. Rarely is it known that such are ever reclaimed. They go on waxing worse and worse, till life close, and eternity open upon them. How needful therefore the caution, *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines!* How unhappy to be unstable, in the things of Gods! How mischievous is the tendency of error! *The double minded man is unstable in all his ways.* The character of *Reuben* is, *unstable as water thou shall not excel.* Instability will effectually prevent our arriving at any degree of excellence, in any praise-worthy pur-

suit. If unstable, we can make no proficiency in useful knowledge, or arrive at any high degree of moral Virtue, or religious attainments. Man suffers more by being unstable in his ways than can be easily computed, or than almost any one is aware of. The more important and interesting the things, in which we are engaged, or to which we propose to pay our attention, the more fatal is instability. To be always changing from one thing to another, is the way never to accomplish any thing, at least, to any good purpose. When we consider instability as it respects Religion, the danger of it can hardly be expressed or conceived. He who is unstable in the things of the world is sure to be, in the event, despised; and to sink into wretchedness. Misfortunes and disgrace will attend him. He cannot pass his days with comfort. He must content himself, whatever may be his ambition, with being an unimportant character, and being of little service to the great community of men, unless by being a warning to all with whom he may converse of the ill effects of instability.

BUT he who is unstable in the things of God, can enjoy no comfort or arrive at any excellence. *It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.* Happy is the person who is established, in the principles of grace, and in gracious and holy exercises! *To be carried about with divers and strange doctrines* is the way to have no just and true notions of the doctrines of Christ, to lose the advantages of the Gospel, to be instrumental of giving to others false notions of religion, or prejudices against it, and to be in danger of missing of final happiness ourselves. The Apostle had very great anxiety lest Christians, the

professed converts to Christianity, should be led away from the truth by subtle deceivers. *That we, says he, to the Ephesians, henceforth be no more Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of man, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.* Children are easily persuaded to change their minds—to adopt new, and lay aside former opinions, without any careful examination, or sufficient reasons. So, many people, who indeed are but Children in knowledge, are tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. And there are always to be found a plenty of wrong-principled men, who lie in wait to deceive. The Apostle speaks of their insidious arts, and plausible ways of deception in terms remarkably strong: *by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*—As there are *true*, so there are *false*, and as there are *sound*, so there are *unsound* or corrupt doctrines. And as we are most diligently to seek and love the one, so we are most cautiously to shun the other. And this is of the greatest importance to us all; and of equal importance to all. All are liable to fall from the truth, or to misapprehend it. There is no moment the Christian can say, “I am free from the danger of falling into error; such error as shall offend God, grieve his people, cause divisions, interrupt the peace of the Church, and wound my own Conscience.” Error is pleasing to the depraved heart of man. Divine truth is unwelcome. Others, great and learned men, after high professions have apostatized---have renounced the right ways of the Lord. “I may, in the holy and righteous Providence of God, should the Christian say, be left to fall into

“error and delusion.” *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* The tendency of false principles in Religion is extremely pernicious. All error indeed hath an unhappy effect on the human mind.*

* THE pernicious tendency of ERROR, especially in religion, is described by a writer of some eminence in the literary world—in the following allegorical representation, which I shall take the liberty to insert here for the reader’s benefit, in a note. The allegory is that *the demon of error* undertook to conduct a traveller over *the Ocean of doubts* into *the land of confidence*, and was by a magic power called forth from the earth by the *genius of probability*—“Not waiting for a reply, he, the *genius of probability*, stamped three times on the ground, and called forth the *demon of Error*, a gloomy fiend of the servants of A-rimanes. The yawning earth gave up the reluctant Savage, who seemed unable to bear the light of day. His stature was enormous, his colour black and hideous, his aspect betrayed a thousand varying passions, and he spread forth pinions that were fitted for the most rapid flight. The traveller, at first, was shocked at the spectre; but, finding him obedient to superior power, he assumed his former tranquility.

I HAVE called you to duty, (cries the genius to the demon,) to bear on your back a son of mortality, over *the Ocean of doubts* into *the land of confidence*. I expect you will perform your commission with punctuality. And as for you, (continued the genius, addressing the traveller,) when once I have bound this fillet round your eyes, let no voice of persuasion, nor threats, the most terrifying, persuade you to unbind it, in order to look round: keep the fillet fast; look not at the Ocean below, and you may certainly expect to arrive at a region of pleasure.

THUS saying, and the traveller’s eyes being covered, the demon muttering curses, raised him on his back, and instantly upborne by his strong pinions, directed his flight among the clouds. Neither the loudest thunder, nor the most angry tempest, could persuade the traveller to unbind his eyes. The demon directed his flight downwards, and skimmed the surface of the Ocean: a thousand voices, some with loud invective, others in the sarcastic tones of contempt, vainly endeavoured to persuade him to look round; but he still continued to keep his eyes covered, and would, in all probability, have arrived at the happy land, had not flattery effected what other means could not perform. For now he heard himself welcomed on every side to the promised land, and an universal shout of joy was sent forth at his safe arrival; the wearied traveller desirous of seeing the long wished for country at length pulled the fillet from his eyes, and ventured to look round him. But he had unloosed the band too soon; he was not yet above half way over. The demon who was still hovering in the air, and had

1. THE pernicious tendency of error appears from the influence, which all principles, whether true or false, have on the life and conduct of mankind. That truth has great power and influence upon the human mind, will hardly be denied. Mighty is its force. The powerful influence of divine truth in purifying the affections of the heart, and reforming the life is necessarily implied in these words : *Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth.* These are the words of our Redeemer himself. And they certainly teach us, that Gospel-truths, or the pure and heavenly doctrines of his religion have a tendency to correct the prejudices, to enlighten the minds, to impress the hearts, and to purify the affections of people. If the happy effects of true doctrines, and the real principles of the Gospel were not great---why are they to be preached---why is there so much said about holding fast the form of sound words---of being found in the faith---of sound doctrines,---of contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints---of abiding in the doctrine of Christ? On the other hand, if the effect of error be not exceedingly pernicious, why should we be so frequently, and so solemnly warned against false teachers---false doctrines---false Christ's---against making shipwreck of faith and a good Conscience---and against the danger of all delusion? Some affect to believe in the harmlessness of error; and that all opinions and speculations in religion are of little or no consequence. But if error be

produced those sounds only in order to deceive, was now freed from his commission; wherefore, throwing the astonished traveller from his back, the unhappy youth fell headlong into the subjacent Ocean of doubts from whence he was never after seen to rise."——

harmless—I think it will follow that truth is useless. But did not Jesus of Nazareth, come from God on purpose to reveal the truth?—

2ndly. ALL errors or false principles, respecting religion and morals, lead to evil practices. The greater the error, the greater will be its ill-effect. Small errors, relating to the mere circumstances of religion, to names and forms, rites and ceremonies, have a proportionally small influence in producing wrong practice, or corrupting the morals of men. Many speculations, and erroneous opinions are of so inconsiderable a nature, though they have caused much altercation and divisions among professing Christians, as to be totally unworthy of notice. And Christians ought to be ashamed that they ever contended about them. They are not of sufficient consequence in themselves to excite warrantably any alarm in that mind, which has the tenderest and most affectionate regards for truth and religion. There are meats and drinks, indifferent things, in which the kingdom of God doth not consist. We need never dispute about these. From those who hold to them, our Charity ought not, in the smallest degree, to be withdrawn. We may have all the ardor of brotherly love towards, and Christian Communion with, them.—Other errors, again, are of a most alarming nature, and affect the very substance and vitals of Religion. They undermine the foundation, and take away all the beauty and glory of the Gospel. Such the Apostle Peter styles *damnable heresies*. 2 Pet. ii. 1. *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false Teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them,*

and bring up themselves swift destruction. These are errors which are essential—which, pursued in all their natural and necessary consequences, destroy all the foundations of Religion. Errors of this kind have the worst effect on practice. We must strictly guard against them, and do all in our power, in all scripture-ways, to prevent their rise or progress. We must retire from such as hold them. And we cannot, with a safe conscience, wish them *God speed.* *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the father and the son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.—*

OUR practice is more or less influenced by all our religious tenets. Wrong belief leads to wrong conduct. Error in doctrine, invariably and universally, affects the conduct in proportion to its magnitude. To illustrate this, in a few plain instances which cannot be controverted—permit me to ask,—Suppose I imbibe the erroneous opinion that prayer to the God of all grace is not required of man, and is wholly insignificant, will not this lead me to lay aside the practice of it, in all its forms, altogether?—Again, suppose I adopt, as one article of my Creed, that there are no divine Sacramental ordinances in the spiritual religion of Jesus Christ—or stated prayer—or Sabbath-day—or that the means of grace are of no use, will not this cause me to disesteem them; and, then, to neglect them in my life entirely?—or further, suppose I receive, as a

right opinion in morals, the lawfulness of self-murder, and the lawfulness of violating the truth, when it may be inconvenient for me to adhere strictly to its laws, will any man believe that I shall not, as emergencies arise, act out these corrupt principles? Innumerable other instances, might with equal pertinency, be adduced. These are only adduced as a specimen to prove, beyond all contradiction, that all errors have either a greater or less influence on the conduct of men.

3dly. FALSE principles in religion excite and nourish evil tempers of heart. Doctrines which are contrary to the Gospel, and are not according to godliness have an influence upon the heart, as well as life. They corrupt the mind. Nay, they pollute and vitiate it. They create evil desires and vile affections, envy, prejudice, wrath, evil speaking, censoriousness, bitterness. They destroy the sweet and benevolent exercises, in which our happiness consists. As heavenly truths, the pure doctrines of Christianity, sweeten and purify the heart, and make man meek, kind, tender-hearted—benevolent, and friendly to man, so false principles or wrong religious tenets, excite evil affections, and poison the soul with malice and impurity. By their fruits on the heart, as well as conduct are we to know doctrines, as well as Teachers. *Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit: neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit*

is hewn down and cast into the fire. Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.—Characters and doctrines are to be known by their *fruits*. False doctrines always tend to corrupt the heart.

4thly. FALSE doctrines or errors have a pernicious influence upon the morals of society at large, even upon the manners of those people, where they rise up and prevail, though they do not imbibe them. Loose and unimproving discourse flows from wrong and loose principles. Such discourse falls in with the evil propensities of the natural heart, is listened to with eagerness, and retailed as an amusement even by persons who detest the principles. *Evil communications corrupt good manners.* They always had, and always will have this effect. The *tongue* which speaks evil of Virtue and the pure doctrines of the Gospel, and which advocates the cause of vice, is doing untold mischief to society and the public morals.—Much more extensive is the mischief produced by the *pen*, which is employed to recommend, to colour over, and spread Vice and error, infidelity and immorality. Happy for society, happy for the world, would it have been, if the learned had never devoted genius, science, and talents to the cause of Vice! But error as well as truth, Vice as well as Virtue will have advocates to plead in their defence. And where, either by wrong-principled men, or erroneous writings, errors are spread, the people are corrupted in their morals. All false principles, more or less, injure society, where they obtain; and have an ill-effect upon the manners of such as are spectators of them, or reside in the midst of them. This is the natural tendency of errors, in doctrines and practice. And this effect

will take place, unless individuals, or the people at large, have such an abhorrence of them, as shall be an effectual antidote.

WHEN errors arise and spread, the Christian may, and ought to be grieved, but he ought not to despond; or distrust the love and kindness of God to his true people and the true Religion. Especially ought he not to mingle resentment with his concern for the cause of truth, *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* For wise and holy ends, error is permitted to spring up, and prevail. But it can go no farther than a wise and Sovereign God sees meet. He can say to it, hitherto shall thy proud waves come and no farther. And he will stay it, in such a manner, and such ways, and at such times, as seem best to him. We may rest in these words of our Saviour, *Every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.* It was a wise advice of a learned man, Gamaliel---*If this work and counsel be not of God, it will come to nought.* Error and delusion must at last die away. But truth shall obtain an eternal victory.—

HAVING finished what was proposed, it only remains to improve what hath been offered, for your direction and assistance in practice.—

AND first—We should examine all our principles by the word of God. The true principles of religion are to be taken thence. And they are, in their great foundation, easily to be learned. All men of common capacity may know them, if they will be honest and upright in their search. The reason, why there have been so many divisions and errors, or false doctrines,

is because men have left the holy scriptures, and gleaned strange doctrines, from other sources. The word of God must be our supreme and only standard. If we make any thing a rule above it, we wholly depart from it, and get our religion from another source. And respecting the true principles of religion, I venture to say, all real Christians, of whatever denomination, are perfectly agreed in them—in the absolutely essential doctrines, I mean, and are much more agreed in every thing material, than they themselves either clearly apprehend, or are willing to confess.

Secondly, let us feel the need of continually watching, lest we go off from the pure principles of the Gospel. We see others, in one age and another, and in one place and another, renouncing the right ways of the Lord—denying the great doctrines and ordinances of Christ. And we behold men changing their principles after long professed, for errors and delusion.—Let us ever be upon our guard against the danger of going off from the doctrine of Christ. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.—*

Thirdly, if we have imbibed errors, let us hence be persuaded to lose no time in recovering ourselves from the snare. Others, after having adopted great errors, have seen their folly—have mourned over their obstinacy, stubbornness, and prejudices:—have recanted:—and returned to the truth. Let us, if we have been carried away with divers and strange doctrines—**HASTEN** to relinquish them, and recover ourselves from them, before it be too late. Soon

our days on earth will be ended, and it will be too late to rectify any mistakes.—

Fourthly—Let us add constant humble prayer for divine grace to keep us from backsliding—from instability—from all delusion—and false doctrines. Odious is the character of the *backslider*. The unstable man cannot excel. Fer-
vently—constantly, should we look to the God of all wisdom and grace to keep us from dishonouring him, and the truth, by backsliding, and error:—that he would be pleased to open our eyes to see the truth, and our ears to hear it:—that he would confirm us in goodness:—establish us in the faith:—and hope of the Gospel, that we may not only be steadfast and immoveable, but abound more and more in the work of the Lord—be perfect in every good word and work---and thus be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.



DISCOURSE XXI.

THE general excellency of the Christian Religion.

I CORINTHIANS xii. 31.

BUT covet earnestly the best gifts ; yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

IN the Church of Corinth there was much contention about the various miraculous gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT, which, in the first ages of Christianity, were conferred for the general benefit of the common cause of our Salvation. Without them, small would have been the success of the Apostles. Their wonderful success depended not upon the efficacy of human means, but is to be chiefly attributed to these miraculous gifts. *And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* These gifts, called the baptism of the holy Ghost, were necessary to rouse the attention of a thoughtless generation, to satisfy the Jew that the promised Messiah, one greater than Moses, was come, and that mighty works showed forth themselves in him, and to convince the Gentile that the Idol-Gods of the nations were vanity and a lie. They were also necessary to put men of leisure

and science upon a full and free enquiry into the merits and worth of that Religion, which was introduced to the world and supported by evidences of so extraordinary a nature.—The persons, as would be rational to suppose, who possessed these miraculous powers, such as the gift of tongues—of healing—of prophecy—and discernment of spirits, were considered in a high and honourable light, in a light bordering upon veneration. By their own brethren they were greatly respected, and among their heathen neighbours: of course, would be viewed as almost divine. Whatever is preternatural calls forth attention and wonder. The distinction, which these gifts conferred, became in the Corinthian Church a matter of envy. In this Chapter, which is closed with our text, the Apostle takes up, and largely discusses the subject of the miraculous gifts of the spirit. He allows them to *covet*, earnestly to desire and seek these gifts, not as an occasion of boasting and pride, but that thereby they might be the instruments of more successfully spreading the truth and glory of the Gospel. But he would have them by no means forget that, excellent as these gifts were, there was something still more excellent, to which he would most affectionately recall and fix their attention:—which far exceeded all external gifts however splendid, and that was the spirit of Charity or Christian benevolence, which is the essence of all pure and undefiled Religion. *But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.*

THIS more excellent way, which he above all recommends to them, is that of Charity, or real holy benevolent affection, and which, in the

next Chapter, he discusses and illustrates, in a manner equally beautiful and sublime.—Instead of calling the attention of the audience to the particular excellencies of the divine principle of holy benevolent affection, Charity, I shall attempt to state at large the GENERAL EXCELLENCE of the Christian religion. And for this, the words selected for present meditation, lay a proper foundation. Charity indeed, as but now mentioned, is *that more excellent way* intended by the Apostle, and of which he speaks in the following terms.—*Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling Cymbal.* But since Charity which, here doth not mean beneficence to the poor, but the true love of God and man, or holy benevolent affection, is the sum and essence of true Christianity, we may naturally pass to consider the GENERAL EXCELLENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, or to show, in a number of important respects, how excellent a way the Gospel is, which it is proposed to do, in the four following discourses.

To all the real friends of Zion, of rational religion, this must be of all themes one of the most pleasing. Whoever loves either his Maker or Redeemer, must feel a satisfaction, greater than words can describe, to hear the honours of that religion unfolded, which the supreme Being hath so clearly revealed, which a Saviour died to establish, and upon which his own hopes of eternal felicity must be founded.—If any subject, therefore, in the extensive science of theology, be able to awaken and fix the attention of a congregation, it must be the one now to be

considered. After all that can be said by me, or even by the most eloquent tongue, or written by the ablest pen, in praise of that Religion which we enjoy, the one half of its praises will be still untold. With much propriety may the words of the Queen of Sheba, expressive of her well-founded admiration, after she had leisurely surveyed the grandeur and glory of Solomon, and been an ear-witness of his wisdom, be applied to the subject of the GENERAL EXCELLENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.—*And she said to the king, it was a true report that I heard in mine own Land of thy acts and of thy wisdom; howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes have seen it; and behold the one half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.*—Thrice happy are those who know the excellency of the Christian Religion, not merely from speculation, but from feeling its temper, and practising its duties.—May divine grace enable me to speak upon this great subject in such a manner, that when you have heard its glories, you may be so delighted with it, as to be resolved in your own minds, that you will never for the future neglect it, whatever else may be neglected.—I have an inexpressible solicitude, lest so important a subject should be debased by the imperfect manner, in which it will be illustrated.—

In the first place, the worth of the Gospel way of life and peace will deeply impress the mind contrasted with every other Religion. All the religions which have ever been in the world, from the beginning to this day, may be divided

into *revealed* and *unrevealed*. Man will have some kind of Religion. To suppose all the human race can be brought to absolute scepticism or Atheism, is the idlest of all chimerical suppositions. Visionary are those philosophers who believe this possible. While they exert themselves to bring it to pass, they may be the means of diffusing impiety and irreligion considerably, and of consequence profaneness and immorality. They will find some profelytes. For nothing was ever yet so absurd or self-contradictory, on the subject of religion, but some have been found foolish enough to embrace and defend it. But in the end all will be convinced, that the attempt to extirpate all religion from the Earth, will be like contending with the Elements, or opposing nature in her great course, and therefore cannot succeed. The propension towards some kind of religion in the human heart is strong. There is a natural preparation in our minds for receiving some impressions of supernatural belief. "Upon these, among ignorant and uncultivated men, superstition and enthusiasm never fail to graft themselves. Into what monstrous forms these have shot forth, and what various mischiefs they have produced to society, is too well known." Designing men are always ready to take advantage of this popular weakness, and to direct the superstitious bias of the multitude to their own ambitious and interested ends. Hence all the impostures which have been in the world among the various nations, and in various ages. Hence the imposture of Mahomet—that of Zoroaster among the ancient Persians—of Numa Pompilius at Rome:—and of all the heathen Oracles. Whoever attends to these, with a candid and critical mind, will

have a proof abundantly clear, and fully satisfactory, that they could not have a celestial origin, but must be man's device, mere fraud and delusion. All the particular religions which have ever been in the world, may be comprehended in these three, *paganism*, Judaism inclusive of the patriarchal, and Christianity to which the Jewish, including the patriarchal, was only introductory. And we may add Deism, if that may, with any justice, be called a religion. A fair and large contrast of all these, in their nature, their tendency, their doctrines, their rites would be an effectual way to evince the glories of the Christian Theology, as the only TRUE system; for the Jewish was only typical of, and preparatory to it. This cannot now be done, for it would interfere with the present design. I think however if some able and learned pen were employed to do this, it would be an unspeakable advantage to the Christian Cause, and lasting benefit to the world.*——I now content myself with only just observing, compared with the ceremonies of the law of Moses, or all the heathen systems of morality or superstition, the Christian Religion shines, like the Sun in his meridian splendor, compared with the borrowed light of the Moon, or faint glimmering of the

* THE reader will take notice that I suppose eminent service may be done the Christian Religion, by a fair and candid comparison made between it, and all other religions—namely, Paganism—Mahomitanism—and the philosophic religion of modern Infidels—or rather irreligion. This is, in a measure, a new subject. And as from the state of our Country the probability is that the grand dispute will be, SHALL WE HAVE ANY RELIGION OR SHALL WE NOT; so it would be a peculiarly SEASONABLE subject. I hope some able pen will ere long, undertake the arduous task to discuss it.—An elegant pen has beautifully contrasted Mahomitanism with the Gospel. But we want something further.

Stars. *And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we behold his glory as of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.* It is the best religion that ever was, or that will be ever published to the world. The last dispensation of mercy is it, which will ever be revealed to a sinful race: and its glory is such as bespeaks its divine original, in so clear and affecting a light, that all will be left perfectly inexcusable, if they neglect its calls, or refuse to comply with its offers. For, it is just such a Religion as depraved and fallen Creatures need. It provides for their relief and pardon, while at the same time, it secures the honours of the law—of the Character—and of the Government of God. None who will divest themselves of prejudices, and in the spirit of candor examine its nature, can help admiring the grace which it reveals; the duties which it enjoins, and the comforts which it imparts, not with a sparing but liberal hand. Such as with patience survey its nature, will be compelled however reluctant, to acknowledge that it is a peaceful benevolent system, calculated in the wisest manner to promote the glory of the Supreme Being, to secure the dignity of his attributes, and to bring the greatest good to man. Well therefore might the angelic hosts celebrate the birth of its founder, in the following beautiful anthem of praise; *Glory to God in the highest, good will to man, and peace on earth.*—How mild its aspect! how beneficial its tendency!—What is its object, but to wash away our sins, that they may never rise up to our condemnation in a future world, to which we are hastening; to establish our peace---and to secure our felicity?—What is its object, but to

make us pious and holy here, to rescue us from that misery which we deserve, and to prepare us for, and finally bring us to, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away!—

In the next place, The Gospel contains a most excellent system of doctrines, and prescribes a plain and rational mode of worship. This is one thing, in which its glory or worth consists. The universal degeneracy of mankind, their blindness and ignorance of God or their perverseness of will must convince us, that the light of reason is not sufficient to bring us to the true knowledge of duty, or just apprehensions of the divine perfection, or to point out that mode of worship with which he will be pleased. But the Christian religion begins, where it ought to begin, by pointing us first of all to the one true God, existing in a threefold, though to us incomprehensible manner; and most explicitly prescribes the only right way of worshipping and serving him. It calls off the mind entirely from all vain Idols, which are a lie, and all absurd forms, and superstitious rites. As the belief of one God lies at the foundation of all religion, so it is altogether fit, and not only altogether fit but perfectly reasonable that we should first be instructed concerning his being, his nature, his laws, and his character; and then concerning that mode of honouring and serving him, which will be acceptable to him. There is but one God, and one Mediator between God and man. He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of all them that diligently serve him. The history of all the pagan nations abundantly proves to all who either know much about it, or have eyes to see, how prone human nature is

to go after Idols and false Gods; and to practise rites of worship, inconsistent, absurd and superstitious—or to perform in honour of their Divinities, sacrifices, both extremely cruel, and exceedingly unnatural. The glory of Christianity, therefore, shines with a bright lustre, in calling man's attention first of all to the one true God; and then to the right way of serving him. This also sets its wisdom, in a most conspicuous point of view. For the world by wisdom knew not God. Mankind, where they have had no assistance from Revelation, have had no proper or just ideas of a supreme Being.

THE pagan nations of the earth ever have, whatever might be their civilization or learning, lived in the grossest ignorance of God, and in the most sottish Idolatry: worshipping, by absurd and impure rites, many of their Idols. They have paid honours divine to the sun, moon, and stars:—to birds, beasts, and fishes, nay even to insects and plants. The wise Greeks and learned Romans are not to be excepted. The few philosophers among them, who saw and despised the folly of the vulgar superstition, did not mark out any rational system of worship. The people at large lived, not only in the vilest Idolatry, but indulged in the most unnatural and detestible vices, such as cannot be named, without causing us to blush for the shameful conduct of human nature.

As the few philosophers, in the antient civilized heathen nations, who had arrived at the greatest eminence in the knowledge of what is called natural religion, exhibit to us in the midst of some bright sayings about the supreme Being, the first cause of all things, many child-

ish and unworthy notions ; so they have also given a poor, defective system of moral Virtue. It must not be denied, that some very rational and wise sayings concerning the being and attributes of the Deity, have come down to us from the antient ages. But none of them had any uniformly consistent and just apprehensions of him. Their notions about the first cause of all things, had in them a strange mixture of truth and error, sense and nonsense. Sometimes in reading them, we are struck with agreeable surprize, at the justice of some observation concerning the being of a God, his perfection, and Providence. But alas ! the pleasure is destroyed in a moment by some most absurd or impious sentiment :—all is confounded with fable and fiction.—When we turn our eye to their notions of moral Virtue, and man's real happiness, we find little, if any more satisfaction. They wrangled continually about the CHIEF GOOD, or true happiness of man. They differed most widely from each other. And none of them hit upon the truth.—Their morality, viewed only with a superficial eye, I grant, looks specious and shining. Some beautiful and just sentiments are displayed in all the elegance and charms of language. The man of taste admires the diction. We read, with a kind of rapture, some of their sentences : the ideas of morality contained in them are so just, and the stile so pleasing. Many of their moral sayings indeed are worthy to be imprinted on the memory. But when we critically and impartially weigh their systems, of moral Virtue, we find them essentially defective. For they are always built upon wrong principles. A contracted self-love, or a regard to the external advantages of society,

or a hope to live, in the praises of the latest posterity, were their highest motives. The rewards of piety—the honour of God—and the certain belief of a future state cannot be reckoned at all a part of their religion. Nay, if any acknowledged the unity of the Godhead, they were reputed Atheists. And the best of them all pleaded for suicide, and other shocking and unnatural vices.

FOR arguments sake, we will admit that our reason, without any help from a divine revelation, is adequate to teach us the duties of morality, so far as may be needful to regulate all our conduct in this world, and to direct all the exercises of our affections aright as to time. Still something further is essential. When I admit this sufficiency of reason in regard to moral duty; I do not admit by any means that it can be proved.—But if it could be proved, still the wonderful discoveries of the Gospel respecting a Mediator and a world to come, and many other important points, would be not only most desirable, but essentially necessary. And therefore, the Gospel is indeed glorious and excellent. Reason, then, separate from Revelation, cannot inform us concerning some of the most necessary and essential things in Religion. It cannot tell us whether any pardon of sin can be dispensed to us. It cannot inform us, either what the recompence of Virtue will be, or the punishment of Vice. It cannot ascertain the degree of goodness which will be remunerated; if any is to be at all:—or what kinds and degrees of Vice shall be punished. It cannot point out to us, what sins, of which we have been guilty, will be for-

given; or whether any will be; or if they will be, upon what grounds. Neither can it look forward into another state of being, and tell us the duration in which we shall exist; or in which Virtue will be remunerated; or in which Vice will be frowned upon:—or indeed whether there shall be any future state at all; or whether there will be a future retribution, if a future state. It may conjecture on these most important and essential subjects. But it can go no farther than mere conjecture; and as to some of them, hardly so far. Its light here is so feeble, that it scarcely glimmers. It cannot therefore relieve us under the pains and anguish of a guilty conscience. It hath no motives and arguments of weight sufficient to induce us to break off all our sins by repentance, and our transgressions by turning unto the Lord. It spreads not before us, an endless good to engage us to love and fear God, or endless punishment to deter us from sin.—In the world we often behold vice prospered, and Virtue depressed. The wicked often flourish, in the course of human events; and upon them fortune smiles propitiously: while the worthy and the good experience the bitterness of calamity, and adversity takes them by her cold hand. In cases of this nature, reason would utterly fail in administering sufficient succour.—But Religion composes the mind under all the vicissitudes of human life. Nay, it opens to us rich consolation.—And one eminent branch of its excellence is that it instructs us fully, clearly, and plainly as to just notions of God, of the manner in which he will be worshipped, of his readiness to forgive us on our repentance and amendment through an atonement made for sin. It teaches us, also, the nature of this atonement

It informs us of the nature of true Virtue; the rewards of it; the punishment of Vice; the continuance of the one and the other; and the certainty of a life to come.—It opens to us the truth in distinction from all error; and is, therefore, by way of eminence sometimes called THE TRUTH. Its author is stiled the true and faithful witness. And its doctrines are set forth as true and faithful sayings. It points out the right path, and guards, as much as is possible against all false principles and delusions, visions and idle dreams in things of a religious nature. And what is much to its praise, and no inconsiderable proof of its divinity, it doth not dwell upon subtle and curious speculations, whose tendency would be only to embarrass and perplex honest inquirers after truth and happiness; or at least to amuse the imagination, without mending the heart, or regulating the morals of men.

WITH the utmost possible clearness and force of language, it states what we are by nature, and what we must be by grace:—the manner in which we must live, and what we are to expect, if we conform ourselves to its precepts, and exercise its temper, in another world, as a recompence. It directs us to keep under due discipline all the turbulent passions and evil propensities of the mind. *They that are Christ's, says the Apostle Paul, have crucified the flesh with its lusts and affections.* The same inspired penman thus exhorts us, *Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

WHAT is worthy of particular notice, the

christian Religion has no pomp and parade. It relates the great truths which we are to believe and leaves them to have their impression both on the heart and life. It discovers indeed the most sublime mysteries, doctrines above man to invent, and consequently above, though not repugnant to reason.—It informs us of the FALL of man, that tragical event whence all our woes :—and the method of our recovery :—that the Supreme Being exists as Father, Son, and holy Ghost, possessed of all possible perfections, and worthy of all homage :—that he orders and disposes of the Universe, the natural and moral world, at pleasure :—that he controuls and directs all things and events :—that the eternal destiny of every one of the Children of men is in his sovereign hands :—that purity of heart and piety of life are essential to salvation :—that incorrigible sinners must be punished with endless destruction :—that at the end of the world, the dead will be raised :—the living be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye :—that a general judgment will be holden :—that all real goodness will share in a glorious reward :—and that grace divine is necessary to form and prepare the heart for the eternal enjoyment of God.

AND what is by no means to be omitted, all its doctrines are consistent. They form one rational connected system. There is no contradiction, no darkness, or mysticism resting upon its doctrines, as they are stated in the sacred Volume, though they have been differently explained by different denominations. They are in themselves clear. They are full. They are explicit. No clouds hang over them. And every lover of this holy religion must deeply re-

gret, that ever any human mixtures and traditions should be substituted for the commandments of God. Much more, that these last should be made null and void, or superseded by those, as the most generous candour must allow they have by various Communions of Christians.

As to the MODE of worship, and divine ORDINANCES to be attended upon; they are such as reason fully approbates; they are free from superstition and enthusiasm. Superstition places all the excellence of worship in rites and forms, names and ceremonies. It tythes mint, annise and cummin. It lays great stress on mere bodily observances which profit little, or on trifles. —Enthusiasm lays claim to fictitious joys, visionary raptures, to inspiration, and an uncommon intimacy with the Deity. Now it is the Excellency of the Christian religion, that it gives no countenance to either of these. It always, on the contrary, places the essence of all acceptable worship, in the pure and fervent devotions of the heart, in a rational and enlightened piety, commanding us stately to offer homage to God:—to be fervent in spirit serving the Lord:—and to present all our prayers to his throne, in the name of our Redeemer, relying on his complete righteousness, and efficacious intercessions. For he is *that other angel that came and stood at the Altar, having a golden Censor, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden Altar.*



DISCOURSE XXII.

THE general excellency of the Christian Religion.

I CORINTHIANS xii. 31.

BUT covet earnestly the best gifts ; yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

THE *more excellent way* here spoken of, is that of Charity, by which we are not to understand a liberal and bountiful disposition, or mere almsgiving, or a favourable opinion of the good or safe state of others, which is the general acceptation of the word in common discourse, and in some writers, but the great principle of love to God and man, which is the scripture-sense of the word. In a preceding sermon, on these words, the Congregation were informed, that it was proposed by divine leave, at some length to consider from them the GENERAL EXCELLENCY of the Christian Religion : and that it was presumed the intelligent hearer would immediately perceive, that they laid a proper foundation for so extensive a design. No subject in Divinity can be more important in itself, more seasonable in this day, or more interesting to any audience, than the one before us. For it is because the beauty and glory of the Christian Religion, in itself, or compared with all other

particular religions which have been in the world, are not discerned or realized, that any, in their folly or pride of abilities and philosophy, reject it as unworthy of credit; or scoff at it as a *cunningly devised fable*; or embrace a maimed and defective scheme of it. To the same general cause must it be ascribed, that others are careless and indifferent about complying with its offers of life and pardon, who daily sit under its ministrations. Most happy will it be, therefore, if in the progress of our reasonings and illustrations, an impression may be made on the mind, of the beauty and worth of that system of Religion, under which in the course of a wise and Sovereign Providence, it is our favoured lot to live. If you will carefully and strictly attend, I shall not despair of effecting so desirable a purpose: for all who have eyes cleansed of prejudice to see, ears sanctified by a solemn awe of God to hear, and understandings awakened by the importance of the subject to perceive, cannot help being struck with the *beauty and worth* of the Gospel.—

WE have already taken notice of the system of doctrines and mode of worship which the Gospel contains, as deserving of praise and admiration, as well as its glory compared with the law of Moses, or pagan systems of morality and superstition.—

Thirdly—WE now proceed to consider as a farther evidence of the excellency of the Christian Religion the duties which it enjoins, and the motives by which they are enforced.

ONE very great branch of the Excellence of Christianity consists in its containing a most *ra-*

tional system of duties, and enforcing them by the most *solemn motives*. The doctrines, indeed, the precepts, the duties, and the ordinances of the Christian religion are such as bespeak its Excellence, and the justice of its claims to a celestial origin. We have already gone over with a summary of its doctrines, and a brief view of its mode of worship. Imperfect indeed was the enumeration, and very short the view, but sufficient to evince the Excellence of it, as a divine Religion.—For whatever weight is to be laid on the external evidences of the Christian Religion, and it is to be confessed, that great weight is to be laid upon them, and that they have been happily and beautifully illustrated by some of the most learned men the world ever saw; still after all, the proof which administers to the reflecting mind the most entire satisfaction, is its internal Excellence, its own inherent worth and merit. To the real believer, who has experienced its divine power, the witness of God's spirit with his that he is a child of God, is above all other things, a proof to him of the truth and glory of the Gospel. But this is merely personal. This is like the *new name, the white stone, or hidden manna*, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.—*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. He that believeth hath the witness in himself.* The Gospel-system, then, lays before us the duties to be performed by us, in the various places and relations of life, as well as the doctrines to be believed. It tells us what we are to do, as well as what we are to believe. And that mere

belief, though the most orthodox, separated from the practice of duty, cannot avail to our acceptance with God.—And it is to the honour of the Gospel that there is no deficiency in regard to the duties urged upon us, any more than the doctrines to be received by us, the faith once delivered to the saints. All we are to do, then, in order to obtain the divine favour and to inherit eternal life, is most clearly placed before the mind. The practical part of religion, or the precepts to which our lives and conversation are to be conformed, is exceedingly plain. None in justice can urge that, what is necessary, in the preceptive part of scripture, is beyond their ability to comprehend, or that it is not reconcileable to reason. To every eye, though weak, the great outlines of duty are visible. Who is, or need be ignorant of what will infallibly ensure his complete and eternal felicity? If suitable pains be taken, and the necessary helps used, who doth not or may not understand the main branches of his duty to God, to the Saviour, to man, and to himself? What is the chief end of man? can any plead ignorance here? Is it not to love God supremely, to serve him faithfully, and to be happy forever in the enjoyment of him?—The sum of all revealed duty is what, in the text, the Apostle means by that *excellent way*, which he was about to show unto the Corinthian Christians, the love of God and man, or Charity. On these two following commandments, observes the author of it, hangs all practical Christianity, *thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself*. He who loves his Maker with all his heart, and his fellow-men as himself; and is careful in all things to do unto them, as he would that they should

do to him, fulfills his duty, in its main points. And if we comply with the whole duty of man—attend to all that is required of us, as duty, respecting God and man, Jesus Christ, and ourselves, we shall be happy. For our duty and our happiness are indissolubly connected. No one can be accepted of God, or be blessed, who omits duty knowingly and habitually. No one can be miserable who conscientiously attends to the whole of his duty, as revealed to him in the Oracles of truth. Holiness, then, is our highest interest, and the *Supreme Good*. The way that leadeth to life, is the way of obedience—of self-denial—of faith—of hope—of repentance—of humility—of meekness—of patience—of all moral goodness. And these duties are repeatedly urged—beautifully illustrated, and plainly commanded. The great terms of life and peace, of pardon and glory are so clearly revealed *that he that runs may read*. *And the Lord answered me, and said, write the vision and make it plain upon the table, that he may run that readeth it*. To the great clearness, with which our duty is set before us, extensive as we acknowledge it to be, may the following words be applied. *And an high way shall be there, and a way: and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those: the way-faring men though fools, shall not err therein*. The path of duty is a straight path. We cannot be carried away from it, but either through a corrupt inclination or misinformed judgment. If we sincerely desire to be found accepted of God, and to do our duty in all things, and faithfully use all the advantages which we enjoy, to learn our duty in its whole extent, we shall fail in no material points. Corrupt passions, pride,

indolence, self-will, and as the consequence, an erroneous conscience, turn us aside from the line of duty. Indeed our duty in all its branches is so explicitly laid before us, that we may be freed from all painful doubts or distressing perplexity about what we shall do to inherit eternal life. If we be not voluntarily deficient in proper care to understand our duty, we may well know what is required of us to do, as rational and accountable creatures, what will please our Maker and Preserver, the author and fountain of all goodness:—how he will be worshipped:—what will fit us in the temper of our hearts for his presence and kingdom:—and how, while in the world, to walk and conduct so as to be happy, when our connection with it shall be dissolved by death. Indeed, to say the truth, our duty to God—our duty to man—our duty to the Redeemer—and our duty to ourselves are set before us in the Gospel so plainly, that with good and honest hearts, we may easily understand it; and so repeatedly, that without criminal negligence, we cannot fail to understand it. The sum of it, as but now remarked, is comprised in supreme affection to the author of the Universe and unfeigned good will to men:—in forgiveness of injuries—in love to enemies—in beneficence to the poor—in benevolence to all—in humanity and compassion—in justice and integrity—in every Christian, moral, social, civil, and relative duty—in repentance and reformation, where we have done amiss, a fiducial reliance on the great atonement provided by the sufferings of the Mediator—a conformity to, and imitation of, his example which is complete and finished—and conformity to the moral character of God, together with an obediencial regard to his preceptive, and acquiescence in his providential will.

Conformity to the divine will is the sum of our duty.

AND what is worthy of particular notice here, is that Christian duty has but one object in view, the divine glory and human happiness, not as opposite and distinct, but as inseparably blended. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God. Of him, to him, and through him are all things, to whom should be glory forever. He made all things, and for his pleasure they are, and they were made. The universe was spoken into being, and is upheld in being to manifest the divine glory. It ought therefore to be our highest end. And the chief design of Christianity is to prepare us for happiness, in such a way, as shall effectually promote the divine honour; that is, IN THE WAY OF HOLINESS. All the doctrines which it enjoins, all the duties which it requires—and all the rites or sacramental institutions which it would have us celebrate, are, in their very nature, calculated to accomplish this most amiable and excellent purpose. In its design consequently it is perfectly uniform. It doth not hold up, or direct us to aim SUPREMELY at different and opposite objects. And the great end which it keeps uniformly, constantly, and invariably in view, beyond all controversy, is to prepare us by a state of probation, or by the exercises of a benevolent heart and the duties of a good life, for the kingdom of heaven. This is every where professed by Christ and his Apostles to be the chief end of the Christian life—the crown for which he is to contend—the goal to which he is to run—and the harvest which is to recompence him for all his labours. “No such prize was ever, in any other religion, hung out to mankind; nor any means, of course, pre-

scribed for the attainment of it.”—And how excellent that system must be, which has in view so glorious an object, cannot but strike every person of reflection and observation. Reason must see and acknowledge it. The path of duty is the narrow way that leadeth unto life. And the only way to advance effectually the divine glory.

AND to enforce duty upon the hearts and consciences of mankind, the most solemn motives are opened to us in the Christian Religion; which is a further and no inconsiderable proof of its excellence. After it has, with great accuracy and fulness, stated our duty, it doth not leave us as if indifferent whether we performed it or not. But as a firm and real friend, it follows us with such arguments and motives, as are the best adapted to work upon us, a saving impression. As it hath for its object our Salvation, so it employs every consideration to gain our consent to be saved, which has any probability of success. It deals not in cold and uninteresting speculations, or abstruse points, which only perplex, or at most amuse the inquisitive, or feed pride. It comes home to our hearts, to our bosoms, as if it would take no denial from us: as if it beheld us foolishly plunging into ruin. While we are straying in the wilderness of error, it calls after us with the eager voice of importunity and love, and pleads with us to return from our wanderings and folly, and to consent to be happy. *Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he would turn and live. O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words and turn to the Lord, say unto*

him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.

A GREAT deal has been said about religion in every age. There has been much contention about it too; some pleading for one scheme of doctrine, and some for another. Some setting up one plan of Church-order and discipline, and mode of worship, and some another. But all that is essential, absolutely so, is easy to be comprehended, and lies in a very narrow compass. There are but a few things absolutely necessary to salvation. And to induce us to attend to these, as we ought, the most solemn and weighty motives are presented to the mind: motives adapted in their own nature, to influence the heart, to interest the attention, and to call forth the warmest exertions: motives sublime, and of which reason must approve.—All that is, or can be dear to us: all that is sacred: all that is interesting to us as inhabitants of a dying world: all that respects everlasting happiness or everlasting woe, is placed before us—in the minds view. Expostulations, arguments, calls, warnings, and offers of life and peace, of pardon and glory are addressed, by turns, to mankind.—To persuade us to do our duty—to lead holy lives—to prepare for future blessedness—to hate sin—to repent of it—to turn from all unrighteousness—to believe and accept of a Saviour—and to obey the precepts of moral Virtue, every suitable argument is suggested. We are urged by the love of God;—by the compassion of Christ;—by the riches of eternal glory;—by the horrors of eternal perdition;—by the beauty of Virtue; by the deformity of vice;—by the uncertainty of time;—by the dying nature of all earthly

joys ;—by the agonies of death ;—by the solemn scenes of the opening grave ;—by the tribunal of the enthroned Judge ;—and by all the wonders of Eternity, to live as such beings, as we are, ought to live, to be holy in life and all manner of conversation, that after dissolution we may ascend to the realms of glory.

FROM this summary view of the DUTIES, which the Christian religion enjoins, and of the MOTIVES, by which these duties are enforced, its Excellence most clearly appears. Were we to enlarge, as with abundant propriety, we might, upon these topics, we should still more convincingly perceive its internal worth and glory.—Without dwelling any longer however upon them, we go on to say----

FOURTHLY, that the Excellency of the Christian Religion farther appears, as it contains the most *precious promises*, and *richly supports* its disciples in days of sorrow and affliction. This is an argument to prove its glory and usefulness, which can hardly fail to make some impression upon the mind. In general, we may here observe, that the Christian Religion seems to display a most intimate and perfect knowledge of human nature :---of what it wants to cure its disorders ; to guard it from errors ; to subdue its corruptions ; to strengthen its principles of reason and conscience ; to rectify its mistakes ; and to support it under every pressure of outward calamity or inward trial. Man as a frail Creature needs assistance ; as dependant, a refuge ; as weak, strength ; as ignorant, light and instruction ; as guilty, righteousness and pardon ; as wretched, redemption ; and as a candidate for another state of existence, gracious encourage-

ments and promises. And this intimate knowledge of human nature discovered, in the Gospel, proves its excellence, and is worthy to be mentioned among the evidences that it came from a source far above us, even from HIM who made us. With the reflecting and judicious, this is a proof which will have considerable influence towards satisfying and convincing the mind. If it contained no precious promises to encourage and animate our hopes, it certainly would be so far from being a perfect and finished system, that it would be materially defective. As hope is one of the great springs of human actions, so a Religion which is well and wisely adapted to our nature, would not fail to address this power of the soul, and make all the advantage of it that could be made, to bring about its everlasting salvation. A Religion which is true and genuine, must take man as he is---as he is found in experience, and treat him accordingly. And one peculiar excellence of the Christian Religion is, that it actually takes man as he is---addresses him as such, as a moral agent, as a rational though fallen Creature, as designed for an immortal duration, and accountable to his Maker not only for all his outward conduct, but also for his mental exercises---or views, exercises, and affections of heart.——

A BRIEF consideration of the richness, extensiveness, and preciousness of its promises to encourage hope and exertion, will teach us that it most marvellously consults what man is. Its promises are indeed glorious. We cannot reflect upon them, without being filled with wonder; and their aim, like the doctrines of the

Gospel, is to increase in the soul holiness and meetness for heaven. *Having therefore* says the Apostle Paul, *these promises dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.* How divine, therefore, the tendency of Gospel-promises! The design of the precious promises of the Gospel is here expressly declared. It is not to amuse the fancy—to nourish pride and vanity—to build up empty hopes and expectations; but to purge away sin from our hearts, to advance us in holiness, and ripen and prepare us for the exalted services, and sublime felicities of the celestial world:—or in St. Paul's words above cited, *to cleanse us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.* The tendency, then, of all the promises of the Gospel is to advance the interests of holiness. How sweet and supporting are they! How worthy of a wise and gracious God to make, and of us to receive with all thankfulness! *Whereby are given to us,* says the Apostle Peter, *exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* The promises of the Gospel are not only great and precious, but exceedingly great and precious—full of comfort—of joy—of peace—and rest. They tend to raise our affections, to increase our zeal, to quicken our hopes, to enliven our faith, to establish us in the ways of righteousness and truth, and to furnish us for, and unto, all good works.

As a specimen of all the rest, only consider for a moment, three of them. *And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daugh-*

ters saith the Lord Almighty.—Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and exceeding great reward.—Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Behold, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. What can be more full, or rich, or precious than these promises? Can words convey more? Is there not something rapturous and extatic in them? Should we dare credit them, were they not expressly given? And how excellent do they make the Christian Religion appear!

INSTEAD of tracing out all the promises, and ranging them under their proper heads, though this would be a most pleasing employment, we will only particularize the supports afforded, in the Gospel, in days of sorrow and calamity. Doctor Blair, speaking of the house of mourning, has the following very just thoughts. “Moreover you would *there* learn, says he, the important lesson of suiting your mind, beforehand, to what you had reason to expect from the world; a lesson too seldom studied by mankind, and to the neglect of which, much of their misery, and much of their guilt is to be charged. By turning away their eyes from the dark side of life—by looking at the world only in one light, and that a flattering one—they form their measures on a false plan, and are necessarily deceived and betrayed. Hence the vexation of succeeding disappointment and blasted hope. Hence their criminal impatience of life, and their bitter accusations of God and man; when,

in truth, they have reason to accuse only their own folly. Thou who wouldst act like a wise man, and build thy house on the rock, and not on the sand, contemplate human life not only in the sun-shine but in the shade. Frequent the house of mourning, as well as the house of mirth. Study the nature of that state in which thou art placed; and balance its joys with its sorrows. Thou seest that the cup, which is held forth to the whole human race, is mixed. Of its bitter ingredients expect that thou art to drink thy portion. Thou seest the storm hovering every where in the clouds around thee. Be not surpris'd if on thy head it shall break. Lower, therefore, thy sails. Dismiss thy florid hopes; and come forth prepared either to act or to suffer, as heaven shall decree. Thus shalt thou be excited to take the properest measures for defence, by endeavouring to secure an interest in his favour, who, *in the time of trouble, can hide thee in his pavilion.* Thy mind shall adjust itself to follow the order of his Providence. Thou shalt be enabled, with equanimity and steadiness, to hold thy course through life."

God, says the pious Psalmist, *is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* We are liable to personal distress and pain, to bereavement of friends, to public evils, and to spiritual disconsolations and the hidings of our heavenly Father's face. Human life, indeed, is filled up with evils, many ideal only; many mournful realities. No state, no condition is exempt. *In the world,* said our Lord, *to his disciples, ye shall have tribulation.* Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. We cannot fly from it, go where we will, or do what we

may, any more than we can fly from ourselves. As long as man is imperfect, as long as we are imperfect, so long must we be liable to various sorrows and losses, trials and misfortunes. We have no reason to expect, nay, it is unwise to expect, that all our days, if hitherto they have passed without any sorrows, will still glide away unmolested. We ought not to look for, or build upon uninterrupted comforts, or a cloudless sky. Storms will arise. The lightnings will flash.—The thunders will roar. Providence has seen fit to strow the path of life with painful sorrows, that we may not be too fond of a dying world, or its dying comforts; or seek for a rest here. Every thing sublunary is continually shifting, and, like the moon, never keeps the same face long. Time like fire is wasting, consuming and changing every thing upon which it prays: and like fire too, when it has no more fuel to feed it, will itself be extinguished,—and be no more. Every earthly good, is at best but a dying joy. For there is a time when we must die and leave it, or it will die and leave us. And one excellence of the Christian Religion is, its furnishing us with the best motives and considerations to patience under the evils and afflictions of this life. Its consolations are neither few nor small, and such as the world can neither give nor take away. In a day of adversity, religion is supposed generally to have great power. Here it triumphs. And here all its supports are needed. To a thoughtful pensive mind, no study can appear more important, than how to be suitably prepared for the misfortunes of life; so as to contemplate them in prospect without dismay; and if they must take place, to bear them without dejection. Throughout every age, the wisdom of

the wife, the treasures of the rich, and the power of the mighty, have been employed, either in guarding their state against the approach of distress, or in rendering themselves less vulnerable by its attacks. Power has endeavoured to remove adversity to a distance. Philosophy has studied, when it drew nigh, to conquer it by patience; and wealth has sought out every pleasure that can compensate or alleviate pain.—But the Gospel alone has ample support. Religion fortifies the heart by its divine influence to bear the evils of life.

THE heathen philosophy, in days of sorrow and misfortune, opened but two sources of comfort.—*One* was that we must consider that what we call *evils*, are no *evils*. It denied the existence and reality of wants and pains. But a most miserable motive to patience and peace was this. For nature would feel pain, when in sickness and sorrow, let philosophy pretend what it might. To pretend to console the anguished heart, when bleeding under some deep recent wound, by denying that it felt any anguish; by denying that there is any such thing as pain and evil, was only to insult it.

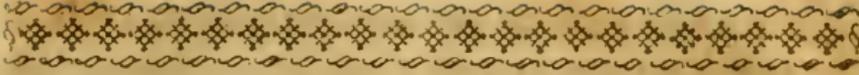
THE other source of comfort opened by pagan philosophy under calamities, was that they could not be avoided—that all are liable to them—and that man was destined to evil while on the earth. This method to assuage and tranquilize the afflicted was equally inefficacious with the other. It was so far from being a mitigation of woe, that we could not escape it, that it was rather an aggravation.—There is a saying of the Emperor Augustus recorded in history on this subject, which is worthy of remembering. To one

who undertook, in some deep affliction, to console him from this consideration, that it was inevitable, he justly replied “this is the very thing that troubles me.”—And in the life of Lipsius is a remarkable passage. He was a great student in, and admirer of the Stoick philosophy. When he lay on his death bed, one of his friends came to visit him—and after some conversation designed to smoothe his exit out of time into Eternity, he observed to him, that he need use no arguments to persuade HIM to patience under his pains, for the philosophy which he had studied, would furnish him with motives enough for that purpose.—He answers his friend with this ejaculation—“Lord Jesus—give me Christian patience—away with stoical insensibility.”

THERE is no patience like that which Christianity inspires; and of which its divine-author was a perfect pattern. His religion furnishes strong and full consolations.—It fortifies the soul; raises it above time; and gives it strength. Its hopes are animating. Its prospects are sublime. Christ saith to his disciples, *let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. These things have I spoken unto you, that your joy might be full.* To have God to apply to, who is the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation; the God that comforteth them that are cast down:—to have an interest in Christ, by whom we have access unto the Father, whose grace is sufficient for us in every time of trouble:—to have the spirit, the comforter by office, do his office unto us, and diffuse that joy and peace in believing, which are part of the kingdom of God, and the fruits of the spirit:—and to have the holy

scriptures to which we may repair, and which were written on purpose that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope, are consolations, which, compared to all that can be derived from reason and philosophy, are as *the fountain of living waters, to the broken cisterns which can hold no water.*

THUS the Christian religion teaches us *all the doctrines* we are to believe, the *mode* of worship to be observed—enjoins *all the duties* we are to practise, and *enforces them* by the most influential of *all motives*;—it is full of the most *precious promises* to animate us, and in days of misfortunes opens to us sources of the most plentiful consolation.



DISCOURSE XXIII.

THE general excellency of the Christian Religion.

I CORINTHIANS xii. 31.

But covet earnestly the best gifts ; yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

WHAT was proposed from these words, was to consider at some length, not merely the excellence of Charity or holy benevolent affection, which is the meaning of the word Charity in the holy scriptures, but the GENERAL EXCELLENCE of the Christian Religion. Two discourses have already been devoted to the illustration of this, which of all others is one of the most interesting subjects ; interesting to every class of hearers. For if any have scruples concerning the divine original of Christianity, this subject is as well adapted to remove them, as almost any one which could be chosen. If any be heedless and indifferent about its duties, doctrines, institutions, and proposals of mercy and salvation, this subject is well calculated to reprove their unconcern, and to excite their attention. If any have lost their first warmth and zeal, their first love to Religion, their relish and favour of

its duties and comforts, this subject is directly fitted to re-establish their faith—to re-invigorate their zeal—to re-quicken their favour of divine things—to regain their relish—to re-kindle their affections, and to restore them from their backslidings. To the aged, who have long attended to the duties of the Gospel, and experienced its power, it ministers support; and the young it invites to the paths of Virtue, in a most pleasing and delightful manner. These ideas will apologize for confining your attention, my hearers, so long to one subject; if any apology be needful, but it is presumed none will be needful.—For no kind of justice could be done to this theme, in a single discourse. A Volume would be little enough for this end.—

WE have already surveyed the EXCELLENCY of the Christian Religion in four instances, though in a very brief and imperfect manner—*first*, compared with all other religions:—*secondly*, as it contains an admirable system of doctrines, and plain and rational mode of worship:—*Thirdly*, as it lays before us the best system of duties to be performed by us, all of which are perfectly reasonable, and enforces these duties by the most weighty and solemn motives:—And *fourthly*, as it comprises in it the most precious promises, and furnishes the richest supports in days of adversity and misfortunes, far surpassing all that could be derived from reason and philosophy, though these assistances are by no means to be overlooked.—

I NOW pass to observe that——

Fifthly, another proof and part of the EXCELLENCE of the Christian Religion is, that it builds

itself upon no *selfish* foundation. So far is it from giving countenance to the selfish affections of the human heart—or promising rewards for any thing done from a supreme regard to self, that it first of all bids us to deny self—to take up our Cross—and to follow our divine Lord and Master at all events, *whithersoever he goeth*—through good report, or evil report, in days of gladness, or of loss and distress. And the disciple of Christ sometimes sustains more injury, or spiritual disadvantage from the flatteries, than from the frowns of the world; and experiences that the *friendship of the world is enmity against God*. The smiles of prosperity, though so highly esteemed, are often more prejudicial to our spiritual interest, than the cold blasts of adversity. But the follower of the slain Lamb of God is to hold on in his benevolent course, both in the prosperous and adverse day; neither turning aside to the right hand or left. And so entirely must the selfish affections be conquered, that even life itself dear as it may be, must be given up for the Gospel's sake at the call of God. *For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: but whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's the same shall save it*. The benevolence of the Gospel is such, that every duty done from selfish ends is accounted of no avail. However far we may go, in external compliances, still if we be unwilling to forsake all for Christ and his religion, for God and his glory, we are none of Christ's. *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, why callest thou me good? there is none good but one that is God. Thou knowest the commandments, do not*

commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honour thy Father and Mother. And he answered, and said unto him, Master all these have I observed from my youth up. Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, one thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor: and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come take up the Cross, and follow me, And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. In our affections we are to forsake all for Christ and his Gospel. No self interest is to be preferred to his cause or kingdom. The divine glory and the cause of the Gospel are to be supreme with us, higher than any temporal emolument. We must say, as David did, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth: if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.* The interest of Christ's kingdom and the honor of God are to be preferred above our *chief joy*. Our own pride, our own feelings, our own ease, honor, and wealth are never to be consulted at the expense of truth and duty, or the honour of Religion. The essence of true Virtue lies in holy benevolent affection—or in a principle of love to God, as the sum of being, and to all created intelligencies, according to their rank in the scale of existence, or capacity for happiness. No system or Theory of Virtue or moral sentiments can be just, or genuine where the public good, the glory of God, as the sum and foundation of all being, and the good of all created rational beings, according to their capacity for happiness, is not the ultimate object. It is most consonant to reason that private interest and pri-

vate good are to give way, or be sacrificed to the public, a less to a greater good. To make our own private interest or happiness the supreme object, of all our actions, regards and attention, is to counteract the great laws of the Universe, and to put a very small interest, in the place of one infinitely grand and important. Self, the Idol of man, as he is by nature, must be thrown down; and homage must not be paid to it. Says the Apostle, *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.* According to the Gospel, therefore, all the unsocial and selfish affections are to be mortified. We are to prefer the honour and glory of God to all things else, to the whole Universe. *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or WHATSOEVER YE DO, do all to the glory of God.* As of him, and through him, so to him are all things, to whom should be glory forever. For his pleasure all things are, and were made. All things were made to promote his glory. All things are preserved for,—and will, eventually, issue in the same end. And it is infinitely fit and proper that they should all subserve the purposes of his glory. For he is infinitely worthy to be exalted to the throne of the Universe in the views and affections of his rational Creatures. He indeed is the alone proper object of the highest esteem, and most ardent love of all his rational creatures for what he is in himself, independent of any interest they may have, or hope to have in his favour. And all his laws are infinitely worthy to be eternally, and unchangeably obeyed.—

AGAIN, further, according to the benevolent scheme of Religion in the Gospel, so far are all

our selfish feelings and passions to be subdued, that even our enemies—our personal and prejudiced enemies—such as hate us without any reason at all—such as are inveterate in their hatred are to be embraced in the arms of benevolent compassion—the love of pity not of complacence.—This however doth not imply that we have any complacential affection towards them, or that we willingly put ourselves in their power, or give them the means and opportunity of injuring us. On the other hand we may and ought to be displeas'd with their evil ways, their causeless hatred of us, and to be cautiously upon our guard against the efforts of their malice. Malice is always active. An enemy to you is commonly restless and uneasy, unless, by revenge, he is gratifying his ill-nature. It is always unwise to put ourselves into the power of any who are malicious and inimical to us. Religion doth not require us to consider enemies as friends, or to treat them in the same manner. This would be both absurd and unsafe. But we are to extend to them our benevolence, or love of compassion. *But I say unto you love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you, that you may be the Children of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust.* Here is our duty to enemies of all kinds. No system of morals or philosophy ever taught man this great and difficult duty in its *true* nature and *proper* extent, but the Gospel. The love of enemies in its just nature is an article no where found in nature's Creed. We have no hints scarcely about it among the sages of pagan antiquity. The di-

vine philosophy of Jesus alone teaches it, in its *true* sense.—A regard therefore to the good of others and even of those who hate us, must govern us, or we are not the real disciples of him, who laid down his life for us. He laid down his life for his enemies, those who hated him without a cause. *God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* Here is an example for us. We are to do good to others, even while our enemies. In all our words and actions a higher aim than self must bear sway. *For if ye love them that love you what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only? What do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?* There is no moral excellence or virtue in our friendships and complaisant treatment of others, if we go no higher than self: or if our own ease, good, honour, or advantage be our ultimate end or ruling motive. The sum of Christian duty is contained in the moral law; and the sum of the moral law is contained in these two Commandments, *the love of God, and the love of man.* There is therefore nothing of a selfish nature; mean, or base belonging to christianity. It will not even suffer us to retaliate, or to revenge an injury for the sake of punishing; or to delight in the pains and sufferings of others; or to take any measures to hurt them, that are contrary to what is right and fit, or to reason. It expels, in fine, every false Virtue, enjoins only every real virtue, though exploded by the world:—it pays no attention to the usages, opinions, and laws of the world any further, than they are the eternal laws of reason and rectitude. It will not allow its followers to think an *evil* thought—or speak an *evil* word—or to

do an *evil* action to man. But it commands us to forgive injuries on the penalty of exclusion from the forgiving pity of our heavenly Father. Philosophy has often recommended the contempt, but rarely the forgiveness of injuries. It is a doctrine not indeed above the reach of reason, but reason is too weak to establish it as a general principle of action.—Our Lord presses it upon man, in the most solemn manner, as he would hope or expect pardon from God. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

CHRISTIANITY is then a religion of benevolence, forbearance, forgiveness of injuries, and meekness and condescension, which can be said in truth of no religion that was ever among any of the heathen nations, antient or modern—in earlier or later times. It is therefore as different from, and as much above, in its principles, in its doctrines, in its hopes, and in its aim, all the schemes of religion, which have been broached by cunning and artful impostors, as the one true God, is different from and above all Idols; or *holiness above sin*, or light preferable to darkness.

IT teaches us the infinite benevolence of the Deity. That he is good, and does good—is slow to anger—long-suffering—and that his tender mercies are over all his works. There is none good but one that is God. He is one boundless ocean of benevolence. There is nothing in him, or done by him which is contrary to, or irreconcilable with, infinite, universal, and impartial benevolence. It declares to us that its great FOUNDER is the image of his Fa-

ther who is in heaven—full of grace and truth—all benevolence indeed and condescension. It requires of all the Children of men the same mind that was in Christ, perfect benevolence. And when completed in glory, all its friends will form one kingdom of peace—one society of pure and perfect benevolence: where no competitors struggle; no factions contend; no rivals supplant each other. “The voice of discord never rises, the whisper of suspicion never circulates, among those innocent and benevolent spirits. Each, happy in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and by reciprocal communications of love and friendship, at once receives from, and adds to, the sum of general felicity.”

WHILE in this world of sorrow and tears, the Gospel most strictly requires of all, that we should cultivate and practise universal benevolence, and in all our respective places be careful to do unto others, as we would that they should do unto us in similar circumstances—which is the most excellent compend of moral duty.—The Christian Religion therefore must appear to all candid minds, to be a system of benevolence and good will. And on this account it is a system of religion deserving of our admiration, and love.—Inattentive to its very genius are those, and strange as it may seem, there have been some such among its enemies, who accuse it as defective in kindness and beneficence, and call it a mercenary and selfish system.

It encourages us along in duty, we grant, from the hope of reward, and dissuades us from sin, by the fear of misery. And hence some infidel writers whose attacks against it, have been read,

with great avidity, have taken occasion to say that it is a mercenary, and selfish religion; and therefore, unworthy of God to institute or man to receive. Nothing can betray their partiality more, or exhibit in a more conspicuous light their unfairness, and their ignorance of the nature of this system of religion than to bestow upon it, the epithets of *mercenary* and *selfish*. They tell us that the excellence and glory of Virtue should be the only motive to persuade us to embrace it in our hearts, and to pursue it in our lives: that INTERESTED motives, or motives drawn from the rewards of virtue, or ill-effects of vice, are unworthy of God to use with us; and only build up a SELFISH system.—Why *interested* motives are made use of by the Supreme Being to persuade us to accept of the offers of the Gospel is a question of some importance, and seems incumbent on me here to discuss. And that the hearer may gain satisfaction he is requested to attend to the following remarks.

1stly. THE supreme inherent excellence of Virtue, or moral goodness would perhaps be the best and most suitable motive to be used with angels, or beings who had never apostatized from God. Because they could perceive all its richness and worthiness. As it is the most noble, so with them it might be the most influential. They, it will be granted, have a clear and direct view of the nature and of the charms of holiness. It shines before them, in all its native splendor, and is possessed and exercised by them, without any mixture of evil. They see all the loveliness of Virtue, and actually experience a fulness of joy from it. And of course it will have all its due weight with them. But man is plunged in

sin and guilt.—And is guilty because sinful. These, *sin* and *guilt*, intercept, as an intervening cloud, his vision of the glory and excellence of Virtue. He cannot therefore be so *entirely* influenced by them. For what is not fully perceived cannot operate as a motive in all its weight and importance. Besides, this is a state of probation and trial; and man, accordingly, is treated in the Gospel as in such a state. And if he were not treated as in such a state, he would not be treated either justly or truly, either according to the nature, or the fitness of things.

2dly. *FURTHER*, human nature, in a religion which is from God or which would do any good, must be taken as it is, and be treated agreeably to truth and fact. Did Christianity consider and treat *man* as an *angel*, we certainly should be furnished with an unanswerable argument against it, and ought not to receive it; or if we should receive it, it could do us no essential good, because not adapted either to our nature or necessities—to our circumstances as degenerate and fallen Creatures.—Therefore

3dly. *WHILE* in the body, motives drawn from the prospect of a recompence beyond the grave, to excite our hopes, and from the threatenings of endless misery, as the native result of our ill-conduct to awaken our fears must be altogether proper and reasonable. As long as hope and fear are the two great springs of human action, so long will both reason and philosophy, as well as propriety, require that they should be alternately addressed, and be made to assist the cause of Virtue. When, therefore, the Christian Religion employs *interested* motives to work upon the human mind, it carries a clear

mark of its reasonableness, and adaptedness to the circumstances, in which we are placed in this world, and is no proof, consequently, of its being defective in benevolence, or a mercenary and selfish religion.——Again,

4thly. IF Virtue or holiness shall be rewarded forever, and Vice or wickedness shall be punished forever: or if the effects of the one shall be the most happy, and of the other the most unhappy. Ought not this to be known? Is it not fit and proper that the *exact* truth, in things of such infinite moment, should be revealed? Must *the truth* be secreted lest it should have weight to induce us to act agreeably to it. If God have annexed, in his Providence, or in the nature of things a reward to piety, and evil to impiety, where can be the harm for us to be plainly informed of it, that we may practise the one, and shun the other.

WE proceed—to observe—on the great subject before us—

Sixthly, A further evidence of the *internal worth* and *merit* of the Christian Religion is that it strictly prohibits all moral evil, and whatever would interrupt our peace and comfort as individuals, and the harmony and benefit of society. No religion is of any value or worth any further than it is good, and tends to good. The beauty of holiness is its tendency to happiness; and where it obtains in a full measure, there misery is expelled with all its train of evils. And the beauty of religion is its tendency to promote the real welfare of man, as an individual, and as connected in civil society. By cultivating in men the principles of honour, faith, integrity,

and conscience; and calling them off from vain and hurtful courses, they are made the *best members* of society. The best interests of civil government and of society are, consequently, most promoted by Religion. It gives to civil government faithful rulers and quiet subjects. Nothing is good or praise-worthy, in a moral view, any otherwise, or any further than in fact it actually does or aims at good. It would not be worth while to embrace a system which pretended to be religion, if it had no power or tendency in its principles and duties, promises and exercises, institutions and precepts to do us good, to do good to others—to the world at large—to the various orders and ranks of society. Most certainly that Being, who has infinite wisdom and infinite goodness, would never reveal or institute, or require us to believe and practise a religion, which had no tendency to promote our own or the welfare of others. For it would be to no purpose. It would be useless and vain.—All false religions, it will be acknowledged, actually do hurt. Error and imposture, are so far from being *harmless*, that they are always, in a greater or less degree *pernicious*. They mislead and bewilder the mind. They create dissensions: they nourish evil passions—they pollute of course the morals.—Now the Christian Religion appears excellent and glorious, worthy of all acceptance and praise, as it consults, and tends most directly, and powerfully, to secure the welfare of man, here and hereafter, in time and in Eternity. Its grand design is to render us happy in this state of being, and blessed when another shall open upon us. And the way, it takes to render us happy, is by subduing all our evil appetites and propensities; and

forbidding whatever is hurtful to our own peace, or to society around us. If it secure the morals of individuals, it in effect secures the *public* morals; for of individuals is the public composed. A government or people are then prosperous, when rulers and the ruled conduct aright, in their several places; when the morals are most pure; and when disorders, licentiousness, extravagance, and other evils, vice and iniquity, are most suppressed. The more pious and virtuous the members of a Community the happier is that Community. It ever has been, and ever will be found, that righteousness exalteth a nation, and that sin is the reproach of any people, in greater or less societies. *Blessed is that people whose God is the Lord.*—The Gospel indeed was never *originally* designed by its divine author to be an instrument of civil government, or merely an aid of civil society. It hath something infinitely higher in view.—But, at the same time, it as directly tends, in its great doctrines and moral precepts, and as much promotes the highest and most valuable interests of society, as if it had no other object in view, or were instituted for this sole purpose.—Here it ought to be particularly remembered, that those who regard religion, in no other light, than as an excellent expedient to civilize and humanize man, and to strengthen the bands of government and society, debase its design and nature, and err widely from the truth.—Religion, however, brings people to order, to regular conduct, to humanity, to love moral duties, and to the practice of all the social and relative duties, and then they are prepared to be *good subjects* of civil government, and *good members* of civil society. It, then, most essentially co-operates for the hap-

pineness of the Community, when it checks growing vice, when it liberalizes and humanizes the rough pieces of human nature. And by forbidding all moral evil, and laying before the mind the terrors of the Lord, to dissuade from all iniquity, by revealing from heaven the wrath of God against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, it contributes powerfully to the best good of civil society.—

WHATEVER can be to the glory, ornament, and dignity of the social intercourse is commanded in the Gospel; and whatever tends, even, though in the remotest view, to debase or injure man, in his rights as a member of the community, is most expressly prohibited. Industry, order, frugality, economy, diligence, faithfulness, honesty, truth, humanity, and all the civil virtues and duties, as well as the moral and Christian, are abundantly inculcated. We are taught not only the laws of virtuous friendship, but in that general philanthropy which as Christians is incumbent on us, we are taught a real love to our Country; and we are bound to submit to all the regulations of government, and its wholesome ordinances, not only for wrath, but for conscience-sake—not only as a duty which we owe to the Community, but as a duty which we owe to God. For to break the laws of man, is to offend against the laws of Christ.

BESIDES, in our prayers and wishes, as well as in our words and actions, are we to seek the good of others. Christians are bound to pray for others—to wish well to them in all lawful pursuits—to seek the peace of government, its honour and stability—and to do nothing which is contrary to the peace of society. Banish reli-

gious principle, and you loosen all the bonds which connect mankind together; you shake the fundamental pillar of mutual confidence and trust; you render the security arising from laws, in a great measure, void and ineffectual.—For human laws and human sanctions cannot extend to numberless cases, in which the safety of mankind is deeply concerned. They would prove very feeble instruments of order and peace, if there were no checks upon the conduct of men, from the sense of divine legislation—if no belief of future rewards and punishments were to overawe conscience, and to supply the defects of human government.

AGAIN—Christians are by their example to recommend regularity of deportment, sobriety, temperance, righteousness and truth. They are to put away all guile, hypocrisy, wrath, evil speaking, malice, and deceit. Not only all that would hurt society is prohibited, but all moral evil, indeed of every kind and degree. Not a wish or passion, which is inconsistent with, or contrary to purity, to justice, to benevolence, is to be indulged. No line of conduct or business which is unlawful, or incompatible with moral obligations is permitted by the laws of Christ. So far therefore as religion really obtains, so far society and civil government are essentially benefitted. Perjury, falsehood, theft, robbery, oppression, extortion—and all the train of crimes which embroil and render society miserable, are driven away by the influence of religious and moral duties. And were the Christian Religion to obtain in all hearts, and over all nations, society on earth would resemble, in sweetness, the music of the spheres—the harmony of nature;

and the abodes of eternal felicity. For it is religion in its perfection which constitutes the chief ingredient of heavenly glory and blessedness.—If we had no reference, therefore, to another world, it would be wise to maintain the Gospel for the purposes of carrying the happiness of civil society to its zenith of glory.—This is no small proof of the internal worth and merit of the Christian religion; and displays in a most amiable and illustrious manner, the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being: for he has consulted and aimed at both the temporal and spiritual good of man, and both at once in the very frame of that religion, which he requires us to receive and practise; and has joined together our interest and duty. An habitual omission of duty and moral Virtue is of course a rejection of our happiness, *a forsaking our own mercy*. What an exalted idea ought this to give us of the EXCELLENCE of the Christian Religion!—Let us therefore, to conclude the present discourse, admire its doctrines, and conform ourselves to its precepts, that we may experience its consolations—and finally, when time is no more, enjoy its rewards. For such as obey it, shall be recompenced in the resurrection of the just.—

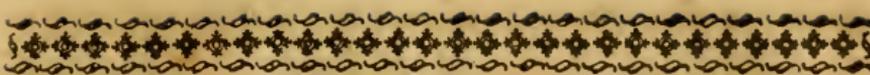
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DISCOURSE XXIV.

THE general excellency of the Christian Religion.

I CORINTHIANS xii. 31.

*BUT covet earnestly the best gifts ; and yet show I
unto you a more excellent way.*

WHAT was proposed, in attending to these words, through divine help, was to consider the GENERAL EXCELLENCE of the Christian Religion. Could a deep impresson of this be made upon the mind, a very material point would be gained. For when people are once convinced in their judgments, of this, they will be, in some good measure, prepared to listen to the propofals of mercy made to them, and their attention will be excited. Of course they may be said to be not far *from the kingdom of heaven.*

If possible, I would offer such arguments and considerations, as that you shall be unable either to resist, or to hear with cold unconcern. Let reason and reflection work. Weigh all that has been, or may be still offered to you, in the even balance of candour and deliberation ; and be resolved that your minds shall be open to truth and reason : and if you find, as I trust you will, upon the closest examination, and most impartial at-

tion, that the proofs of the EXCELLENCE of the Christian Religion are full, clear, and satisfactory, let your lives and future practice be consonant to your conviction.

WE have already in the progress of our discussion adduced *six arguments* to establish the point before us, and enlarged upon them, according to what propriety demanded of us.

WE now pass to observe——

Seventhly, The excellence of the Christian Religion appears from the gracious influences of the divine spirit, which it offers, and the reasonableness and moral and doctrinal nature, as well as great simplicity and plainness of the divine Ordinances, or Sacramental Institutions, which it bids us celebrate.

THE gracious influences of the holy Ghost are offered to enable us to comply with the whole of our duty, as Christians, and to triumph over all opposition and enemies in our road to happiness. These influences are usually distinguished into the renewing or sanctifying—the awakening and convictive—the supporting and comforting—the restraining and confirming,—the abiding and indwelling operations of grace. Such is the depravity of the human heart that the power of God is absolutely necessary to bring man to the love of truth and duty. We depend upon the sovereign grace of God for salvation. And such assistances of the holy spirit are promised, in the Gospel, as are altogether proper and sufficient. It doth not offer us salvation, and leave us in the dark, as to the means of obtaining it, or destitute of the help, which is necessary to fit us for all that we are either to do, or to suffer. A mer-

ciful and wise God never imposed on any of his rational creatures, any thing as duty which was not in its own nature proper, or for the performance of which neither power, opportunity, nor means were given. He hath graciously appointed all the means which are necessary to comply with his revealed Will. And natural strength and power, or rational faculties and capacities abundantly adequate. Nothing but a disposition to comply with duty is wanting. *Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life. Thy people shall be made willing,* says David, *in the day of thy power.* Nothing prevents our immediate compliance with the gracious proposals of mercy and salvation made us, in the Gospel, but the wickedness of the heart. To overcome this wickedness of heart, or enmity against God, the powerful operations of the holy Ghost are promised. He must sanctify or regenerate the soul. He must call, convince, awaken, and renew us. The voice of the Almighty must effectually call us. He who made and upholds the Universe, by his divine energy must rouse us from our supineness and lethargic state. By his spirit he awakens—convinces—and savingly illuminates the soul. The peculiar office or work of the divine spirit is to apply the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ. The remedy provided, in infinite mercy, to heal the moral disorders of the heart and to wash away our sins, is all-powerful; and is rendered effectual by the kind and quickening influence of grace. The regeneration of the sinner is the work of God's spirit. Motives and arguments are unequal to this. It must be effected by the operations of the holy Ghost. He creates the soul anew unto good works, which were before ordained that we should walk in

them. Except a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. We are said to be chosen to salvation through the sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. In the following words, the renovation of our nature is attributed to divine influence—*which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* And in the whole progress of the christian life, as well as in our entrance upon it, the gracious aids of the divine spirit are requisite. Divine grace enters us on the christian course at first. And it must aid us along, in every step of our way, till we shall be admitted into the regions of eternal blessedness. And how free and ready God is to impart the efficacious influence of his spirit, even all that influence which is needful for us, our Lord himself, who came to reveal his Father's Will, in forms us in the following remarkable passage Luke xi. 5, to the 14th verse.—*And he said unto them, which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, friend lend me three loaves. For a friend of mine is come unto me, and I have nothing to set before him: and he from within shall answer and say, trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my Children are now with me in bed: I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not arise, and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you ask, and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find: knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of you that is a father, will he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish,*

will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your Children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy spirit to them that ask him. How ready is a gracious God to bestow upon us, on our earnest, continued, and devout pleadings with him therefor, all the influence to renew and sanctify us which we need? He is as ready as tender earthly parents are, and how ready they are, let their own feelings and the history of all ages and nations declare, to confer when in their power, on their Children, good gifts of a temporal nature. He is not backward or reluctant. On the other hand, he is willing to bless, pity, and save us. Indeed he waits to be gracious. *And therefore will the Lord WAIT that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.* He bears long with us on purpose to reclaim us from our evils ways, and to bring us to repentance. Considering the number and aggravations of our sins, our slowness of heart to believe, how astonishing the long-suffering of the supreme Being! How pleasing the thought, that he is ready to bestow all THAT DIVINE INFLUENCE, which is needful to renew our souls, to subdue within us the power of sin, and to prepare us, in the way of holiness or progressive sanctification, for the kingdom of heaven! Were he not more ready to impart spiritual blessings, divine grace, than man is to give aid to his fellow-men, when in his power, who then would be saved. We might justly complain and object against his ways.

WITH respect to the *two sacraments* of the Gospel, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, they are plain in their design; and viewed as means of religious instruction, and considering our make and condition in the world, they are altogether reasonable. We are composed of body and soul, which strongly and reciprocally affect each other. Jesus Christ, our only Redeemer is gone to Heaven, and we expect his return again into this world to judge it, at the last day. We are exceedingly apt to forget him, like servants their absent Lord; we need, then, some special monitors to bring him often to our grateful and affectionate remembrance, in his wonderful condescension and meritorious sufferings, and bitter death on the Cross. For he hung on the bloody Cross to expiate human guilt. The Ordinance of the supper is happily calculated to keep alive, the memory of his sufferings and death for sinners, by an affecting Symbol: and the ordinance of baptism to impress the mind with a deep conviction of the need of having our polluted natures cleansed by the sanctifying power of grace. They both aid the devotions of the mind by outward and sensible signs. Much instruction, in the things of God and our everlasting peace, is contained in them. They teach us more affectingly than we could, perhaps, be otherwise taught, some of the most important truths of the Gospel. They, in fact, do us good just as the other means of religion do us good, by making us better; by enlightening the mind and impressing the heart. They do not operate for our benefit, like a *spell*, or *charm*. They are *rational* institutions, and tend to promote our spiritual edification and comfort, as means of religion. We most sincerely regret, that, in any instances

or age, they have been misapprehended, and made to subserve the purposes of superstition. But doctrines as well as ordinances have been, through the ignorance and perverseness of men, misunderstood and abused. All the friends of virtue lament that this has been the case, but it cannot be pleaded as an objection against the reality of divine ordinances.—It is we conceive, a mark of great wisdom as well as of goodness, that it has pleased the God of all grace and mercy, to take this way, by divine ordinances, to quicken, to instruct, to warm our hearts in the things of his kingdom. He knows infinitely well, what means to employ to bring us to himself, the fountain of all good, to induce us to repent of sin, to lead pious lives, and to prepare us for future rest and glory. We should be sincerely thankful for all the means he has appointed; and most diligently improve them, for the important purposes of his glory and our eternal Salvation. Exceedingly wrong, therefore, are those pretended Christians who deem divine ordinances useless—who turn them into allegory and figures, who treat them with impious scorn; as if wholly unworthy the nature of the spiritual religion of Jesus Christ, and hindrances in the way to eternal life. For they are really WELL ADAPTED to answer important moral and doctrinal purposes, and to fill the mind with fervent piety. Instead, then, of being a disadvantage to, they are a powerful recommendation of the Christian Religion. They are a part and instance, indeed, of its excellence.

—Further;—

Eighthly, Another proof of the EXCELLENCE

of the Gospel is, that it contains a system of the most perfect and finished morals. In respect to the morality of the Gospel, even its most inveterate enemies allow it to be excellent ; and much superior to any rules of conduct and happy living to be gleaned from all the writings of the sages of pagan antiquity. Without morality there can be no true Religion. Morality is an important branch of Religion—is essential to it. To place religion altogether in piety, or altogether in Virtue is a very great error. It is an error, too, peculiar to no times. It has prevailed more or less in every age of the Christian Church. “ It has run through all the different modes of false religion. It forms the chief distinction of all the various sects, which have divided, and which still continue to divide the Church—according as they have leaned most to the side of belief, or to the side of morality.

DID we listen candidly to the voice of scripture, it would guard us against either extreme. The Apostle Paul every where testifies, that by no works of our own, we can be justified ; and that without faith it is impossible to please God. The Apostle James as clearly shows, that faith, if it be unproductive of good works, justifies no man. Between those sentiments, there is no opposition. Faith without works, is nugatory and insignificant. It is a foundation, without any superstructure raised upon it. It is a fountain, which sends forth no stream—a tree, which neither bears fruit, nor affords shade. Good works, again, without good principles, are a fair, but airy structure—without firmness or stability. They resemble the house built on the sand—the reed, which shakes with every wind.

You must join the two in full union, if you would exhibit the character of a real Christian. He, who sets faith in opposition to morals, or morals in opposition to faith, is equally an enemy to the interests of Religion. He holds up to view an imperfect and disfigured form, in the room of what ought to command respect from all beholders. By leaning to one extreme, he is in danger of falling into vice; by the other of running into impiety.”

MORALITY therefore being so essential to, and so important a part of pure and undefiled Religion, it is one great recommendation of the Christian Religion, that it contains a system of perfect and finished morals. There is not a single defect in its morals—not a single false virtue to be found in it, or one vice, however specious countenanced. This cannot with truth be affirmed of any, or all the best systems of heathen philosophy and morals. The heathen moralists have, we concede, said many fine and beautiful things of Virtue: and given many rules of moral conduct which are both just and weighty. They painted too, in lively colours, the frailties and miseries of man. But the most amiable and pure systems among them allowed of self-murder, and many other absurd and inconsistent follies and vices. They either had no idea at all, or not any just one concerning the high moral duties of forgiveness of injuries—the love of enemies—self-denial—humility—and unlawfulness of revenge. On the other hand, in the morals of the Gospel there is not one blemish. They are above censure, and demand admiration. They are both pure and sublime. Only bear, as one instance, among many others

equally noble and beautiful, how the Apostle Paul sums up, and presses home moral duties. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report : if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*—When our Lord had finished his sermon on the Mount, in which we have a glorious epitome of the morals, which he taught, and the motives from which they should flow, the great concourse of people, who had convened to hear him, were astonished at his doctrines. *And it came to pass when Jesus ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine : for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* He delivered truth with so much force and energy ; his address and eloquence were so much the perfection of propriety : *for he spake, in this sense, as never man spake :* the doctrines were so plain and pure : and the principles from which he taught us our actions should proceed, were so holy and sublime, that we need not be surpris'd, that the multitude were full of admiration. The Christian Religion, therefore, is most EXCELLENT on account of the purity, perfection, and sublimity of its morals ; and of course, worthy of all acceptance.—

Ninthly, A further argument to prove the inherent worth and beauty of our holy Religion, is that it gives us so much light, into the great plan of the divine government. Without this revealed light, we could never know any thing about the grand end of God in the Creation, preservation, and government of the world.

Reason cannot open to us these ends. The Bible is a history of divine Providence and the work of redemption. It is a comment upon the works of God. This is a most convincing proof of its divinity; and of the glory of that religion which it contains. Without it, all would be mystery to us. We could not satisfy ourselves with respect to any thing around us. We could not go so far as to prove that the world had a beginning in time, or that it did not exist from everlasting. We could not offer any rational view, why we were made; much less could we give any satisfactory account, why so many evils take place, or so much disorder is permitted in the system of the world. Reason, though it may lead up the mind, through nature's works, to nature's God; though it may discover to us many parts of duty, could never be able of itself, to give us any *light* into the end of God, in the formation of man, and government of the universe. But the Gospel informs us fully, what this world was brought into existence for—what man was placed in the scale of rational being for, and that the present life is a state of probation and education to prepare us for another, a state of remuneration. This is confirmed by every thing we see around us. Man is to live hereafter. Time is to introduce an Eternity. All the events of Providence are ordered or permitted with a view to another world. This is the only key which can open to us the designs of Providence, in the permission of sin:—the continuance of moral evil, and, of course, natural evil:—in the disorders of the world:—the inequalities, which we cannot help beholding:—the oppression of Virtue: the triumphs of vice—so often observed, and so

deeply afflicting to the pious in all ages. Without the supposition that this is a probationary state, and that it looks forward to a retribution state, all would be to us, a pathless wilderness—a labyrinth, out of which we could have no clue to guide us. This world could not possibly be formed on any other plan. And the history of it cannot be understood or explained on any other ground. If this were the *last* state of man, certainly we might expect a very different arrangement, in the government of it. We should either see perfect happiness every where enjoyed—no storms arising—no clouds interposing—but one continued scene of order, peace, and delight; or complete wretchedness. Had God intended it for a place of perfect happiness, we should not see it overspread with innumerable miseries; we should not be pained with the sight of so much folly and vice. Had he intended it for a place of *sorrow only*, we should not see human life blessed with such a rich profusion of mercies. But when we consider this world as represented, in the sacred Volume, as a probationary state, all is LIGHT; every thing we meet with may be easily solved. This mixture of good and evil is necessarily implied in a state of probation. We are here to exist with a reference to a future world. We are upon our trial. If we abuse our advantages and neglect our duty, we shall sustain hereafter all the ill-consequences of our folly and madness. If we rightly improve this state of probation, ample rewards will be conferred upon us. We are here in our education for another stage of our existence. According to Christianity, God's end in all things is his own name—or glory—and the best good of the Universe—its greatest

eventual perfection. It assures us, which is a cordial to support us, under all dark and distressing calamities, that in the last result of all things, perfect justice will be done—order will be educed out of confusion—peace out of contention—light out of darkness—and happiness out of misery. *Our God is in the heavens, and doth whatsoever he will.—Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*—While Christianity informs us of God's last end in Creation and Providence, and the nature of true Virtue, consisting in a conformity of heart to his moral image, and conformity of life to his law, it opens to us the only way of acceptance with him, and the full remission of all sin. This leads me to observe——

In the last place, that the PRINCIPAL glory of the Gospel, is its revealing to us a mediatorial Salvation, the only way of pardon—the recovery of lost man by the sufferings and death of the Son of God. This, indeed, as the attentive hearer will easily apprehend, is the GREAT EXCELLENCY of our Religion. That which more than any thing else, or all things else, shows its glory and worth. This is the chief excellence. All that hath been above illustrated, if united together is far from being equal to this; and was but preparatory to it. This was designedly reserved for the last and crowning glory of all. As sinners we want a method revealed, or to be shown, how we may obtain forgiveness and the divine favour, acceptance with a holy and sin-hating God. This the Gospel clearly reveals to us; and in this consists its glory. This distinguishes it from all false religions—from all the religions ever broached in the world. There is

one God and one Mediator between God and man. Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid even Jesus Christ. We are redeemed with his precious blood. He is the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. No man can come unto the Father but by him. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Through him, as an exalted Redeemer, repentance and remission of sin are preached to an Apostate world. He came to seek and to save that which was lost—to call sinners to repentance.—*Be it known unto you, therefore men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins : and by him all that believe, are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.* Neither is there Salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. The CHIEF MERCY of the Deity to a ruined world is the gift of a Saviour. This is the unspeakable gift. None can be compared to it. It is infinitely above all others. Whenever the inspired penmen touch upon this theme, the LOVE of God in giving his son to make a propitiation for sin, they seem to be carried out of themselves. They delight to dwell upon it. They are raised beyond their ordinary pitch. They labour for language to describe it. They know not how to speak worthily upon it ; where to begin, or where to end.—They exclaim, O the *length*, the *depth*, the *height*, and *breadth* of the love of God ; his redeeming love !—

ALL indeed that Jesus Christ did, and suffered was to open a way for our pardon, and to lead us to life eternal ; a way of pardon and acceptance with God, which might be compatible

with the claims of strict justice. **FOR THIS**, he lived a painful life. **FOR THIS**, he condescended to be clothed in human flesh. **FOR THIS**, he died on the Cross, an ignominious death. **FOR THIS**, he lay in the cold and silent grave. **FOR THIS**, at the destined moment, he burst asunder the bonds of death, and arose in triumph, as a mighty conqueror over death and hell; for as he was wounded for our transgressions, so he was raised again for our justification. **FOR THIS**, he ascended, in a visible form, before chosen witnesses, into heaven. When we behold him coming into the world—living—suffering—bleeding—dying—numbered with transgressors, for he was crucified between two malefactors, as if the greatest criminal of the three—and suspended on the cross on Calvary's top, between the heavens and the earth, as if unworthy of either—we see him as the **GREAT PROPITIATORY SACRIFICE** for sin.

THE law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ; and he fulfilled all righteousness. He put an honour, by what he did, and by what he suffered, by his active and passive obedience, on the divine character, law, and government. To all worlds, he has given full proof that pardoning mercy may be consistently exercised to all penitents—that the ruler of the Universe may be just and yet justify the believer—that an honourable door of salvation is opened. He indeed bore the sinner's shame and iniquities as his substitute; and accordingly is made unto all that believe, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Through his peace-speaking blood a way of life and forgiveness for, even the chief of sinners on their repentance is

made known. A holy, and righteous, and sovereign God, who is bound to consult the honour and glory of his own character, law, and government, and the welfare of the system of the Universe, can be just and yet forgive the sinner, who repents and believes in a Saviour. Man may be saved, and yet his salvation honour his Maker, as the all-wise and all-holy Jehovah. He is glorified in our recovery from sin to holiness, and more glorified, than if we had been left to perish, unpitied; and the law been executed upon us, in all its awful rigours.—Here consequently is the PECULIAR GLORY OR PRINCIPAL EXCELLENCE of the Gospel—its revealing to us a mediatorial interposition—a way of pardon and felicity consistent with all the divine attributes. It honours, indeed, the DIVINE BEING, and all his perfections, wisdom, goodness, mercy, and justice, while it provides, in the most ample manner, for the sinner's relief and salvation.

WOULD any then enquire after the peculiar glory or excellence of the Gospel they may at once receive a full answer, on what I have now stated.—A VICARIOUS RIGHTEOUSNESS—a PARDON PURCHASED by the precious blood of the Son of God—the CROSS of Christ—is the sum and substance—the GLORY of the Gospel. Sin is expiated by an adequate sacrifice—everlasting righteousness is brought in—the divine honour is secured—and all the law magnified. This is the EXCELLENCE of the Christian Religion. Unless we see this; we see nothing of the worth of a Saviour—and we know nothing either experimentally, savingly, or even speculatively of the GLORY of the Gospel.

I HAVE NOW considered, at some length, the

general excellence of the Christian Religion. Had my illustrations and arguments been such, as the dignity and grandeur of the subject required, I should hope that every hearer would receive such a sense of the excellence of that Religion, in which he was born and educated, and which blesses, with its salutary rays, as a divine light, our happy Country, as would never wear off, but lead to a temper of mind and conduct of life conformable to its precepts.—In as few words as they can be expressed, permit me, to recapitulate all the arguments and considerations which have been enlarged upon in these discourses, and present them, in one united view, that they may all have their proper weight on the mind. The Christian Religion then is excellent, as it shines gloriously above all other religions.—As it contains an admirable system of doctrines, and a plain and rational mode of worship:—as it lays before us the best system of duties, all of which are reasonable, and the most weighty and solemn motives to enforce them:—as it comprises in it the most precious promises, and furnishes the richest supports, in days of adversity and misfortune, far surpassing all that could be derived from reason and philosophy, though these a wise man will by no means despise:—as it builds itself upon no selfish foundation,—as it prohibits all moral evil, and every thing which would interrupt our peace and comfort as individuals, or the harmony and benefit of society, which it consults and secures:—as it offers the most gracious, and sufficient assistances to enable us to perform all required duty, and hath but two *sacramental institutions*, both of which are reasonable, having a doctrinal and moral tendency,—as it exhibits a perfect and sublime

morality which the life of its FOUNDER happily exemplified: for the example which he set us of Virtue and goodness is indefective:—as it gives us so much light into the great plan of the divine government:—and as it reveals a mediatorial salvation, the only way of pardon and acceptance with the omniscient—and all-holy God. Well may the Gospel, be called the *Gospel of God*—the *Gospel of the grace of God*—the *glorious Gospel of the blessed God*—the *power of God* unto salvation—the *wisdom that is from above*—the *mystery hid from ages*—the *Gospel of Christ*—good *news of salvation*—and the *Gospel of our salvation*—the *grace of God*—and the *Gospel of peace*.

THE whole will be concluded, with only one request to the hearer, that as he would act up to the dignity of his rational nature—as he would admit nothing, which is contrary to, or reject nothing which is consistent with, reason—that as he would be happy on earth—and happy after death, so he would, with fairness and candor, with all due seriousness and deliberation, examine the merits, the internal worth and beauty, the EXCELLENCE of the Christian Religion, that from a full conviction of its being worthy of all acceptation, he may conform his life to its precepts, be interested in the righteousness of its author, and build his hopes upon its promises—and, then, its rewards will be his portion, when time is no more.—And now to the King, eternal, immortal, and invisible, be rendered, through Jesus Christ, all honor, glory, and praise, from all on earth, and all in heaven!—AMEN!

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