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SERMONS

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

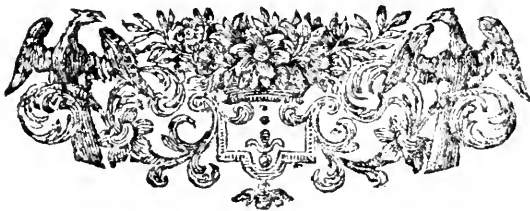
By the most Reverend

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

L A T E

Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*.

VOLUME *the* SIXTH.



L O N D O N :

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M DCC XLII.



S E R M O N LXXXV.

The love of GOD to men, in the incarnation of CHRIST.

I J O H N iv. 9.

In this was manifested the love of GOD towards us, because that GOD sent his only-begotten SON into the world, that we might live through him.

TH E S E words contain a clear and evident demonstration of the love of GOD to us; S E R M. LXXXV.
 “ In this was manifested the love of GOD Preached
 “ towards us ;” that is, by this it plainly appears, in the chapel of
 that GOD had a mighty love for us, “ that he sent Lambeth-
 “ his only begotten SON into the world, that we house on
 “ might live through him.” In which we may consider this threefold evidence of GOD’s love to man- Christmas-
 kind. Day,
1691.

I. That he should be pleased to take our case into consideration, and to concern himself for our happiness.

II. That he should design so great a benefit to us, which is here expressed by life; “ that we might live “ through him.”

III. That he was pleased to use such a means for the obtaining and procuring of this benefit for us; “ he “ sent his only begotten SON into the world, that we “ might live through him.” Each of these singly is

SERMON. a great evidence of GOD's love to us; much more all
LXXXV. of them together.

I. It is a great evidence of the love of GOD to mankind, that he was pleased to take our case into consideration, and to concern himself for our happiness. Nothing does more commend an act of kindness, than if there be great condescension in it. We use to value a small favour, if it be done to us by one that is far above us, more than a far greater done to us by a mean and inconsiderable person. This made David to break out into such admiration, when he considered the ordinary providence of GOD towards mankind, "LORD, what is man, that thou art mindful of him! or the son of man, that thou shouldst consider him!" This is a wonderful condescension indeed, for GOD to be mindful of man.

At the best we are but his creatures, and upon that very account at an infinite distance from him; so that were not he infinitely good, he would not be concerned for us, who are so infinitely beneath the consideration of his love and pity. Neither are we of the highest rank of creatures; we are much below the angels, as to the excellency and perfection of their beings; so that if GOD had not had a peculiar pity and regard to the sons of men, he might have placed his affection and care upon a much nobler order of creatures than we are, and so much the more miserable, because they fell from a higher step of happiness, I mean the lost angels; but yet for reasons best known to his infinite wisdom, GOD pass by them, and was pleased to consider us. This the apostle to the Hebrews takes notice of, as an argument of GOD's peculiar and extraordinary love to mankind, "that
" he

“ he sent his SON, not to take upon him the nature
“ of angels, but of the seed of Abraham.”

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Now that he, who is so far above us, and after that we by wilful transgression had lost ourselves, had no obligation to take care of us, but what his own goodness laid upon him, that he should concern himself so much for us, and be so solicitous for our recovery, this is a great evidence of his kindness and good-will to us, and cannot be imagined to proceed from any other cause.

II. Another evidence of GOD's great love to us, is, that he was pleased to design so great a benefit for us. This the scripture expresseth to us by life; and it is usual in scripture to express the best and most desirable things by life; because as it is one of the greatest blessings, so it is the foundation of all other enjoyments: and therefore the apostle useth but this one word to express to us all the blessings and benefits of CHRIST's coming into the world; “ GOD
“ sent his only-begotten SON into the world, that we
“ might live through him.”

And the expression is very proper in our case; because life signifies the reparation of all that which was lost by the fall of man. For man by his wilful degeneracy and apostasy from GOD, is sunk into a state of sin and misery, both which the scripture is wont to express by death. In respect of our sinful state we are spiritually dead; and in respect of the punishment and misery due to us for our sins, we are judicially dead, dead in law; “ for the wages of sin is
“ death.” Now GOD hath sent his SON into the world, that in both these respects “ we might live
“ through him.”

1. We were spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, as the apostle speaks, Eph. ii. 1, 2. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world." Every wicked man, tho' in a natural sense he be alive, yet in a moral sense he is dead. So the apostle speaking of those "who live in sinful lusts and pleasures, says of them, that they are dead while they live," 1 Tim. v. 6. What corrupt humours are to the body, that sin is to the soul, their disease and their death. Now GOD sent his SON to deliver us from this death, by renewing our nature, and mortifying our lusts; by restoring us to the life of grace and holiness, "and destroying the body of sin in us, that henceforth we should not serve sin." And that this is a great argument of the mighty love of GOD to us, the apostle tells us, Eph. ii. 4, 5. "GOD who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with CHRIST." It is an argument of the richness of GOD's mercy, and of his great love to us to recover us out of this sad and deplorable case. It is a kindness infinitely greater, than to redeem us from the most wretched slavery, or to rescue us from the most dreadful and cruel temporal death; and yet we should value this as a favour and benefit, that could never be sufficiently acknowledged: but GOD hath sent his SON to deliver us from a worse bondage, and a more dreadful kind of death; so that well might the apostle ascribe this great deliverance of mankind from the slavery of our lusts, and the death of sin, to the boundless mercy and love of GOD to us. "GOD who is rich

" rich

“ rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he
 “ loved us, hath quickened us together with CHRIST,
 “ even when we were dead in sins ;” when our case
 was so desperate as could well be imagined ; then was
 GOD pleased to undertake this great cure, and to pro-
 vide such a remedy, as cannot fail to be effectual for
 our recovery, if we will but make use of it.

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2. We were likewise judicially dead, dead in law,
 being condemned by the just sentence of it. So soon
 as ever we sinned, eternal death was by the sentence
 of GOD’s law become our due portion and reward ;
 and this being our case, GOD in tender commise-
 ration and pity to mankind, was pleased to send his
 SON into the world to interpose between the justice of
 GOD and the demerits of men ; and by reversing
 the sentence that was gone out against us, and pro-
 curing a pardon for us, to rescue us from the misery
 of eternal death ; and not only so, but upon the condi-
 tion of faith and repentance, of obedience and a
 holy life, to bestow eternal life upon us ; and by this
 means to restore us to a better condition than that
 from which we were fallen, and to advance us to a
 happiness greater than that of innocency.

And was not this great love, to design and provide
 so great a benefit and blessing for us, “ to send his SON
 “ JESUS to bless us in turning away every one of us from
 “ our iniquities ?” Our blessed SAVIOUR, who came
 from the bosom of his FATHER, and knew his tender
 affection and compassion to mankind, speaks of this
 as a most wonderful and unparallel’d expression of
 his love to us, John iii. 16. “ GOD so loved the
 “ world, that he gave his only-begotten SON.”
 “ GOD so loved the world,” so greatly, so strangely,
 so

SERM. fo beyond our biggeſt hopes, nay, fo contrary to all
 LXXXV. reasonable expectations, “ as to ſend his only-begot-
 “ ten SON, to ſeek and to ſave the ſinful ſons of
 “ men.”

If it had only in general been declared to us, that GOD was about to ſend his SON into the world upon ſome great deſign, and been left to us to conjecture, what his errand and buſineſs ſhould be; how would this have alarmed the guilty conſciences of ſinful men, and filled them with infinite jealousies and ſuſpicion, with fearful expectations “ of wrath
 “ and fiery indignation to conſume them!” For conſidering the great wickedneſs and degeneracy of mankind, what could we have thought, but that ſurely GOD was ſending his SON upon a deſign of vengeance to chaſtiſe a ſinful world, to vindicate the honour of his deſpiſed laws, and to revenge the multiplied affronts which had been offered to the higheſt majeſty of heaven, by his pitiful and ungrateful creatures? Our own guilt would have been very apt to have fill'd us with ſuch imaginations as theſe, that in all likelihood the SON of GOD was coming to judgment, to call the wicked world to an account, to proceed againſt his father's rebels, to paſs ſentence upon them, and to execute the vengeance which they had deſerved. This we might juſtly have dreaded; and indeed conſidering our caſe, how ill we have deſerved at GOD's hands, and how highly we have provoked him; what other weighty matter could we hope for?

But the goodneſs of GOD hath ſtrangely out-done our hopes, and deceived our expectation; ſo it follows in the next words, “ GOD ſent not his SON
 “ into

“ into the world to condemn the world,” (intimating that this we might justly have imagin’d and feared) but upon a quite contrary design, “ that through him the world might be saved.” What a surprize of kindness is here! that instead “ of sending his SON to condemn us, he should send him into the world to save us ;” to rescue us from the jaws of death and of hell, from that eternal and intolerable misery which we had incurred and deserved !

And if he had proceeded no farther, this had been wonderful mercy and kindness: But his love stopt not here, it was not contented to spare us, and free us from misery ; but was restless till it had found out a way to bring us to happiness ; “ for GOD so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten SON, not only that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but might have everlasting life.” This is the second evidence of GOD’s great love to us, the greatness of the blessing and benefit which he had designed and provided for us, “ that we might live through him ;” not only be delivered from spiritual and eternal death, but be made partakers of eternal life.

III. The last evidence of GOD’s great love to us, which I mentioned, was this, that GOD was pleased to use such a means, for the obtaining and procuring of this great blessing and benefit ; “ he sent his only-begotten SON into the world, that we might live through him.” And this will appear to be great love indeed, if we consider these four things.

I. The person whom he was pleased to employ upon this design, “ he sent his only-begotten SON.”

2. How much he abas'd him, in order to the effecting and accomplishing this design, implied in these words, "he sent him into the world."

3. If we consider, to whom he was sent, "to the world." And,

4. That he did all that voluntarily and freely, out of his mere pity and goodness; not constrained hereto by any necessity, not prevail'd upon by any application or importunity of ours, nor obliged by any benefit or kindness from us.

1. Let us consider the person whom GOD was pleas'd to employ in this design, "he sent his only-begotten SON"; no less person than his own SON, and no less dear to him, than his only-begotten SON.

(1) No less person than "his own SON;" and the dignity of the person that was employed in our behalf, doth strangely heighten and set off the kindness. What an endearment is it of the mercy of our redemption, that GOD was pleas'd to employ upon this design no meaner person than "his own SON, his begotten SON;" so he is called in the text, his SON, in so peculiar a manner, as no creature is, or can be; the creatures below man are called the works of GOD, but never his children; the angels are in scripture call'd the sons of GOD; and Adam likewise is call'd the son of GOD, because GOD made him after his own image and likeness in holiness and righteousness, and in his dominion and sovereignty over the creatures below him; but this title of begotten SON of GOD was never given to any of the creatures, man or angel; "for unto which of the angels said he at any time, thou art my SON, this day have I begotten thee," as the apostle

apostle reasons, Heb. i. 5. He must be a great person indeed to whom this title belongs, “ of the begotten SON of GOD ;” and it must be a mighty love indeed which moved GOD to employ so great a person, on the behalf of so pitiful and wretched creatures as we are. It had been a mighty condescension for GOD to treat with us at all ; but that no less person than his own SON should be the ambassador, is an astonishing regard of heaven to poor sinful dust and ashes.

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(2.) The person was as dear to GOD, as he was great, “ he was his only-begotten SON.” It had been a great instance of Abraham’s love and obedience to GOD, to have sacrificed a son at his command ; but this circumstance makes it much greater, that it was his only SON ; “ hereby I know that thou fearest GOD (says the angel) since thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” This is a demonstration that GOD loved us at a stupendous rate, when he would send his only-begotten SON into the world for us.

Before this, GOD had tried several ways with mankind, and employed several messengers to us ; sometimes he sent his angels, and many times his servants the prophets ; “ but in these last days he hath sent his SON.” He had many more servants to have employed upon this message, but he had but one SON ; and rather than mankind should be ruined and lost, he would send him. Such was the love of GOD towards us, that rather than our recovery should not be effected, he would employ in this work the greatest and dearest person to him both in heaven and earth, his only-begotten SON ; “ in this was the love of

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“ GOD manifested, that he sent his only-begotten
“ SON, that we might live through him.”

2. Let us consider how much this glorious and excellent person was abased in order to the effecting and accomplishing of this design, which is here expressed, by sending him into the world; and this comprehends his incarnation with all the mean and abasing circumstances of it. This the apostle declares fully to us, Phil. ii. 6, 7. “ tho’ he was in
“ the form of GOD, (that is, truly and really GOD)
“ yet he made himself of no reputation, *ἑωσὶν ἑξέ-*
“ *νωσει*, he empty’d himself,” was contented to be strangely lessen’d and diminish’d, “ and took upon
“ him the form of a servant, or slave, and was
“ made in the likeness of men;” that is, did really assume humane nature. Here was an abasement indeed, for GOD to become man, “ for the only-begotten SON of GOD to take upon him the form of
“ a servant, and to become obedient to death, even
“ the death of the cross,” which was the death of slaves, and infamous malefactors. Here was love indeed, that GOD was willing that his own dear SON should be thus obscured and diminished, and become so mean and so miserable for our sakes; that he should not only stoop “ to be made man, and to dwell among
“ us,” but that he should likewise submit “ to the
“ infirmities of our nature, and to be made in all
“ things like unto us, sin only excepted;” that he should be contented to bear so many affronts and indignities from perverse and unthankful men,
“ and to endure such contradiction of sinners against
“ himself; that he who was the brightness of his
“ FATHER’S glory, should be despised and rejected
“ of

“ of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with SERM.
“ griefs,” and rather than we should perish, should LXXXV.
put himself into our place, and be contented to suffer and die for us; and that GOD should be willing that all this should be done to his only SON, to save sinners, what greater testimony could he give of his love to us !

3. Let us consider farther to whom he was sent, which is also implied in these words, “ he sent his SON into the world ;” into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him ; and an ungrateful world, that did most unworthily use him.

First, into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him, that had deserved no such kindness at his hands. For what were we, that GOD should send such a person amongst us, that he should make his SON stoop so low as to dwell in our nature, and to become one of us ? We were rebels and enemies, “ enemies to GOD by evil works,” up in arms against heaven, and at open defiance with GOD our maker. When the world was in this posture of enmity and hostility against GOD ; then he sent his SON to treat with us, and to offer us peace. What can more commend the love of GOD than this, that he should shew such kindness to us, when we were sinners and enemies ! Herein “ GOD hath commended his love towards us ; (says the apostle, Rom. v. 8.) in that “ whilst we were yet sinners CHRIST died for us.”

Secondly, Into an ungrateful world, that did most unworthily use him, that gave no becoming entertainment to him (“ the foxes had holes, and the birds “ of the air had nests ; but the SON of man had not “ where to lay his head”) that heaped all manner of
con-

S E R M. LXXXV. contumelies and indignities upon him, that persecuted him all his life, and at last put him to a most painful and shameful death; in a word, that was so far from receiving him as the SON of GOD, that they did not treat him with common humanity, and like one of the sons of men.

4. He did all this voluntarily and freely; "GOD sent his SON into the world," *mero motu*, of his own mere grace and goodness, moved by nothing but his own bowels, and the consideration of our misery; not overpowered by any force; (for what could offer violence to him to whom all power belongs?) not constrained by any necessity, for he had been happy, tho' we had remained for ever miserable; he might have chosen other objects of his love and pity, and have left us involved in that misery which we had wilfully brought upon ourselves.

Nor was he prevailed upon by any application from us, or importunity of ours to do this for us. Had we been left to have contrived the way of our recovery; this which GOD hath done for us, could never have entered into the heart of man to have imagin'd, much less to have desir'd it at his hands. If the way of our salvation had been put into the hands of our own counsel and choice, how could we have been so impudent as to have begg'd of GOD, that his only SON might descend from heaven and become man, be poor, despised and miserable for our sakes? GOD may stoop as low as he pleaseth, being secure of his own majesty and greatness; but it had been a boldness in us, not far from blasphemy, to have desired of him to condescend to such a submission.

Nor, lastly, was he pre-oblig'd by any kindness or benefit from us; so far from that, that we had given him all possible provocation to the contrary, and had reason to expect the effect of his heaviest displeasure: and yet though he was the *pars lesa*, the party that had been disoblig'd and injur'd; though we were first in the offence and provocation, he was pleas'd to make the first overtures of peace and reconciliation; and tho' it was wholly our concernment, and not his; yet he was pleas'd to condescend so far to our perverseness and obstinacy, as "to send his SON to us, and to beseech us to be reconciled."

Now herein (says the apostle, immediately after the text) "herein is love, not that we loved GOD, but that he loved us, and sent his SON to be the propitiation for our sins:" herein is the love of GOD manifested, that the kindness began on his part, and not on ours; that being neither obliged nor desired by us, he did freely and of his own accord, "send his only-begotten SON into the world, that we might live through him."

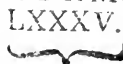
What now remains but to apply this to ourselves?

I. Let us propound to ourselves the love of GOD for our pattern and example. This is the inference which the apostle makes in the next verse but one after the text, "Beloved, if GOD so loved us, we ought also to love one another." One would have thought the inference should have been, "if GOD so loved us, that we ought also to love him." But the apostle doth not speak so much of the affection, as the effect of love; and his meaning is, if GOD hath bestowed such benefits upon us, we ought, in imitation of him, to be kind and beneficial one

SERM. to another. Not but that we ought "to love GOD
 LXXXV. "with all our hearts, and souls, and strength;" but
 in this sense we are not capable of it. We cannot
 be beneficial to him; because he is self-sufficient, and
 stands in need of nothing; and therefore the apostle
 adds this as a reason, why he does not exhort men
 to love GOD, but one another; "no man hath seen
 "GOD at any time;" he is not sensible to us, and
 therefore none of these sensible things can signify any
 thing to him. But he hath friends and relations here in
 the world, who are capable of the sensible effects of our
 love, and to whom we may shew kindness for his
 sake; we cannot be beneficial to GOD, but we may
 testify our love to him, by our kindness and charity
 to men who are made after the image of GOD; and
 if we see any one miserable, that is consideration
 enough to move our charity. There was nothing
 but this in us to move him to pity us, "when we
 "were in our blood, and no eye pitied us."

GOD is a pattern of the most generous kindness
 and charity. Tho' he be infinitely above us, yet he
 thought it not below him to consider our case, and
 to employ his only SON to save us; he had no obli-
 gation to us, no expectation of advantage from us,
 and can never be in a possibility to stand in need of
 us; and yet he loved us, and hath conferred the
 greatest benefits upon us: so that no man can have
 deserved so ill at our hands, but that if he be in
 want, and we in a condition to help him, he ought
 to come within the compass and consideration of our
 charity.

And this is the proper season for it, when we com-
 memorate the greatest blessing and benefit that was

ever conferr'd on mankind, " the SON of GOD sent SERM. LXXXV.
" into the world, on purpose to redeem and save us." 

And therefore I cannot but very much commend the custom of feeding and relieving the poor, more especially at this time, when the poor do usually stand most in need of it, and when we commemorate " the grace " of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who being rich became poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be made rich."

2. Let us readily comply with the great design of this great love of GOD to mankind. " He hath sent " his SON, that we might live through him." But tho' he had done all this for us, tho' he hath purchased so great blessings for us, as the pardon of our sins, and power against them, and eternal life and happiness; yet there is something to be done on our parts, to make us partakers of these benefits. GOD hath not so loved us, as to send his SON into the world, to carry men to heaven whether they will or no; and to rescue those from the slavery of the devil, and the damnation of hell, who are fond of their fetters, and wilfully run themselves upon ruin and destruction. But the SON of GOD came to offer happiness to us, upon certain terms and conditions, such as are fit for GOD to propound, and necessary for us to perform, to make us capable of the blessedness which he offers; as namely, " repentance towards " GOD, and faith in our LORD JESUS CHRIST;" a sincere and constant endeavour of obedience to the laws and precepts of our holy religion.

These are the terms of the gospel; " and the grace " of GOD which brings salvation," offers it only upon these terms, " that we deny ungodliness and

SERM. LXXXV. “worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly
 “in this present world :” then we may “expect the
 “blessed hope.” But if we will not submit to
 these conditions, the SON of GOD will be no SAVI-
 OUR to us; “for he is the author of eternal salva-
 “tion only to them that obey him.” If men
 will continue in their sins, the redemption wrought
 by CHRIST will be of no advantage to them; such
 as obstinately persist in an impenitent course, *Ipsa se
 velit salus servare non potest*, “salvation itself cannot
 “save them.”

These are the conditions of our happiness, and if
 we submit to them we are heirs of eternal life; if we
 refuse, we are sons of perdition, eternally lost and
 undone; for we may assure ourselves, that these are
 the best and easiest terms that can ever be offered to
 us, because GOD sent them by his SON. This is the
 last effort of the divine love and goodness, towards
 the recovery and salvation of men; so the apostle tells
 us, Heb. i. 1, 2. “that GOD, who at sundry times,
 “and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the
 “prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by
 “his SON;” and if we refuse to hear him, he will
 speak no more. After this it is not to be expected,
 that GOD should make any farther attempts for our
 recovery; for he can send no greater nor dearer per-
 son to us, than his own SON; and if we refuse him,
 whom will we reverence? if after this we still wilfully
 go on in our Sins; “there remains no more sacrifice
 “for sin; but a fearful looking for of judgment,
 “and fiery indignation to consume us.”

3. With what joy and thankfulness should we com-
 memorate this great love of GOD to mankind, “in
 “sending

“ sending his only-begotten SON into the world, that
“ we might live through him ! ”

S E R M .
LXXXV.
}

This is the proper end of the blessed sacrament, which we are now going to receive, to represent to our minds the incarnation and passion of our dear LORD, by the symbols of his body broken, and his blood shed for us. With what acknowledgments should we celebrate the memory of this wonderful love, which the SON of GOD hath shewn to the sons of men ; endeavouring to make all the world in love with him, who hath so loved all mankind !

Whenever we see his blood poured forth, and his body broken for us, so moving a Sight should raise strange passions in us, of love to our SAVIOUR, and hatred to our sins ; and should inspire us with mighty resolutions of service and obedience to him ; and whenever the pledges and seals of these benefits are delivered into our hands, the sight of them should at once wound and revive our hearts, and make us to cry out, “ LORD, how unworthy am I, for whom thou
“ shouldst do and suffer all this ! I am overcome by
“ thy love, and can no longer hold out against the
“ mighty force of such kindness ! I render myself to
“ thee, and will serve thee for ever, who hast re-
“ deemed me at so dear a rate ! ”

“ Now to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to
“ the lamb that was slain, to GOD even our FA-
“ THER, and to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, the
“ first-begotten from the dead, and the prince of the
“ kings of the earth ; unto him that hath loved us,
“ and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and
“ hath made us kings and priests to GOD and his FA-
“ THER, to him be glory and dominion for ever and
“ ever. Amen.”

S E R M O N LXXXVI.

The sin and danger of adding to the doctrine of the gospel.

G A L A T. i. 8, 9.

But tho' we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

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BEFORE I come to handle the words, for the better understanding of them, I shall give a brief account of the occasion of them, which was this. Some false apostles had made a great disturbance in the churches planted by the apostles of CHRIST, by teaching that it was necessary for christians, not only to embrace and entertain the doctrines and precepts of the christian religion, but likewise to be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses. Of this disturbance which was raised in the christian church, you have the history at large, Acts xv. and as in several other churches, particularly in that of Galatia, these false apostles and seducers had perverted many, as appears by this epistle; in the beginning whereof St. Paul complains, that those who were so seduced into this error of the necessity of circumcision, and keeping the law of Moses, had by this new article of faith, which they had added to

the

the christian religion, quite alter'd the frame of it, and made the gospel another thing from that which our SAVIOUR delivered, and commanded his apostles to teach all nations. SERM.
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For he tells us, ver. 6. of this chapter, “ that he “ marvelled, that they were so soon removed from “ him that called them by (or through) the grace of “ CHRIST, unto another gospel,” that is so different from that which they had been instructed in by those who first preached the gospel unto them: for the making of any thing necessary to Salvation, which our SAVIOUR in his gospel had not made so, he calls another gospel. “ I marvel that ye are “ so soon removed from him that called you by the “ grace of CHRIST, unto another gospel, which is “ not another, *ὁ ἕκ ἐστὶν ἄλλο*, which is no other “ thing, or by which I mean nothing else, but that “ there are some that trouble you, and would per- “ vert the gospel of CHRIST;” as if he had said, when I say that “ ye are removed to another gos- “ pel,” I do not mean, that ye have renounced christianity, and are gone over to another religion, but that ye are seduced by those who have a mind to pervert the gospel of CHRIST, by adding something to it, as a necessary and essential part of it, which CHRIST hath not made so: this the apostle calls a perverting or overthrowing of the gospel; because, by thus altering the terms and conditions of it, they made it quite another thing from what our SAVIOUR delivered it.

And then at the 8th and 9th verses he denounceth a terrible anathema against those, whoever they shall be, yea tho' it were an apostle, or an angel from heaven,

heaven, who by thus perverting the gospel of CHRIST (that is, by making any thing necessary to be believed or practised, which our SAVIOUR in his gospel hath not made so) should in effect “ preach another gospel; but tho’ we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema, an accursed thing.” And then to express his confidence and vehemency in this matter, and to shew that he did not speak this rashly, and in a heat, but upon due consideration, he repeats it again in the next verse, “ as we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

From the words thus explained by the consideration of the context, and of the main scope and design of this epistle, these following observations do naturally arise.

First, that the addition of any thing to the christian religion, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to salvation, is “ a perverting of the gospel of CHRIST, and preaching another gospel.”

Secondly, that no pretence of infallibility is sufficient to authorise and warrant the addition of any thing to the christian doctrine, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to salvation.

Thirdly, that christians may judge and discern when such additions are made.

Fourthly, and consequently, that since the declaration of the gospel, and the confirmation of it, there is no authority in the christian church to impose upon christians any thing as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so.

Fifthly,

Fifthly, that there is no visible judge (how infal-
lible soever he may pretend to be) to whose defini-
tions and declarations in matters of faith and prac-
tice, necessary to salvation, we are bound to submit,
without examination, whether these things be agree-
able to the gospel of CHRIST, or not.

Sixthly, and lastly, whosoever teacheth any thing
as of necessity to salvation, to be believed or practi-
sed, besides what the gospel of CHRIST hath made
necessary, doth fall under the anathema here in the
text, because in so doing, “ he perverteth the gos-
pel of CHRIST, and preacheth another gospel.”
Now the apostle expressly declares, “ that tho’ we
“ (that is, he himself, or any of the apostles) or an
“ angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto
“ you, than what we have preached unto you, let
“ him be accursed: as we said before, so say I now
“ again, if any man preach any other gospel unto
“ you, than that ye have received, let him be ac-
“ cursed.”

I. That the addition of any thing to the christian
religion, as necessary to be believed or practised, in
order to salvation, “ is a perverting of the gospel
“ of CHRIST, and preaching another gospel.”

This is evident from the instances here given in
this epistle; for the apostle chargeth the false apo-
stles, with “ perverting the gospel of CHRIST, and
“ preaching another gospel,” upon no other ac-
count, but because they added to the christian reli-
gion, and made circumcision, and the keeping of
the law of Moses, an essential part of the christian re-
ligion, and imposed upon christians the practice of
these things, and the belief of the necessity of them,
as a condition of eternal salvation. That

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That this was the doctrine of those false teachers, we find expressly, Acts xv. 1. “ And certain men “ which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, “ and said, except ye be circumcised after the man- “ ner of Moses, ye cannot be saved ;” and ver. 24. in the letter written by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, to the churches abroad, there is this account given of it ; “ forasmuch as we have heard, that “ certain which went out from us, have troubled you “ with words, subverting your souls, saying, ye must “ be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we “ gave no such commandment.” Where you see that this doctrine is declared to be of pernicious consequence, tending to subvert the souls of men, and likewise to be an addition to the doctrine of the gospel which was delivered by the apostles, who here with one consent declare, “ that they had given no “ such commandment ;” that is, had delivered no such doctrine as this, nor put any such yoke upon the necks of christians ; but on the contrary had declared, that the death of CHRIST having put an end to the Jewish dispensation, there was now no obligation upon christians to observe the law of Moses.

And from the reason of the thing it is very plain, that the addition of any thing to the christian religion as necessary to be believed or practised in order to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so, is preaching another gospel ; because it makes an essential change in the terms and conditions of the gospel-covenant, which declares salvation unto men upon such and such terms, and no other. Now to add any other terms to these, as of equal necessity with them, is to alter the condition of the covenant of the gospel,

pel, and the terms of the christian religion, and consequently “ to preach another gospel,” by declaring other terms of salvation, than CHRIST in his gospel hath declared, which is to pervert the gospel of CHRIST.

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II. No pretence of infallibility is sufficient to authorise and warrant the addition of any thing to the christian doctrine, as necessary to be believed or practised, in order to salvation. After the delivery of the gospel by the Son of God, and the publication of it to the world by his apostles, who were commissioned and inspir'd by him to that purpose, and the confirmation of all, by the greatest and most unquestionable miracles that ever were, no person whatever that brought any other doctrine, and declared salvation to men on any other terms than those which are declared in the gospel, was to be credited, what pretence soever he should make to a divine commission or an infallible assistance. The apostle makes a supposition as high as can be, “ tho' we (says he) or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be an anathema.” If the apostles themselves, who were divinely commissioned, and infallibly assisted in the preaching of the gospel, should afterwards make any addition to it, or declare any other terms of salvation than those which are declared in the gospel which they had already published to the world, they ought not to be regarded.

And the reason is plain ; because what claim soever any person may make to infallibility, and what demonstration soever he may give of it, we cannot possibly believe him, if he contradict himself, and deliver doctrines which do plainly clash with one another: for if he spake true at first, I cannot believe

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 him declaring the contrary afterwards: and if he did not speak true at first, I cannot believe him at all; because he can give no greater proof of his divine commission, and infallible assistance and inspiration, than he did at first.

And the reason is the same, if an angel from heaven should come and preach a contrary doctrine to that of the gospel, he were not to be believed neither; because he could bring no better credentials of his divine commission and authority, than those had who publish'd the gospel, and, consequently, he ought not to be credited in any thing contrary to what they had published before. For tho' a man were never so much disposed to receive a Revelation from GOD, and to submit his faith to it; yet it is not possible for any man to believe GOD against GOD himself; that is, to believe two revelations, plainly contradictory to one another, to be from GOD; and the reason of this is very obvious; because every man doth first, and more firmly, believe this proposition or principle, "that contradictions cannot be true," than any revelation whatsoever; for if contradictions may be true, then no revelation from GOD can signify any thing, because the contrary may be equally true, and so truth and falshood be all one.

The apostle indeed only makes a supposition, when he says, "tho' we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other doctrine unto you;" but by this supposition he plainly bars any man, or company of men, from adding to the christian religion any article of faith, or point of practice, as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so; I say, any man, or company of men, whatever authority or infallibility they may lay claim to, because they cannot pretend to a clearer

com-

commission, and greater evidence of infallible assistance, than an apostle or an angel from heaven, and yet the text tells us, that would not be a sufficient warrant to preach another gospel; it might indeed bring in question that which they had preached before, but could not give credit and authority to any thing plainly contrary to it, and inconsistent with it.

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III. Christians may judge and discern when another gospel is preached, when new articles of faith, or points of practice, not enjoined in the gospel, are imposed upon Christians. This the apostle supposeth every particular church, and for ought I know every particular christian, that is duly instructed in the christian religion to be a competent judge of, and to be sufficiently able to discern when another gospel is preached, and new terms and conditions, not declared in the gospel, are added to the christian religion; for if they be not able to judge of this, the apostle does in vain caution them against the seduction of those “ who perverted the doctrine of CHRIST, and “ endeavoured to remove them from him that had “ called them by the grace of CHRIST, unto another gospel.”

It may perhaps be said, that there was no need that they should be able to discern and judge of the doctrines of those false teachers, it was sufficient for them to believe the apostle concerning the doctrines of those seducers, when he declared to them the fallhood and pernicious consequence of them. But the apostle speaks to them upon another supposition, which does necessarily imply, that they were able to discern and judge what doctrines were agreeable to the gospel, and what not; for he puts the case, that

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if he himself, or any of the apostles, or an angel from heaven, should preach to them another doctrine, contrary to that of the gospel, they ought to reject it with detestation; but this doth necessarily suppose them able to judge, when such doctrines were preached, and consequently that all things necessary to be believed and practised by all christians, are clearly and plainly declared in the gospel; all the doctrines whereof are now contained in the holy scriptures, in which all things necessary to faith and a good life, are so plainly delivered, that any sober and inquisitive person may learn them from thence, and the meanest capacity, by the help and direction of their guides and teachers, may be instructed in them.

And this is not only the principle of protestants, but the express and constant doctrine of the ancient fathers of the church, whatever the church of Rome, for the maintaining of her usurped authority over the consciences of men, pretends to the contrary. And if this were not so, that men are able to discern and judge which are the doctrines of the gospel, and what is contrary to them; the doctrine of the gospel was in vain preached, and the holy scriptures containing that doctrine were written to no purpose.

Some things in scripture are granted to be obscure and difficult, on purpose to exercise the study and enquiries of those who have leisure and capacity for it: but all things necessary are sufficiently plain; otherwise it would be impossible to judge when another gospel is preached, which the apostle here supposeth the Galatians capable of doing. For if the revelation of the gospel be not sufficiently plain in all things necessary to be believed and practised, then
christians

christians have no rule whereby to judge what doctrines are agreeable to the gospel, and what not, for an obscure rule is of no use; that is, in truth is no rule to those to whom it is obscure.

I proceed to the IVth observation, which is plainly consequent from those laid down before; namely, that since the declaration of the gospel, and the confirmation given to it, there is no authority in the christian church to impose upon christians any thing, as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so.

The commission given by our LORD and SAVIOUR to his apostles, was “to preach the gospel to all nations, (or as St. Matthew expresses it) to go and teach all nations, to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them;” and this is that which we call the gospel, viz. that doctrine which CHRIST commanded his apostles to preach and publish to the world; and if the apostles themselves had exceeded their commission, and added any other points of faith or practice to those which our SAVIOUR gave them in charge to teach and publish to the world, they had, in so doing, been guilty of that which St. Paul here in the text chargeth the false apostles with, viz. “of preaching another gospel.” And if the apostles had no authority to add any thing to the gospel, much less can any others pretend to it, since they have neither so immediate a commission, nor such a miraculous power to give testimony to them, “that they are teachers come from God.”

Now this doctrine of the gospel, which the apostles preached to the world, is that which christians are so often, and so earnestly by the apostles in all their epistles “exhorted to continue in, and not to suffer
“them-

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“ themselves to be shaken in mind, by every wind of new doctrine,” because that which the apostles had delivered to them, was the intire doctrine of the gospel, which was never to receive any addition or alteration. This is that which St. Peter calls “ the holy commandment which was delivered unto them,” 2 Pet. ii. 21. “ It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them,” speaking in all probability of those who were seduced by the errors of the gnosticks, from the purity of the christian doctrine delivered to them by the apostles. This likewise St. Paul calls “ the common faith,” Titus i. 4. and St. Jude ver. 3. “ the common salvation;” that is, the doctrine which contains the common terms of salvation, and “ the faith which was once delivered to the saints,” that is, by the apostles of our LORD, who published the gospel; “ once delivered,” that is, once for all, so as never afterwards to admit of any change or alteration. This faith he exhorts christians, “ earnestly to contend for,” against those several sects of seducers, which were crept into the christian church, and did endeavour by several arts to pervert the gospel of CHRIST, and to deprave the faith delivered by the apostles.

So that the doctrine of the gospel publish'd by the apostles, is fix'd and unalterable, and there can be no authority in the church to make any change in it, either by taking from it, or adding any thing to it, as necessary to be believed or practis'd in order to salvation.

5. It follows likewise from the foregoing observations, that there is no visible judge (how much so-

ever

ever he may pretend to infallibility) to whose determination and decision in matters of faith and practice necessary to salvation, christians are bound to submit without examination, whether those things be agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel, or not.

When our SAVIOUR appeared in the world, tho' he had authority enough to exact belief from men, yet because there was a standing revelation of GOD made to the Jews, he appeals to that revelation, as well as to his own miracles, for the truth of what he said, and offered himself, and his doctrine, to be tried by the agreeableness of it to the scriptures of the old testament, and the predictions therein concerning him. And this was but reasonable, it being impossible for any man to receive two revelations, as from GOD, without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to, and consistent with one another. In like manner the apostles of our LORD and SAVIOUR, tho' they were guided and assisted by an infallible spirit, and had an immediate commission from CHRIST to preach the doctrine of the gospel, did not require from men absolute submission to their doctrines and dictates, without examination of what they delivered, whether it were agreeable to the divine revelation which was contained in the ancient scriptures.

This was St. Paul's constant custom and way of teaching among the Jews, who had received the revelation of the old testament; he did not dictate to them by virtue of his infallibility, but "reasoned with them out of the scriptures," and required their belief no farther than what he said should, upon examination, appear agreeable to the scriptures. So we find, Acts xvii. 2, 3. "And Paul, as his manner
" was,

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“ was; went in unto them (speaking of the Jews) and
 “ three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the
 “ scriptures, opening and alledging that CHRIST
 “ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the
 “ dead; and that this JESUS whom I preach unto you,
 “ is the CHRIST.” And chap. xviii. 28. “ he mighti-
 “ ly convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shew-
 “ ing by the scriptures, that JESUS was the CHRIST.”
 And St. Paul was so far from reproving them for exam-
 ining his doctrine by the scriptures, that he com-
 mended it, as an argument of a noble and generous
 mind in the Bereans, that they did not give full as-
 sent to his doctrine, till upon due search and exami-
 nation they were satisfied that what he had said was
 agreeable to the scriptures. Chap. xvii. 11, 12.
 Where speaking of the Bereans, it is said, “ That
 “ these were more noble than those in Thessalonica,
 “ in that they received the word, with all readiness
 “ of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whe-
 “ ther those things were so; therefore many of them
 “ believed;” that is, because upon search they found
 what he delivered to be agreeable to the scriptures;
 and it was not a slight, but diligent and deliberate
 search, they took time to examine things thoroughly;
 for it is said, “ they searched the scriptures daily.”
 And here in the text St. Paul puts the case, that if he,
 or any other of the apostles, concerning whose divine
 commission and assistance they were so fully satisfied,
 should deliver any thing to them contrary to the gos-
 pel which they had formerly preached, they were to
 reject it with the greatest abhorrence and detestation;
 and this necessarily supposeth a liberty to examine
 what was delivered, even by those whom they believed

to be infallibly assisted, and a capacity to discern and judge whether what they said was agreeable to the gospel at first delivered to them or not.

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And after this, shall any person or church (what claim soever they may make to infallibility) assume to themselves an authority to dictate in matters of faith, and that their dictates ought to be received with an absolute submission, and without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to “the faith once delivered to the saints;” and tho’ they add new articles to the christian faith, and of which there is not the least footstep or intimation in any of the ancient creeds of the christian church, and do plainly impose upon christians the practice and belief of several things as necessary to salvation, which the gospel never declared to be so, yet no body shall judge of this, but every man ought without more ado, to believe blindfold, and to resign up his understanding and judgment to the directions of this visible infallible judge?

But surely this is not the reasonable “obedience of faith,” but the forc’d submission of slaves to the tyranny of their masters. Christians are expressly forbid “to call any man father or master upon earth, because we have one father and master in heaven.” Now to make an absolute submission of our understandings to any upon earth, so as without examination to receive their dictates in matters of faith, is surely, if any thing can be so, “to call such a person father or master,” because a greater submission than this we cannot pay to our FATHER who is in heaven, even to GOD himself. I come now to the

VI and last observation from the text, that who-
soever teacheth any thing as of necessity to salva-
tion, to be believed or practised, besides what the
gospel of CHRIST hath made necessary, does fall
under the anathema here in the text; because they
that do so, do, according to the mind of St. Paul,
“pervert the gospel of CHRIST, and preach ano-
“ther gospel.” For the reason why he chargeth
the false apostles with “preaching another gospel,”
and those that were seduced by them, as “being re-
“moved from him that called them into the grace of
“CHRIST unto another gospel,” is plainly this;
that they had changed the terms of the christian re-
ligion, by adding new articles to it, which were not
contained in the gospel; that is, by making it ne-
cessary to believe it to be so. because they taught so.
Now St. Paul expressly declares this to be “preach-
“ing another gospel,” because they plainly alter’d
the terms of salvation declared in the gospel, and
made that to be necessary to the salvation of men,
which the gospel had not made so.

And whatever person or church does the same,
does incur the same guilt, and falls under the ana-
thema and censure here in the text; yea, “tho’ he
“were an apostle, or an angel:” and I am sure no
bishop or church in the world can pretend either to
an equal authority or infallibility with an apostle, or
an angel from heaven.

Let us then hear what St. Paul declares in this
case, and consider seriously, with what earnestness and
vehemency he declares it; “tho’ we (says he) or
“an angel from heaven preach any other gospel un-
“to you, than that which we have preached unto
“you,

“ you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say
“ I now again, if any man preach any other gospel
“ unto you, than that ye have received, let him be
“ accursed.” St. Paul you see is very earnest in
this matter, and very peremptory, and therefore I
cannot but think this declaration of his to be more
considerable, and every way more worthy of our re-
gard and dread, than all the anathema’s of the coun-
cil of Trent, which in direct affront and contempt
of this anathema of St. Paul, hath presumed to add
so many articles to the christian religion, upon the
counterfeit warrant of tradition, for which there is
no ground or warrant from the scripture, or from
any ancient creed of the christian church.

And for the truth of this, I appeal to the creed of
pope Pius the IVth, compiled out of the definiti-
ons of the council of Trent; by which council the
pope only is authorized to interpret the true sense
and meaning of the canons and decrees of that coun-
cil; and consequently his interpretations must be of
equal force and authority with that of the council it
self. So that whatsoever he hath put into his new
creed for an article of faith, ought to be received
with the same pious affection and veneration, as if
the creed had been compiled by the council it self;
because the pope, it seems, and no body else under-
stands the true meaning of that council, at least is
thought fit to declare it. And therefore one may
justly wonder at the presumption of those, who after
this declaration of the council, have taken upon
them to expound the catholick faith, and to repre-
sent that religion to us, as it is defined in that coun-
cil; because if there be any controversy about the

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meaning of its definitions (as there have been a great many even betwixt those who were present at the council when those definitions were made) none but the pope himself can certainly tell the meaning of them.

Now in this creed of pope Pius, there are added to the ancient creed, of the christian church, twelve or thirteen new articles, as concerning purgatory, transubstantiation, the worship of images, the invocation of saints, the communion in one kind, and that the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches, and that there is no salvation to be had out of it; and several other points, all which have either no foundation in scripture, or are plainly contrary to it, and none of them ever esteemed as articles of faith in the ancient christian church for the first five hundred years; and yet they are now obtruded upon christians, as of equal necessity to salvation, with the twelve articles of the apostles creed, and this under a pretence of infallibility, which St. Paul tells us would not have justified an apostle, or an angel from heaven, in making such additions to the christian religion, and the imposing any thing as necessary to salvation, which is not so declared by the gospel of CHRIST.

And all that they have to say for this, is, that we do not pretend to be infallible: but there is a necessity of an infallible judge to decide these controversies, and to him they are to be referred. Which is just as if in a plain matter of right, a contentious and confident man should desire a reference, and contrive the matter so as to have it refer'd to himself, upon a sleeveless pretence, without any proof or evidence,

dence, that he is the only person in the world that hath authority and infallible skill to decide all such differences. Thus the church of Rome would deal with us in things which are as plain as the noon-day; as whether God hath forbidden the worship of images in the second commandment? whether our SAVIOUR did institute the sacrament in both kinds? whether the people ought not to read the scriptures, and to have the publick service of God in a known tongue? these, and the like, they would have us refer to an infallible judge; and when we ask who he is, they tell us that their church, which hath imposed these things upon christians, and made these additions to the gospel of CHRIST, is that infallible judge. But if she were as infallible as she pretends to be, even as an apostle, or an angel from heaven, St. Paul hath denounced an anathema against her, for preaching another gospel, and making those things necessary to the salvation of men, which are not contained in the gospel of CHRIST.

The inference from all this discourse in short, is this; “that we should contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” and not suffer our selves by the confident pretences of seducers, “to be removed from him that hath called us through the grace of CHRIST unto another gospel.” The necessary doctrines of the christian religion, and the common terms of salvation are so plain, that if any man be ignorant of them, it is his own fault; and if any go about to impose upon us any thing as of necessity to be believed and practised in order to salvation, which is not declared to be so in the holy scriptures, which contain the true doctrine

doctrine of the gospel, what authority soever they pretend for it, yea, tho' they assume to themselves to be infallible; the apostle hath plainly told us what we are to think of them; for he hath put the case as high as possible here in the text, when he says, "tho' we, " or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel " unto you, than that which we have preached unto " you, let him be accursed."

I will conclude all with that counsel which the SPIRIT of GOD gives to the churches of Asia, Rev. iii. 3. "Remember therefore how thou hast received " and heard, and hold fast;" and chap. ii. 10. "Fear " none of those things which thou shalt suffer, be " thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a " crown of Life."

S E R M O N LXXXVII.

Honesty the best preservative against dangerous mistakes in religion.

J O H N vii. 17.

If any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself.

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SINCE there are so many different opinions and apprehensions in the world about matters of religion, and every sect and party does with so much confidence pretend that they, and they only, are

are in the truth ; the great difficulty and question is, by what means men may be secured from dangerous errors and mistakes in religion. For this end some have thought it necessary that there should be an infallible church, in the communion whereof every man may be secured from the dangers of a wrong belief. But it seems GOD hath not thought this necessary : if he had, he would have revealed this very thing more plainly than any particular point of faith whatsoever. He would have told us expressly, and in the plainest terms, that he had appointed an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith, and would likewise have told us as plainly who he was, and where we might find him, and have recourse to him upon all occasions ; because the sincerity of our faith depending upon him, we could not be safe from mistake in particular points, without so plain and clear a revelation of this infallible judge, that there could be no mistake about him ; nor could there be an end of any other controversies in religion, unless this infallible judge (both that there is one, and who he is) were out of controversy. But neither of these are so : it is not plain from scripture that there is an infallible judge and guide in matters of faith ; much less is it plain who he is ; and therefore we may certainly conclude, that GOD hath not thought it necessary that there should be an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith, because he hath revealed no such thing to us : and that bishop and that church who only have arrogated infallibility to themselves, have given the greatest evidence in the world to the contrary ; and have been detected and stand convinced of the greatest errors : and it is in vain for any man or company of men, to pretend

to infallibility, so long as the evidence that they are deceived is much greater and clearer than any proof they can produce for their infallibility.

If then GOD hath not provided an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith; there is some other way whereby men may be secured against dangerous and damnable errors in religion, and whereby they may discern truth from imposture, and what doctrines are from GOD, and what not; and this our SAVIOUR declares to us here in the text, namely, that an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire to do the will of GOD, is the best preservative against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; *ὁ ἀληθινὸς ποιεῖν*. “If any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself.”

There are two dangerous mistakes in religion: to reject any thing which really comes from God; and to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which doth not really come from him.

First, to reject any thing which really comes from GOD. This mistake the Jews frequently fell into, when they rejected the true prophets which GOD from time to time sent to them, slighting their message, and persecuting their persons: but they miscarried most fatally and remarkably in their contempt of the true MESSIAS, that great prophet whom they had so long expected, and whom GOD sent at last, to bring salvation to them; but when he came, they knew him not, nor would receive him, but used him with all the despite and contempt imaginable, not as “a teacher come from GOD,” but as a deceiver, and impostor.

Now

Now the danger of rejecting any thing that comes from **GOD**, consists in this, that it cannot be done without the highest affront to the divine majesty. To reject a divine message, or revelation is to oppose **GOD**, and fight against him. So our **SAVIOUR** tells the Jews, “ that in despising him, they despised him “ that sent him.”

Secondly, there is also another dangerous mistake on the other hand, in entertaining any thing as a revelation from **GOD**, which is not really from him. And this likewise the Jews were frequently guilty of, in receiving the false prophets which spake in the name of the **LORD**, when he had not sent them. And this is commonly the temper of those who reject the truth, greedily to swallow error and delusion. So our **SAVIOUR** tells us of the Jews, John v. 43. “ I am come in my **FATHER**'s name, and ye “ receive me not ; if another shall come in his own “ name, him ye will receive ? ” This prediction of our **SAVIOUR**'s concerning the Jews, was fully accomplish'd ; for after they had rejected him, who gave such abundant evidence that he was the true **MESSIAS**, and “ a teacher sent from **GOD**,” they received others, who really came in their own names, and ran after those who pretended to be the **MESSIAS**, and were in great numbers destroyed with them. And this is very just with **GOD**, that “ those who receive not the truth in the love “ of it, should be given to strong delusions, to believe lies.”

Now these being the two great dangerous mistakes in religion which men are liable to, my work at this time shall be to shew, how a sincere desire

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and endeavour to do the will of **GOD**, is a security to men against both those dangers; and it will appear to be so, upon these accounts.

I. Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of **GOD**, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things.

II. Because **GOD**'s providence is more especially concerned to secure such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes in things which concern their eternal salvation. These shall be the two heads of my following discourse.

First, because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of **GOD**, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things, and that for these two reasons,

1. Because such a person hath a truer notion of **GOD**, and divine things.

2. Because he is more impartial in his search and enquiry after truth.

1. Because such a person hath a truer notion of **GOD** and divine things. No man is so likely to have clear and true apprehensions of **GOD**, as a good man, because he hath transcribed the divine perfections in his own mind, and is himself in some measure and degree what **GOD** is. And for this reason it is, that the scripture so often lays the foundation of all divine knowledge in the practice of religion. Job xxviii. 28. "The fear of the **LORD**, that is wisdom, and "to depart from evil, is understanding;" and Psal. cxl. 10. "The fear of the **LORD** is the beginning of "wisdom," that is, the principal and foundation of it; "a good understanding have all they that do his
"command-

“commandments.” Whereas the vices and lusts of men darken their reason, and distort their understandings, and fill the mind with gross and sensual apprehensions of things, and thereby render men unfit to discern those truths which are of a spiritual nature and tendency, and altogether indisposed to receive them. For tho’ the vices of men be properly seated in their wills, and do not possess their understandings; yet they have a bad influence upon them, as fumes and vapours from the stomach are wont to affect the head.

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Nothing indeed is more natural to the mind and understanding of men, than the knowledge of GOD; but we may abuse our faculties, and render them unfit for the discerning even of their proper objects.

When men by wicked practices, have rendered themselves unlike to GOD, they will not love to “retain the knowledge of him” in their minds, but will “become vain in their imaginations” concerning him. What clouds and mists are to the bodily eye, that the lusts and corruptions of men are to the understanding; they hinder it from a clear perception of heavenly things; the pure in heart, they are best qualified for the sight of GOD.

Now according as a man’s notions of GOD are, such will be his apprehensions of religion. All religion is either natural, or revealed: natural religion consists in the belief of a GOD, and in right conceptions and apprehensions concerning him, and in a due reverence and observance of him, and in a ready and chearful obedience to those laws which he hath imprinted upon our nature; and the sum of our obedience consists in our conformity to GOD, and an

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endeavour to be like him. For supposing GOD to have made no external revelation of his mind to us, we have no other way to know his will, but by considering his own nature, and our own; and if so, then he that resembles GOD most, is like to understand him best, because he finds those perfections in some measure in himself, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man so sure a notion of things, as practice and experience: every good man is in some degree “partaker of a divine nature,” and feels that in himself, which he conceives to be in GOD: so that this man does experience what others do but talk of; he sees the image of GOD in himself, and is able to discourse of him from an inward sense and feeling of his excellency and perfections.

And as for revealed religion, the only design of that is, to revive and improve the natural notions which we have of GOD, and all our reasonings about divine revelation, are necessarily gathered by our natural notions of religion; and therefore he that sincerely endeavours “to do the will of GOD,” is not apt to be imposed upon by the vain and confident pretences of divine revelation; but if any doctrine be proposed to him, which pretends to come from GOD, he measures it by those steady and sure notions which he hath of the divine nature and perfections, and by those he will easily discern whether it be worthy of GOD, or not, and likely to proceed from him: he will consider the nature and tendency of it, and whether it be (as the apostle expresses it) “a doctrine according to godliness,” such as is agreeable to the divine nature and perfections, and tends to make

us like to GOD ; if it be not, tho' an angel from heaven should bring it, he will not receive it: if it be, he will not reject it upon every idle pretence, and frivolous exception that prejudiced and ill-minded men may make against it; but after he is satisfied of the reasonableness and purity of the doctrine, he will accept of such evidence and confirmation of it, as is fit for GOD to give to his own revelations; and if the person that brings it, hath an attestation of miracles (which is necessary in case it be a new doctrine) and if he carry on no earthly interest and design by it, but does by his life and actions make it evident that he aims at the glory of GOD, and the good of men; in this case a good man, whose mind is free from passion and prejudice, will easily assent, that this man's " doctrine is of GOD, and that " he does not speak of himself." This was the evidence which our SAVIOUR offered to the Jews in vindication of himself, and his doctrine, John vii. 18. " He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory: " but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the " same is true, and no unrighteousness in him;" as if he had said, hereby may you distinguish one that really comes from GOD, from an impostor: if any man seek his own glory, you may conclude that GOD hath not sent him, but whatever he pretends, that he speaks of himself; but he who by his life, and the course of his actions, demonstrates that he seeks the honour of GOD, and not any interest and advantage of his own, " the same is true, and there " is no unrighteousness in him;" that is, no falsehood or design to deceive (for so the word *adulter* does sometimes signify;) you may conclude such an

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one to be no deceiver, or impostor. And if any man sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of GOD, he may, by such marks and characters as these, judge of any doctrine that pretends to be from GOD, whether it be so or not. This is the first reason; because he that sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of GOD, hath the truest notion of GOD, and of divine things.

2. Such a person is more impartial in his search and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to discern it from error. He that hath an honest mind, and sincerely endeavours to do the will of GOD, is not apt to be swayed and biased by any interest or lust; for his greatest interest is to please GOD, and he makes all his other interests and concernments to stoop and yield to that. But if a man be governed by any earthly interest or design, he will measure all things by that, and is not at liberty to entertain any thing that crosses it, and to judge equally of any doctrine that is opposite to his interest. This our SAVIOUR gives for a reason, why the great rabbies and teachers among the Jews did not believe and embrace his doctrine, John v. 44. "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?" if men have any other design in religion than to please GOD, and to advance his honour and glory in the world, no wonder if they be apt to reject the most divine truths; because these are calculated, not to approve us to men, but to GOD.

And as vain-glory, and desire of the applause of men; so likewise doth every other lust make a man partial in his judgment of things, and clap a false bias upon his understanding, which carries it off from truth,

truth, and makes it to lean towards that side of the question which is most favourable to the interest of his lusts. A vicious man is not willing to entertain those truths which would cross and check him in his course: he hath made the truth his enemy, and therefore he thinks himself concerned to oppose it, and rise up against it: the light of it offends him, and therefore he shuts his eyes that he may not see it. Those holy and pure doctrines which are from God, reprove the lusts of men, and discover the deformity of them; and therefore no wonder if bad men be so hard to be reconciled to them. This account our SAVIOUR likewise gives of the fierce enmity of the Jews to him, and his doctrine, John iii. 19, 20. "Light is come into the World, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil; for every one that hath done evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd."

The vicious inclinations of men are a dead weight upon their understandings, and able to draw down the scales against the clearest truths: for tho' it be absolutely in no man's power to believe or to disbelieve what he will; yet mens lives have many times a great influence upon their understandings, to make assent easy, or difficult; and as we are forward to believe what we have a mind to, so are we very backward and slow in yielding our assent to any thing that crosseth our inclinations. Men that allow themselves in ungodliness and worldly lusts, will not easily believe those doctrines which charge men so strictly with all manner of holiness and purity.

This is the way which the devil hath always used

S E R M. to "blind the eyes of men, that the light of the glo-
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 "them." And certainly the most effectual way
 to keep men in infidelity, is to debauch them in their
 lives; therefore the apostle gives this as the reason of
 the infidelity of men in the last times, 2 Thes. ii. 12.
 "They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in
 "unrighteousness." When men once abandon them-
 selves to lewd and vicious practices, infidelity becomes
 their interest, because they have no other way to de-
 fend and excuse a wicked life, but by denying the
 truth which opposeth it, and finds fault with it.

That man only stands fair for the entertainment of
 truth, who is under the dominion of no vice, or lust;
 because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to
 seduce him, or draw him aside in his enquiry after
 truth; he hath no interest but to find the truth, and
 follow it: he is enquiring after the way to heaven,
 and eternal happiness, and he hath the indifferency of
 a traveller which is not inclined to go this way rather
 than another; for his concernment is to find out the
 right way, and to walk in it: such an indifferency of
 mind hath every good man, who sincerely desires to
 do the will of GOD; he stands ready to receive truth,
 when sufficient evidence is offered to convince him of
 it; because he hath no manner of concernment that
 the contrary proposition should be true. As in ma-
 thematicks, a man is ready to give his assent to any
 proposition, that is sufficiently demonstrated to him,
 because he hath no inclination or affection to one side
 of the question more than to the other; all his design
 and concernment is to find out the truth on which
 side soever it lies; and he is like to find it, because
 he

he is so indifferent, and impartial. But if a man be bias'd by any lust, and addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an interested person, and concerned to be partial in his judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity, when the truths of **God** are proposed to him; because whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of that doctrine, which is so contrary to his inclination and interest. If the affections and interests of men were as deeply concerned, and as sensibly touched in the truth of mathematical propositions, as they are in the principles of morality and religion, we should find that when a proposition stood in their way, and lay cross to their interest, though it were never so clearly demonstrated, yet they would raise a dust about it, and make a thousand cavils, and fence even against the evidence of a demonstration; they would palliate their error with all the skill and art they could, and tho' the absurdity of it was never so great and palpable, yet they would hold it fast against all sense and reason, and face down mankind in the obstinate defence of it; for we have no reason to doubt, but that they who in matters of religion will believe directly contrary to what they see, would, if they had the same interest and passions to sway them in the case, believe contrary to the clearest mathematical demonstration; for where there is an obstinate resolution not to be convinc'd, all the reason and evidence in the world signifies nothing.

Whereas he that is biased by no passion or interest, but hath an honest mind, and is sincerely desirous to do the will of **God** so far as he knows it, is likely to judge very impartially concerning any doctrines that

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are proposed to him: for if there be not good evidence that they are from GOD, he hath no reason to deceive himself, in giving credit to them; and if there be good evidence that they are divine, he hath no interest or inclination to reject them; for it being his great design to do the will of GOD, he is glad of all opportunities to come to the knowledge of it, that he may do it.

Thus you see, how a sincere desire and endeavour to obey the will of GOD, does secure men against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; because such persons are hereby better disposed to make a right judgment of divine things, both because they have truer and surer notions of GOD and religion, and are more impartial in their search and enquiry after truth. This is the first account.

II. Another reason why they who sincerely desire to do the will of GOD, have a great security in discerning truth from error, is, because the providence of GOD is more especially concerned to preserve such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes, in things which concern their eternal salvation. When men are of a teachable temper, GOD loves to reveal himself and his truth to them; and such is an humble and obedient frame of mind, Psal. xxv. 9. "The meek
" will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach
" his way." The proper disposition of a scholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn; is "what is the good and acceptable will of GOD," that we may do it, for practice is the end of knowledge. "If you know
" these things (says our blessed LORD) happy are
" ye if ye do them." It is necessary to know the will of GOD; because we are happy only in the doing of
it:

it: and if any man be desirous to do the will of God, his goodness is such, that he will take effectual care to secure such an one against dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honest mind, and would do the will of GOD, if he knew it, GOD will not suffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it, in any necessary points of faith and practice.

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St. Paul is a wonderful instance of the goodness of GOD in this kind. He was undoubtedly a man of a very honest mind; he had entertained the jewish religion, as revealed by GOD, and been bred in it; and out of a blind reverence and belief of his teachers, who rejected CHRIST and his doctrine, he likewise opposed and persecuted them with a mighty zeal, and an honest intention, being “ verily persuaded (as he himself tells us) that he ought to do what he did, “ against the name of JESUS of Nazareth;” he was under a great prejudice upon account of his education, and according to the heat of his natural temper, transported with great passion: but because he did what he did, ignorantly, and in unbelief; GOD was pleased to shew mercy to him, and, in a miraculous manner, to convince him of the truth of that religion which he persecuted. He was sincerely desirous to do the will of GOD, and therefore GOD would rather work a miracle for his conversion, than suffer him to go on in so fatal a mistake concerning the christian religion.

And as the providence of GOD doth concern itself to secure good men from dangerous errors and mistakes in matter of religion; so by a just judgment he gives up those who allow themselves in vicious practices, to error and infidelity. And this is the mean-

ing of that passage of the prophet, Isa. vi. 10. so often cited by our SAVIOUR, and applied to the Jews, “ of making the heart of that people fat, and their ears heavy, and closing their eyes, lest they should understand, and be converted.” So again, Isa. lxvi. 3, 4. GOD threatens the people of Israel, that because they were wicked and abominable in their lives, he would abandon them, and give them over to a spirit of delusion; “ they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations; I also will choose their delusions.” GOD is said to choose those things for us, which he permits us to fall into: so Rom. i. 28. GOD is said to give over the abominable heathen to a reprobate mind. “ As they did not like to retain GOD in their knowledge, GOD gave them over *εἰς ἀνόητον νῦν*, to an injudicious and undiscerning mind.” When men abandon themselves to wickedness and impiety, GOD withdraws his grace from them; and by his secret and just judgment they are deprived of the faculty of discerning between truth and error, between good and evil, 2 Theff. ii. 10, 11, 12. It is said, “ that the man of sin should come with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” And that “ for this cause, GOD would send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lye; that they might all be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” And it is just with GOD, that men of vicious inclinations and practices should be exposed to the cheat of the grossest and vilest impostors. GOD’s providence is concerned for men of honest minds, and sincere in-

intentions : but if men “ take pleasure in unrighteous-
“ nefs,” GOD takes no further care of them, but
“ delivers them up to their own hearts lusts,” to be
seduced into all those errors, into which their own vain
imagination, and their foolish hearts are apt to lead
them.

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly as I could, to
shew that an honest mind, “ that sincerely desires
“ and endeavours to do the will of GOD,” is the best
security against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of
religion ; both because it disposeth a man to make a
true judgment of divine things, and because the pro-
vidence of GOD is more especially concerned for the
security of such persons.

There remains an objection to be answered, to
which this discourse may seem liable ; but this, toge-
ther with the inferences which may be made from this
discourse, I shall refer to another opportunity.

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Honesty the best preservative against
dangerous mistakes in religion.

J O H N vii. 17.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,
whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself.*

I Made entrance into these words the last day ; in
which our SAVIOUR declares to us, that an honest
and sincere mind, and an hearty desire and en-
deavour to do the will of GOD, is the best security
and this Text.

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The se-
cond Ser-
mon on
this Text.

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and preservative against dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion; *ἴαν τις θέλη ποιεῖν*, “if any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of my self.”

Now there are (I told you) two great mistakes in religion: “to reject any thing which really is from GOD; and to receive and entertain any thing as from GOD, which is not really from him.” And therefore I proposed from this text to shew how a sincere desire and endeavour to do the will of GOD, is a security to men against both these Dangers, namely upon these two accounts.

First, Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of GOD, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things; and that for these two reasons.

I. Because such a person hath a truer notion of GOD, and divine things. He that resembleth GOD most, is like to understand him best, because he finds those perfections, in some measure, in himself, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man so sure a notion of things, as practice and experience.

II. Because such a person is more impartial in his search and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to discern it from error. That man only stands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the power and dominion of no vice or lust, because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to seduce and draw him aside in his enquiry after truth: he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary proposition should be true, having the indifferency of a traveller,

traveller, and no other interest, but to find out the right way to heaven, and to walk in it. But if a man be biassed by any lust, and addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an interested person, and concern'd to make a partial judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity, when the truths of GOD are propos'd to him; because, whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truths of those doctrines, which are so contrary to his inclination and interest.

Secondly, Another reason why they who sincerely desire to do the will of GOD, have a greater security in discerning truth from error, is, because the providence of GOD is more especially concern'd to preserve such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes, in things which concern their eternal salvation. When men are of a teachable temper, of an humble and obedient frame of mind, GOD loves to reveal himself, and his truth to them, Psal. xxv. 9. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." The proper disposition of a scholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn, is, "what is the good and acceptable will of GOD, that we may do it;" for practice is the end of knowledge; "if ye know these things (saith our SAVIOUR) happy are ye if ye do them." It is necessary to know the will of GOD; but we are only happy in the doing of it; and if any man be desirous to do the will of GOD, his goodness is such, that he will take effectual care to secure such a one against dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honest mind, and will do the will of GOD, if he knew it, GOD will not suffer him to remain ignorant

ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it in any necessary point of faith, or practice. Thus far I have gone.

I shall now proceed to remove an objection, to which this discourse may seem liable, and then draw some inferences from the whole.

After all that hath been said, some perhaps may ask, Is every good man then secure from all error and mistake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed: but do not we find the contrary in experience? That an honest heart, and a weak head, do often meet together.

For answer to this, I shall lay down these following propositions.

First, That if there were any necessity, that a good man should be secured from all manner of error and mistake in religion, this probity of mind, and sincere desire to do the will of GOD, is the best way to do it; because such a temper and disposition of mind gives a man the best advantages to discern betwixt truth and error; and GOD is most likely to reveal his will to such persons. But there is no necessity of this, because a man may be a good man, and go to heaven, notwithstanding a great many mistakes in religion about things not necessary. For while we are in this imperfect state, "we know but in part," and see many things very imperfectly: but when we shall come into a more perfect State, "that which is imperfect shall be done away;" the light of glory shall scatter all those mists and clouds, which are now upon our understandings, and hinder us from a clear sight and judgment of things; we shall then see GOD, and other things, as they are; and be freed from all that ignorance, and those many childish mistakes which we are liable to
here

here below ; and till then, it is not necessary that we should be secured from them. Humility, under a sense of our ignorance, is better for us, than infallibility would be.

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Secondly, this temper and disposition of mind, which I have been speaking of, is a certain security against fatal mistakes in religion, and a final continuance in such errors, as would prove damnable ; and this is all that this discourse pretends to, or our SAVIOUR hath promised in this text. And considering the goodness of GOD, nothing is more improbable, than that an honest mind that seeks impartially after truth, should miss of it, in things that are fundamentally necessary to salvation. And if we could suppose such a man to fall into such an error, either it would not be fundamental to him, having not been, perhaps, proposed to him with sufficient evidence, and would be forgiven him upon a general repentance for all sins and errors known, or unknown ; or he would not be permitted to continue in it ; but the providence of GOD would find out some way or other to convince him of his error, and to bring him “ to the acknowledgement of the truth, that he might be saved.” GOD would rather speak to him immediately from heaven (as he did to St. Paul) than suffer him to continue in such an error, as would infallibly carry him to hell.

Thirdly, there is no such depth of judgment, and subtilty of wit required, to discern between gross and damnable errors in religion, and necessary and saving truth, but that an ordinary capacity may be able to do it. There is so plain a line drawn between great truth, and gross errors, that it is visible to every capacity ; and an ordinary understanding, that is not

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under a violent prejudice, or blinded by some vice or fault of the will, may easily discern it. Indeed, in matters of lesser moment and concernment, and which have no such considerable and immediate influence upon the practice of an holy life, the difference betwixt truth and error is not always so gross and sensible, as to be obvious to every unprejudiced eye. But we have all the reason in the world to believe, that the goodness and justice of GOD is such, as to make nothing necessary to be believed by any man, which, by the help of due instruction, may not be made sufficiently plain to a common understanding. GOD hath so tender a care of good men, who sincerely love him and his truth, that we may reasonably presume, that he will not leave them under an unavoidable mistake, concerning those matters upon which their eternal salvation does depend. “The judge of all the world will do right;” and then we may certainly conclude, that he will not condemn any man for no fault, and make him for ever miserable, for falling into an error, which, with all his care and diligence, he could not possibly either discern or avoid.

Fourthly, GOD hath made abundant provision for our security from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, by these three ways.

I. By an infallible rule, sufficiently plain in all things necessary.

II. By sufficient means of instruction, to help us to understand this rule.

III. By an infallible promise of security from dangerous errors and mistakes, if with an honest mind and due diligence we apply our selves to understand this rule, and make use of the means of instruction,

struction, which GOD hath provided for that purpose. SERM.
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I. GOD hath given us an infallible rule, sufficiently plain in all things necessary. He hath given us the holy scriptures, which were given at first by divine inspiration, i. e. by men infallibly assisted in the writing of them, and therefore must needs be an infallible rule; and “all scripture divinely inspired, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” as St. Paul tells us, 2 Tim. iii. 16. speaking there of the books of the old testament; and there is the same reason as to the inspired writings of the new.

Now if the scriptures be an infallible rule, and “profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness,” i. e. to teach us to believe, and do; it follows of necessity, that they are sufficiently plain in all things necessary to faith, and a good life; otherwise they could not be “useful for doctrine and instruction in righteousness;” for a rule that is not plain to us in these things, in which it is necessary for us to be directed by it, is of no use to us; that is in truth, it is no rule. For a rule must have these two properties; it must be perfect, and it must be plain. The scriptures are a perfect rule, because the writers of them being divinely inspired, were infallible: and they must likewise be plain; otherwise, tho’ they be never so perfect, they can be of no more use to direct our faith and practice, than a sun-dial in a dark room is, to tell us the hour of the day: for tho’ it be never so exactly made, unless the sun shine clearly upon it, we had as good be without it. A rule that is not plain to us, whatever it may be in it self, is of no

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use at all to us, 'till it be made plain, and we understand it.

II. GOD hath likewise provided sufficient means of instruction to help us to understand this rule. It is not necessary that a rule should be 'so plain, that we should perfectly understand it at first sight; it is sufficient, if it be so plain, that those of better capacity and understanding may, with due diligence and application of mind, come to the true knowledge of it; and those of a lower and more ordinary capacity by the help and instruction of a teacher. Euclid's elements is a book sufficiently plain to teach a man geometry; but yet not so plain that any man at first reading should understand it perfectly; but that by diligent reading, by a due application, and steady attention of mind, a man of extraordinary sagacity and understanding may come to understand the principles and demonstrations of it, and those of a more ordinary capacity with the help of a teacher, may come to the knowledge of it. So when we say that the scriptures are plain in all things necessary to faith, and a good life, we do not mean that every man at first hearing or reading of these things in it, shall perfectly understand them; but by diligent reading and consideration, if he be of good apprehension and capacity, he may come to a sufficient knowledge of them; and if he be of a meaner capacity, and be willing to learn, he may, by the help of a teacher, be brought to understand them without any great pains; and such teachers GOD hath appointed in his church for this very purpose, and a succession of them to continue to the end of the world.

In a word, when we say the scriptures are plain to all capacities, in all things necessary, we mean, that any man of ordinary capacity, by his own diligence and care, in conjunction with the helps and advantages which GOD hath appointed, and in the due use of them, may attain to the knowledge of every thing necessary to his salvation; and that there is no book in the world more plain, and better fitted to teach a man any art or science, than the bible is to direct and instruct men in the way to heaven; and it is every man's fault if he be ignorant of any thing necessary for him to believe, or do, in order to his eternal happiness.

III. Good men are likewise secured from fatal errors in religion, by the infallible promise of GOD, if so be that with honest minds and due diligence they apply themselves to the understanding of this rule, and make use of the means of instruction which GOD hath provided for that purpose. GOD hath promised "to guide and teach the humble and meek;" that is, such as are of a submissive and teachable temper, desirous and diligent to be instructed in the truth. Prov. ii. 3, 4, 5. "If thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of GOD." And here in the text our SAVIOUR assures us, "that if any man be desirous to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether he spake of himself;" i. e. he shall be able to discern the doctrines which are from God. This

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This is the provision which GOD hath made for our security from fatal mistakes in religion; and this is in all respects a better security, and more likely to guide and conduct us safely to heaven, than any infallible church; and that for these reasons.

First, because it is much more certain that GOD hath made this provision which I have mentioned, than that there is an infallible church appointed and assisted by him to this purpose. That the scriptures are an infallible and adequate rule, and sufficiently plain in all things necessary, I have already proved; and I add further, that this was the constant judgment of the ancient church, and so declared by the unanimous consent of the fathers of it for many ages; and that all councils in their determination of faith, proceeded upon this rule, till the second council of Nice.

I have likewise proved, that GOD hath provided a succession of pastors and teachers in his church, to instruct us in this rule; and that we have GOD's infallible promise for our security from dangerous errors and mistakes, if with an honest mind and due diligence we apply our selves to understand this rule, and make use of the means of instruction which GOD hath provided for that purpose.

But that there is an infallible church appointed and assisted by GOD, to declare and determine matters of faith, and to be an infallible interpreter of scripture, is not certain, because there is no clear and express text of scripture to that purpose, that any church whatsoever, much less that the church of Rome hath this power and privilege.

Nay, I add further, that it is impossible, accord-
ing

ing to the principles of the church of Rome, that this should be proved from scripture; because, according to their principles, we cannot know either which are the true books of scripture, or what is the true sense of scripture, but from the authority and infallible declaration of that church. And if so, then the infallibility of the church must be first known, and proved, before we can either know the scriptures or the sense of them; and yet till we know the scriptures, and the sense of them, nothing can be proved by them. Now to pretend to prove the infallibility of their church by scripture, and at the same time to declare, that which are the true books of scripture, and what is the true sense of them, can only be proved by the infallible authority of their church, is a plain and shameful circle, out of which there is no way to escape; and consequently that God hath appointed an infallible church is impossible, according to their principles, ever to be proved from scripture, and the thing is capable of no other proof. For that God will infallibly assist any society of men, is not to be known, but by divine revelation. So that unless they can prove it by some other revelation than that of scripture (which they do not pretend to) the thing is not to be proved at all. Yes, they say, by the notes and marks of the true church; but what those marks are must either be known from scripture, or some other divine revelation, and then the same difficulty returns; besides that one of the most essential marks of the true church must be the profession of the true faith; and then it must first be known which is the true faith, before we can know which is the true church; and yet

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yet they say, that no man can learn the true faith, but from the true church; and this runs them unavoidably into another circle as shameful as the other. So that which way soever they go to prove an infallible church, they are shut up in a plain circle, and must either prove the scriptures by the church, and the church by the scriptures; or the true church by the true faith, and the true faith by the true church.

Secondly, this provision and security which I have mentioned, is more humane, better accommodated and suited to the nature of man; because it doth not suppose and need a standing and perpetual miracle, as the other way of an infallible church doth. All inspiration is supernatural and miraculous, and this infallible assistance which the church of Rome claims to her self, must either be such as the apostles had, which was by immediate inspiration, or something equal to it, and alike supernatural: but GOD does not work miracles without need, or continue them when there is no occasion for them. When God delivered the law to the people of Israel, it was accompanied with miracles, and the prophets which he sent to them from time to time, had an immediate inspiration; but their supreme judicature, or their general council, which they call the sanhedrim, was not infallibly assisted in the expounding of the law, when doubts and difficulties arose about it; no, nor in judging of true and false prophets; but they determined this, and all other emergent cases, by the standing revelation and rule of their written law; and that they were not infallibly assisted, is evident from the great errors they fell into, “in making
“ void the commandments of GOD by their tradi-
“ tions,”

“ tions,” and in their rejecting and crucifying the true MESSIAS, and the SON OF GOD.

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In like manner the apostles and first teachers of the christian religion, were immediately inspired, and miraculously assisted in the publishing of the christian doctrine, and for the speedy, and more effectual propagating and planting of it in the world, in despite of the violent prejudices that were against it, and the fierce opposition that was made to it. But when this was done, this miraculous and extraordinary assistance ceased, and GOD left the christian religion to be preserved and continued by more humane and ordinary ways, the doctrines of it being committed to writing for a standing rule of faith and practice in all ages, and an order of men appointed to instruct people in those doctrines, with a promise to secure both teachers and people that sincerely desire to know, and do the will of GOD, from all fatal errors and mistakes about things necessary to their eternal salvation; and this is a provision more likely to be made by GOD, and better suited to the nature of man, than the perpetual and needless miracle of an inspired, or any otherwise infallible church.

Thirdly, this way is likewise more agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. The design of an infallible church is to secure all that continue in the communion of it, against all possibility of error in matters of faith. The question now is not, whether an infallible church would do this? but whether that church which arrogates infallibility to itself, does not pretend to do this? and if they could do it, it would not be agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. For faith,

which is the principle of all religious actions, would be no virtue, if it were necessary. A true and right belief can be no virtue, where a man is infallibly secured against error. There is the same reason of virtuous and criminal actions; and as there can be no crime or fault in doing what a man cannot help; so neither can there be any virtue. All virtuous actions are matter of praise and commendation, and therefore it can be no virtue in any man; because it deserves no commendation, to believe and own that the sun shines at noon-day, when he sees it does so. No more would it be a virtue in any man, and deserve praise, to believe aright, who is in a church, wherein he is infallibly secured against all errors in matters of faith. Make any thing necessary, and impossible to be otherwise, and the doing of it ceases to be a virtue. God hath so framed religion, that the evidence of truth, and the means of coming to the knowledge of it, as to be a sufficient security to men of honest minds and teachable tempers, against all fatal and final mistakes concerning things necessary to salvation; but not so, that every man that is of such a church, should be infallibly secured against all errors in matters of faith; and this on purpose to try the virtue and disposition of men, whether they will be at the pains to search for truth, and when it is proposed to them with sufficient evidence, tho' not by an infallible hand, "they will receive it in the love of it, that they may be saved."

Fourthly, this is as much security against errors in matters of faith, as God hath provided against sin and vice in matters of practice; and since a right belief is only in order to a good life, a man would be

hard

hard put to it, to give a wise reason why GOD should take greater care for the infallible security of mens faith, than of their obedience. The reason pretended why GOD should make such infallible provision for a right faith, is, for the better security of mens eternal salvation and happiness, Now the virtues of a good life have a more direct and immediate influence upon that, than the most orthodox belief. “ The end of the commandment (i. e. of the declaration of the gospel) is charity.” In the christian religion that which mainly avails to our justification and salvation is, “ a faith that worketh by charity, and the keeping of the commandments of GOD. He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them (faith our blessed LORD) I will liken him to a wise man that built his house upon a rock.” and again, “ not every one that saith unto me, LORD, LORD, (i. e. makes profession of faith in me) shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my FATHER which is in heaven;” and again, “ if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” And the apostle St. Peter exhorts christians “ to add to their faith knowledge, and virtue, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity, that so an abundant entrance may be ministered to them, into the everlasting kingdom of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.” So that the virtues of a good life have the greatest influence upon our salvation, and the main stress of christianity is to be laid there. And therefore whatever reason can be assign’d, why GOD should provide for the infallible security of our faith, is much stronger, why an equal provision

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should be made to secure holiness, and obedience of life; because without this, faith cannot infallibly attain its end, which is, “the salvation of our souls.” But this it is granted GOD hath not done, and experience shews it; and therefore it is unreasonable to suppose that he hath done the other. It is sufficient, that in both kinds he hath done that which is sufficient to make us capable of happiness, if we be not wanting to ourselves; the rest he hath left to the sincerity of our endeavours; expecting that we on our part, should “work out our salvation with fear and trembling;” and “give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.” And if GOD hath made such provision by the gospel, for all that enjoy the light and advantage of it, that none can miscarry without their own fault; then both his goodness and wisdom are sufficiently acquitted without an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith; and that irreverent way of arguing in the canon law might well have been spared; that of necessity there must be an infallible judge of controversies in religion; *aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus*, “otherwise GOD would “not seem to have ordered matters discreetly.”

But what infallible security soever they have in the church of Rome, as to matters of faith, they are certainly the worst provided of wholesome and safe directions for the consciences and lives of men, of any church in the world. No religion that I know of in the world, ever had such lewd and scandalous casuists. Witness the moral divinity of the jesuits, which hath been so exposed to the world, not only by those of our religion, but by their own writers also. Nor is this mischief only confined to that order; their casuists;

suits in general, and even the more ancient of them, SERM.
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 who writ before the order of jesuits appeared in the world, have given such a liberty, and loose, to great immorality in several kinds, as is infinitely to the reproach of the best and purest religion in the world. Infomuch that Sir Thomas More himself, who was a great zealot for that religion, could not forbear to make a loud complaint of it, and to pass this severe censure upon the generality of their casuists: "that their great business seem'd to be, not
 " to keep men from sin, but to teach them *quàm*
 " *propè ad peccatum liceat accedere sine peccato*; how
 " near to sin they might lawfully come without sin-
 " ning." In the mean time the consciences of men are like to be well directed, when instead of giving men plain rules for the government of their hearts and lives, and clear resolutions of the material doubts, which frequently occur in human life, they intangle them in niceties and endless scrupulosities, teaching them to split hairs in divinity, and how with great art and cunning they may avoid the committing of any sin, and yet come as near to it as possible. This is a thing of a most dangerous consequence to the souls of men; and if men be but once encouraged to pass to the utmost bounds of what is lawful, the next step will be into that which is unlawful.

So that unless faith without works will save men, notwithstanding the infallible security which they pretend to give men of a sound and right belief (if it were really as much as they talk of) the salvation of men would still be in great hazard and uncertainty, for want of better and safer directions for a good life, than are ordinarily to be met with in the casuistical writings

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writings of that church ; especially if we consider that the scriptures are locked up from the people in an unknown tongue, where the surest and plainest directions for a good life are most plentifully to be had ; insomuch, that a man had better want all the volumes of casuistical divinity, that ever were written in the world, than to be without the bible ; by the diligent studying of which book alone, he may sooner learn the way to heaven, than by all the books in the world without it.

Fifthly and lastly, this provision which GOD hath made, is, when all is done, as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one ; and it is as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary that they should be prevented, and have an end put to them : and these are the two great reasons why an infallible judge is so importunately demanded, and insisted upon. I shall speak to these distinctly, and severally ; but because they will require a longer discourse than the time will allow, I shall not enter upon them at present, but refer them to another opportunity.

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Honesty the best preservative against dangerous mistakes in religion.

J O H N vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself.

W H E N I made my entrance into these words, I proposed from this text, S E R M.
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 First, to shew that an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire and endeavour to do the will of GOD, is the greatest security and best preservative against dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion. The third
sermon on
this text.

In the next place, I proceeded to remove an objection, to which my discourse upon this subject might seem liable. Some perhaps might ask, Is every good man then secure from all error and mistake in matters of religion? this is a mighty privilege indeed. But do we not find the contrary in experience, that an honest heart, and a weak head do often meet together? for answer to this, I laid down several propositions;

By the last of which I shew'd, that GOD hath made abundant provision for our security from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, both by the infallible rule of the holy scripture, and by sufficient means of instruction to help us to understand this rule, and by his infallible promise of assisting us, if with honest

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next minds, and a due diligence we apply our selves to the understanding of this rule, and the use of these means. And this, I told you, was in all respects a better security, and more likely to conduct us safe to heaven, than any infallible church whatsoever; and that for five reasons; four of which I have already treated of, and now proceed to the fifth, and last, viz.

Because this provision which I have shewn God hath made, is both as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one: and it is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them. And these are the two great reasons why an infallible judge is so importunately demanded, and insisted upon. I shall speak to these two points distinctly, and severally.

First, because this is as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an infallible church could give, if there were one. For an infallible church, if there were such an one upon earth, could not infallibly secure particular christians against errors in faith, any other way, than by the definition and declaration of those who are infallible in that church. And there are but three that pretend to it; either the pope, or a general council, or the pope and a general council agreeing in the same definitions. Not the pope by himself, nor the general council without the pope; because the church which pretends to infallibility, is not agreed, that either of these alone is infallible, and therefore their definitions

definitions can be no certain, much less infallible foundation of faith; no, not to that church which pretends to infallibility. So that if there be an infallible oracle in that church, it must be the pope and council in conjunction, or the definition of a council confirmed by the pope. Now in that case, either the council was infallible in its definitions, before they had the pope's confirmation, or not. If the council was infallible in its definitions, before they had the pope's confirmation; then the council alone, and of it self, was infallible (which a great part of the church of Rome deny) and then it needed not the pope's confirmation to make it infallible: or else a general council is not infallible in its definitions, before they receive the pope's confirmation; and then the pope's confirmation cannot make it so: for that which was not infallibly defined by the council, cannot be made infallible by the pope's confirmation.

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But there is another difficulty yet: it is a maxim generally received, and that even in the Roman church, "that the definitions of a general council, confirmed by the pope, are not obligatory, unless they be received by the universal church." From whence these two great inconveniences will unavoidably follow.

I. That no man is obliged to believe such definitions, 'till he certainly know that they are received by the universal church; which how he should certainly, much less infallibly know, I cannot understand; unless he either speak with all the christians in the world, or the representatives of all particular churches return back and meet again in council, to

SE RM declare that the universal church hath received their
LXXXIX definitions ; which I think was never yet done.

II. It will follow, that the definitions of a general council confirmed by the pope, are not infallible, 'till they be received by the universal church. For if they were infallible without that, they would be obligatory without it ; because an infallible definition, if we know it to be so, lays an obligation to believe it, whether it be receiv'd by the universal church or not. And if such definitions are not infallible 'till they be received by the universal church, they cannot become infallible afterwards ; because if the definitions were not infallible before, they cannot be received as such by the universal church, nor by the meer reception of them, be made to be infallible definitions, if they were not so before.

But if we should pass over all these difficulties, there is a greater yet behind, and that is, supposing the definitions of general councils confirmed by the pope to be infallible, particular christians cannot be secured infallibly from error without the knowledge of those definitions. And there are but two ways imaginable of conveying this knowledge to them : either by the living voice of their particular pastors, whom they are implicitly to believe in these matters ; but particular pastors are fallible (as they themselves grant) and therefore their words can neither be an infallible foundation of faith, or an infallible means of conveying it ; and it is unreasonable, they say, for men to own themselves to be fallible, to require an implicit belief to be given to them : or else the knowledge of the definitions of councils must be conveyed to particular christians by writing ; and if so, then there will only be

an infallible rule, but no living infallible judge. And if an infallible rule will serve the turn, we have the scriptures, which we are sure are infallible, and therefore at least as good as any other rule. But they say, that the definitions of councils give us an infallible interpretation of scripture, and therefore are of greater advantage to us. But do not the definitions of councils sometimes also need explication, that we may know the certain sense of them, without which we cannot know the doctrines defined? Yes certainly, they need explication as much as scripture, if there be any difference about the meaning of them; and there have been, and still are, great differences among those of their own church about the meaning of them. And if the explications of general councils need themselves to be explained, then there is nothing got by them, and we are but where we were before: for differences about the meaning of the definitions of general councils, make as great difficulties and uncertainties in faith, as the differences about the meaning of scripture.

Well, but the people have the living voice of their particular pastors to explain the definitions of councils to them. But this does not help the matter neither, for these two reasons.

1. Because particular pastors have no authority to explain the definitions of general councils. The council of Trent hath, by express decree, reserved to the pope, and to him only, the power to explain the definitions of the council, if any difference arise about the meaning of them. So that if there be any difference about the true sense and meaning of any of the definitions of the council, particular pastors have no authority to explain them; and where there is no

SERMON. doubt or difference about the meaning of them, there
 LXXXIX is no occasion for the explication of them.

2. But suppose they had authority to explain them, this can be no infallible security to the people, that they explain them right; both because particular pastors are fallible; and likewise because we see in experience, that they differ in their explications; witness the bishop of Condom's exposition of the catholick faith, and of the definitions of the council of Trent, which in many material points very different from that of Bellarmine, and many other famous doctors of that church. And which is more, witness the many differences betwixt Ambrosius, Catharinus, and Dominicus Afoto, about the definitions of that council, in which they were both present, and heard the debates, and themselves bore a great part in them. Now if they who were present at the framing of the definitions of that Council, cannot agree about the meaning of them, much less can it be expected from those that were absent.

Secondly, this provision which I have mentioned, is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them, as any infallible church would be, if there were one: and this is another reason why an infallible church is so much insisted upon, that there may be some way and means for a final decision of controversies, which the scriptures cannot be, because they are only a dead rule, which can end no controversy without a living judge ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occasions.

It is not necessary that all controversies in religion
 should

should either be prevented, or decided : this the church which pretends to be infallible, cannot pretend to have done ; because there are manifold controversies, even in the church of Rome her self, concerning matters of religion, which still remain undecided ; and in their commentaries upon scripture, many differences about the sense of several texts, concerning which she hath not thought fit to give an infallible interpretation. And where their popes, and several of their general councils, have thought fit to meddle with scripture, they have applied and interpreted texts more improperly and absurdly, than even their private doctors. And which is more, in differences about points of faith, which are pretended on both sides to be fundamental, this church hath not thought fit to put an end to them by her infallible decision, after two hundred years brangling about them. For instance, in that fierce and long difference about the immaculate conception of the blessed virgin, which on both sides, is pretended to be an article of faith, and for which contrary revelations of their canoniz'd saints are so frequently pretended ; and yet neither pope, nor general council, have thought fit to exert their infallibility for the decision of this controversy. So that if their church had this talent of infallibility ever committed to them, they have, with “ the slothful servant, laid it up in a napkin ;” and, according to our SAVIOUR’S rule, have long since forfeited it, for not making use of it.

And whereas it is pretended, that the scripture is but a dead rule, which can end no controversies without a living judge ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occasions ; the same objection

objection lies against them, unless a general council, which is their living judge, were always sitting. For the definitions of their councils in writing are liable to the same, and greater objections, than the written rule of the scriptures.

The sum of all is this. In differences about lesser matters, mutual charity and forbearance will secure the peace of the church, tho' the differences remain undecided; and in greater matters, an infallible rule searched into with an honest mind, and due diligence, and with the help of good instruction, is more likely to extinguish and put an end to such differences, than any infallible judge, if there were one; because an humble and honest mind is more likely to yield to reason, than a perverse and cavilling temper is to submit to the sentence of an infallible judge, unless it were back'd with an inquisition. The church of Rome supposeth her self infallible, and yet notwithstanding that, she finds that some question and deny her infallibility, and then her sentence signifies nothing. And of those who own it, many dispute the sense and meaning of her sentence; and whether they deny the infallibility of her sentence, or dispute the sense of it, in neither of these cases will it prove effectual to the deciding of any difference.

But after all this provision which we pretend God hath made for honest and sincere minds, do we not see that men fall into dangerous and damnable errors, who yet cannot, without great uncharitableness, be supposed not to be sincerely desirous to know the truth, and to do the will of God?

To this I shall briefly return these two things.

1. That the same errors are not equally damnable

to all. The innocent and (humanely speaking) almost invincible prejudices of education in some persons even against a fundamental truth; the different capacities of men, and the different means of conviction afforded to them; the greater and lesser degrees of obstinacy, and a faulty will in opposing the truths proposed to them; all these, and perhaps several other considerations besides, may make a great difference in the guilt of mens errors, and the danger of them.

II. When all is done, the matter must be left to **God**, who only knoweth the hearts of the children of men. We cannot see into the hearts of men, nor know all their circumstances, and how they may have provoked **God** to forsake them, and give them up to error and delusion, “because they would not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved.” And as on the one hand **God** will consider all mens circumstances, and the disadvantages they were under for coming to the knowledge of the truth, and make allowance to men for their invincible errors, and forgive them upon a general repentance: so on the other hand, he who sees the insincerity of men, and that the errors of their understandings did proceed from gross faults of their lives, will deal with them accordingly. But if men be honest and sincere, **God**, who hath said, “if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,” will certainly be as good as his word.

It now remains only to draw some inferences from this discourse, and they shall be these three.

First, from this text, and what hath been discoursed upon it, we may infer how slender and ill-grounded the

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the pretence of the church of Rome to infallibility is; whether they place it in the pope, or in a general council, or in both. The last is the most general opinion; and yet it is hard to understand how infallibility can result from the pope's confirmation of a general council, when neither the council was infallible in framing its definitions, nor the pope in confirming them. If the council were infallible in framing them, then they needed no confirmation: if they were not, then infallibility is only in the pope that confirms them, and then it is the pope only that is infallible. But no man that reads these words of our SAVIOUR, "if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine," would ever imagine that the bishop of Rome (whoever he shall happen to be) were secured from all fatal errors in matters of faith, much less that he were endowed with an infallible spirit, in judging what doctrines are from GOD, and what not. For it cannot be denied, but that many of their popes have been notoriously wicked and vicious in their lives: nay Bellarmine himself acknowledgeth, that for a succession of fifty popes together, there was not one pious and virtuous man that sat in that chair; and some of their popes have been condemned and deposed for heresy; and yet for all this, the pope, and the governing part of the church, would bear the world in hand that he is infallible. But if this saying of our SAVIOUR be true, "that if any man will do his will, he shall know of his doctrine, whether it be of GOD;" then every honest man that sincerely desires to do the will of GOD, hath a fairer pretence to infallibility, and a clearer text for it, than is to be found in the whole bible for the infallibility

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bility of the bishop of Rome. What would the church of Rome give, that there were but as express a text of scripture for the infallibility of their popes, as this is for the security of every good man, in his judgment of doctrines; which makes infallibility needless? what an insufferable noise, and what endless triumphs would they make upon it, if it had been any where said in the bible, that if any man be bishop of Rome, and sit in St. Peter's chair, he shall know of my doctrine whether it be of God? Had there been but such a text as this, we should never have been troubled with their impertinent citation of texts, and their remote and blind inferences from *pasce oves*, and *super hanc petram*; "feed my sheep;" and "upon this rock will I build my church;" to prove the pope's infallibility. And yet no man of sense or reason ever extended the text I am speaking to, so far as to attempt to prove from it the infallibility of every good man; but only his security from fatal errors and mistakes in religion. The largest promises that are made in scripture of security from error and mistake about divine things, are made to good men, who sincerely desire to do the will of God. And if this be so, we must conclude several popes to have been the farthest from infallibility of any men in the world. And indeed there is not a more compendious way to persuade men that the christian religion is a fable, than to set up a lewd and vicious man for the oracle of it.

Nay, I will go farther yet; that there are no promises made in scripture, of direction or assistance, or security from mistake, to any church; but the same are made in as full and express terms to every good

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man that sincerely desires to know the truth, and to practise it. Is it promised to the church, or to the pastors of it, "I will be with you always?" and hath not our SAVIOUR promised the same to every one that is obedient to his word? John xiv. 23. "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my FATHER will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And does not the apostle apply the same promise to every good christian, Heb. xiii. 5. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" for where is the difference between these expressions? "I will be with you," and "I will make my abode with him?" "I will be with you always," and "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" Is it promised to the church, that the SPIRIT shall lead her into all truth? and is not the same promise made to every good man? John xiv. 21. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my FATHER; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him;" that is, GOD will reveal his will to those that love him, and keep his commandments. Hath GOD promised "to build his church upon a rock?" and doth not our SAVIOUR use the same metaphor concerning every man that doth the will of GOD? Matt. vii. 24. "whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, is like a wise man that built his house upon a rock." So that if to be built upon a rock signifies infallibility, it belongs to every good man, who sincerely practiseth what he knows, as much as to any church.

When men are enabled by GOD to work miracles for

for the confirmation of the doctrines which they deliver, there is great reason to believe that they are infallibly assisted in the delivery of those doctrines: but without this, 'tis the vainest thing in the world, for any person or church to pretend to it; because they offer no evidence fit to satisfy any man, that they are so assisted: and I do not hear that the pope, among all his privileges, does pretend to the power of miracles.!

Secondly, from hence likewise we may infer the great reason of error and infidelity in the world. If any man be an infidel, it is not the fault of his understanding, but of his will; it is not because there is not sufficient evidence that the christian religion is from GOD, but because mens interests and lusts make them partial and incompetent judges of matters of religion. The evidence of the christian religion is such, as recommends it to every man's reason and conscience; so that (as St. Paul argues) "if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the GOD of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them," 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

If men did but stand indifferent for the entertainment of truth, and were not swayed by the interest of any lust or passion, I am confident that no man that hath the gospel fairly proposed to him, would continue an infidel. If men did but truly live up to the principles of natural religion, they would easily be convinced, that the christian religion, which is so suitable thereto, is from GOD.

Thirdly, and lastly, what hath been said, is a great

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argument and encouragement to obedience, and holiness of life. Do we desire not to be mistaken about the mind of GOD? let us heartily endeavour to do his will. If we would not be seduced by the error of the wicked, let us take heed of their vicious practices. The best way certainly to preserve a right judgment in matters of religion, is to take great care of a good life. GOD's goodness is such, that he will not suffer any man's judgment to be betrayed into a damnable error, without some vice and fault of his will. The principles of natural religion are born with us, and imprinted upon our minds, so that no man can be ignorant of them, nor need to be mistaken about them; and as for those revelations which GOD hath made of himself to the world, he hath been pleased to accompany them with so much evidence, that an honest and sincere mind may easily discern them from error, and imposture. So our SAVIOUR hath assured us, "that if any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD."

On the other hand, if we see any oppose the clear truth, or depart from it, and embrace gross errors and delusions, we may almost certainly conclude, that there is some worldly interest or lust at the bottom of it. So our SAVIOUR has likewise told us, that the reason why "men love darkness rather than light, is, because their deeds are evil; and every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." I will conclude this whole discourse with St. Peter's exhortation, the 2d of Pet. iii. 17, 18. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest

“ left ye also being led away with the error of the
“ wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow
“ in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and
“ SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. To him be glory,
“ both now and for ever. Amen.”

S E R M O N X C.

The nature of covetousness.

L U K E xii. 15.

And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

AMong all the irregular appetites of men, there is none that is more common and unreasonable, and of a more universal bad influence upon the hearts and lives of men, than this of covetousness; and therefore in speaking of this vice, I shall strike at the root of a great many others; even of apostacy from God's truth and religion, of which covetousness, and the love of this present world, is one of the most common causes. So that if I can contribute any thing to the cure of this great distemper of mens minds, I shall in so doing remove that which is the cause and occasion of a great part of the evils and mischiefs which are in the world. And to this end I have pitched upon these words of our blessed SAVIOUR to his hearers; “ and he said unto
“ them, take heed and beware of covetousness; for
“ a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the
“ things which he possesseth.”

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In

In which words are these three things observable :

First, the manner of the caution which our SAVIOUR here gives, “ take heed and beware ;” he doubles it, to shew the great need and concernment of it.

Secondly, the matter of the caution, or the vice which our SAVIOUR here warns his hearers against, and that is covetousness, “ take heed and beware of “ covetousness.”

Thirdly, the reason of this caution, “ because a “ man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the “ things which he possesseth.” Humane life is sustain’d by a little, and therefore abundance is not necessary, either to the support, or comfort of it. ’Tis not a great estate and vast possessions that make a man happy in this world ; but a mind that is equal to its condition, whatever it be.

First, the manner of the caution which our SAVIOUR here gives, “ take heed and beware.” This is a peculiar kind of caution, and no where else, or upon any other occasion, that I know of, used in scripture ; in which, for the greater emphasis and weight, the words of caution are doubled, as if the matter were of so much concernment, that no caution about it could be too much ; to signify to us both the great danger of this sin of covetousness, and the great care men ought to use to preserve themselves from it.

I. The great danger of this sin ; how apt we are to fall into this vice, and of how pernicious a consequence it is to those in whom it reigns.

1. How apt we are to fall into this vice : and excepting those vices which are immediately founded

founded in a man's natural temper and constitution, there is none that men have a more universal propension to, than this of covetousness. For there are two things which humane nature does more especially desire to be secured against, which are want, and contempt: and riches seem to be a certain remedy against both these evils. And because men think they can never be sufficiently secured against these, therefore their desire of riches grows endless and insatiable; so that unless men be very jealous and watchful over themselves, this desire will grow upon them, and enlarge it self beyond all bounds.

2. As men are very apt to fall into this vice, so is it of very pernicious consequence to those in whom it reigns. The mischief of it is very great, and very extensive: So St. Paul tells us, 1 Tim. vi. 8, 9, 10. where he presseth men to be contented with a small competency of the things of this life, because of the great danger and mischief of a covetous mind; "having food and raiment, let us be therewith content, But they that will be rich (that is, they that are bent and resolved upon being rich) fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil." But this I shall speak more fully to, when I come to shew the great evil and unreasonableness of this vice.

II. This earnest kind of caution, as it signifies the great danger of this sin of covetousness, so likewise the great care that men ought to use to preserve themselves from it; for the greater the danger is in any kind, so much the greater care should be used for

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for the avoiding of it. Men are not so solicitously concerned to defend themselves against a slight mischief; but when a terrible one threatens us, we should be continually upon our guard against it, and summon all our strength and force to resist it. Thus much for the manner of the caution.

I proceed to the second thing to be consider'd in the text, viz. The matter of the caution, or the vice which our SAVIOUR here warns his hearers against, and that is covetousness; "take heed and beware of covetousness." And in speaking of this, I shall consider these two things.

I. Wherein the nature of this vice consists.

II. I shall endeavour to shew the great evil and unreasonableness of it. I shall be large in both.

I. For the nature of this vice of covetousness. The shortest description that I can give of it is this; "that it is an inordinate desire and love of riches;" but when this desire and love are inordinate, is not so easy to be determined. And therefore that we may the better understand what this sin of covetousness is, which our SAVIOUR doth so earnestly caution against, it will be requisite to consider more particularly wherein the vice and fault of it doth consist; that whilst we are speaking against covetousness, we may not under that general word condemn any thing that is commendable or lawful. To the end then that we may the more clearly and distinctly understand wherein the nature of this vice doth consist, I shall,

First, endeavour to shew what is not condemned under this name of covetousness, either in scripture, or according to right reason: And,

Secondly,

Secondly, what is condemned by either of these as a plain instance or branch of this sin.

First, what things are not condemned under the name of covetousness, either in scripture, or according to right reason, which yet have some appearance of it; namely, these three things.

1. Not a provident care about the things of this present life.

2. Not a regular industry and diligence for the obtaining of them: Nor

3. Every degree of love and affection to them. I mention these three, because they may all seem to be condemned by scripture, as parts or degrees of this vice, but really are not.

1. Not a provident care about the things of this present life. This indeed seems to be condemned in scripture as a branch of covetousness; namely, in our SAVIOUR'S sermon upon the mount, Mat. vi. 25. "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." Here our SAVIOUR seems to forbid all care, even about the necessaries of life, meat, and drink, and clothing; much more about the delights and conveniences of it. But this is not absolutely, and in ordinary cases, intended by our SAVIOUR to be condemned, as I shall shew by and by under the next head.

2. Neither is a regular industry and diligence for the obtaining of these things condemned in scripture; tho' this also seems to be prohibited by our SAVIOUR in the same chapter, ver. 26. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your hea-

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“venly FATHER feedeth them;” and ver. 28.
 “Why take ye thought for raiment? consider the
 “lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not,
 “neither do they spin.” In which words our SAVI-
 OUR seems to intimate, that we ought to depend
 upon the providence of GOD for food and raiment,
 and to use no more industry for the obtaining of
 them, than the fowls of the air do, or the lilies of
 the field: and the same may seem to be collected
 out of this chapter of St. Luke: for after our SAVI-
 OUR had in my text cautioned them against cove-
 tousness, and spoken to them a parable to that pur-
 pose, “of a rich man who enlarged his barns, and laid
 “up goods for many years,” He infers from thence,
 ver. 22, that men should take no thought for the
 things of this life, nor use any industry about them;
 “and he said unto his disciples, therefore I say unto
 “you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall
 “eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.”

Now to avoid all inconvenience from our SAVI-
 OUR’S words, I think that it is commonly said by
 interpreters, that he does here only condemn a dis-
 trustful and anxious care about the things of this life,
 and an over-solicitous industry and diligence for the
 obtaining of them; but that he allows a prudent
 care, and regular industry about these things: and
 this were very well said, if it would agree with the
 scope and design of our SAVIOUR’S discourse; but
 the instances which he gives of the fowls of the
 air, and the lilies of the field, which are sufficiently
 provided for without any care and industry of theirs,
 and which he seems to set before us for a pattern,
 “behold (says he) the fowls of the air.” I say, these
 instances,

instances, which he gives, seem to exclude even all regular and ordinary care and diligence about these things.

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What shall we say then, that our SAVIOUR intended by his religion to take men off from all labour and industry in their callings? this seems to be unreasonable; and indeed so it certainly were, if our SAVIOUR had given this for a standing and ordinary rule to all christians; and not only so, but contrary to the apostles doctrine, who constantly charged christians to labour with great diligence in their callings, that they might be able to provide for themselves and their families.

But this discourse of our SAVIOUR'S was not intended for a general and standing rule to all christians; but only designed for his disciples, to take them off from all care about the things of this life, that they might attend upon his person, and wholly give up themselves to that work to which he had called them. And therefore St. Luke takes notice, that after he had cautioned his hearers in general against covetousness, he applies himself particularly to his disciples, and tells them that he would have them so far from this vice of covetousness, that they should not so much as use that ordinary care and industry about the things of this life, which is not only lawful, but necessary for men in all ordinary cases, ver. 22. "And he said unto his disciples, therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat." And this agrees very well with the direction which our SAVIOUR gave to his disciples, when he first sent them forth to preach, Matt. x. 9. "Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses,

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fes, neither coat nor scrip;" which no man ever understood as a general law to all christians, but as a particular precept to the apostles at that time.

And if this be our SAVIOUR'S meaning, there is then no reason to think, that this caution against covetousness does forbid men to use a provident care and regular industry about the things of this life.

3. Nor is every degree of love and affection to the things of this world condemned in scripture, as any branch, or part of this vice of covetousness; but such a love of the things of this world as is truly consistent with the love of GOD, and a due and a serious care of our souls, is allowed both by scripture and reason. St. John indeed seems to condemn all love of the world, and of the things of it, as utterly inconsistent with the love of GOD, 1 John ii. 15. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the FATHER is not in him:" But this is according to the hebrew phrase and manner of speaking, to forbid things absolutely, which are to be understood only comparatively. So Matt. vi. 19. "Lay not up for you treasures upon earth; but lay up for you treasures in heaven;" i. e. be not so felicitous for the good things of this world, as for the glory and happiness of the next. And Luke xii. 4. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body;" that is, fear them not so much as "him that can destroy both body and soul in hell:" and Luke xiv. 26. "If any man come unto me, and hate not his father and mother, and all that he hath;" that is, if he do not love me more than all these things, "he cannot be my disciple:" and John vi. 27. La-

"bour

“ labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for ^{S E R M} that which endureth to everlasting life;” that is, ^{X C.} labour not so much for the one as for the other, be not so solicitous about the things of this life, as about the great concernments of eternity. So likewise Coloss. iii. 2. “ Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth;” i. e. set them more on things above, than on earthly things. So here, “ love not the world, neither the things of the world;” that is, do not over-value them, do not love them so much as not to be able to part with them for CHRIST; for if any man thus love the world, he does not love GOD as he ought. So that when the scripture commands us not to love the world, this is to be understood comparatively, that we should not love these things in comparison of GOD, and the great concernments of another world: but it does not forbid us to love these things in a due degree, and with a due subordination to those things which are more excellent, and of infinitely greater concernment to us. For nothing can be more inconsistent than to recommend to men diligence in their callings and employments (as the scripture frequently does) and that in order to the attaining of the good things of this life; and yet to forbid us to love these things at all. For if men have no degree of love to them, the best argument to diligence for the obtaining of them would be taken away. Besides that we are commanded in scripture to be thankful to GOD for bestowing on us the blessings of this life, and we are to love him upon this account. Now can any man love the giver, for bestowing such gifts upon him, which, if he do as he ought, he must not love?

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You see then what those things are, which the scripture does not condemn as any branch or degree of this vice of covetousness; a provident care, and a regular industry, and such a degree of love to the things of this world, as is consistent with the love of God, and the care of our souls.

Secondly, I come now to shew what is condemned in scripture under the name of covetousness; and by this we shall best understand wherein the nature of this sin doth consist. Now covetousness is a word of a large signification, and comprehends in it most of the irregularities of mens minds, either in desiring or getting, or in possessing, and using an estate. I shall speak to each of these severally.

I. Covetousness in the desire of riches, consists in an eager and unsatiabable desire after the things of this world. This the scripture condemns, tho' it be free from injustice, as it seldom happens to be. This insatiabable desire of wealth, God plainly condemns by his prophet, Isa. v. 8. "Wo unto them that join house
 " to house, and lay field to field, till there be no
 " place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of
 " the earth." And this is that which our SAVIOUR here in the text seems to have a more particular respect to, when he cautions men against the sin of covetousness, as appears both from the reason which he gives of this caution, and from the parable whereby he illustrates it. From the reason which he gives of this caution, "take heed and beware of covetousness;
 " for the life of man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." As if he had said, take great care to set some bounds to your desires after the things of this world. For whatever
 men

men may imagine, it is certain in experience, that it is not the abundance of outward things which makes the life of man happy. Wealth and content do not always dwell together; nay so far from that, that perhaps they very seldom meet.

And the parable likewise which follows upon this caution, doth sufficiently shew this to be our SAVIOUR'S meaning; for he illustrates what he was speaking of, by a rich man whose desire of wealth was never satisfied, but he was continually increasing his estate, and enlarging his barns, to make more room still for his fruits, that he might "lay up goods in store for many years." The parable does not so much as intimate any indirect or unjust ways of gain, which this man used to increase his estate; but condemns his insatiable desire and thirst after more; so that even this alone is covetousness, and a great fault, tho' it were attended with no other; because it is unreasonable, and without end.

II. There is covetousness likewise in getting an estate; and the vice or evil of this kind of covetousness consists chiefly in these three things.

I. In the use of unlawful and unjust ways to get or increase an estate. He is a covetous man, who by the greediness of gain, is tempted to do any unjust action, whether it be in the way of fraud and deceit, or of violence and oppression. And this perhaps is that which is most frequently in scripture called covetousness. [And this I take to be the meaning of the tenth commandment, "thou shalt not covet;" wherein is forbidden all unjust desire of that which is another man's, and all unjust endeavours and attempts to deprive him of it. For so our SAVIOUR renders it, Mark x. 19. where

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where he says to the young man that came to be directed by him, “ what good thing he should do that he might inherit eternal life ; thou knowest the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness ;” and then instead of the tenth commandment, “ thou shalt not covet,” or rather by way of explication of it, he adds “ *μὴ ἀποσπέρῃσης*, defraud not ;” as if he had said in a word, be not injurious to thy neighbour in any kind, in desiring or endeavouring to deprive him of any thing that is his. As the Romans in their laws were wont to comprehend those crimes which had no proper name, by the general name of *stellionatus* and *dolus malus* ; so here in the decalogue, after that GOD had instanced in the chief and most common sorts of injuries which men are guilty of towards their neighbour, as “ murder, adultery, theft, bearing of false witness ;” he sums up all the rest, which could not so easily be reckoned particularly in this short and general prohibition, “ thou shalt not covet ;” that is, thou shalt not be injurious to thy neighbour in any other kind ; “ in his wife, or servant, or house, or cattle, or any thing that is his.” Covetousness, or any inordinate desire of that which is our neighbour’s, being commonly the root and parent of all those kinds of injuries.

And for the same reason St. Matthew, instead of the tenth commandment, puts this general precept, “ thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self,” as being the sense of it in other words ; Matt. xix. 18, 19. “ Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother, “ and

“ and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.” S E R M. XC.
 And this command of loving our neighbour as our selves, our SAVIOUR elsewhere tells us was the sum of the duties of the second table; and it is the same in sense with that precept of our SAVIOUR, Matt. vii. 12. “ Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.” That is, as thou wouldest have no man to be injurious to thee in any thing, so be not thou to any other man in any kind. And the apostle, Rom. xiii. 8, 9, 10. shews us upon what account this general precept, “ thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self,” is the sum of the second table. “ He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law; for this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.” And then he adds in the next words, “ love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” That is, he that truly loves his neighbour, will not be injurious to him in any kind: “ therefore love is the sum of the law.”

The design of all this is to shew that he that is injurious to his neighbour in his estate in any kind, is properly guilty of the sin of covetousness, which is forbidden in the tenth commandment. So that all arts of fraud and oppression, whereby men endeavour to get and increase an estate by the injury of their neighbour, is a branch of the sin of covetousness.

2. The vice of covetousness in getting wealth, does likewise consist in an anxious and tormenting care

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about obtaining the things of this life. The regular and due temper of a man's mind about the things of this world, is to commit ourselves to the providence of God in the use of honest and lawful endeavours, and to refer the success of all to his good pleasure; and whatsoever is beyond this, is a branch from the evil root of covetousness. We distrust the providence of God, when after we have used our best endeavours, and begged his blessing upon them, we torment ourselves about the issue and event of things. And as this is sinful, so it is vain, and to no purpose. Diligence in our business is the way to get an estate; but no man was ever the richer for tormenting himself, because he is not so. The reason why men seek the things of this world, and take pains to get them, is to make life convenient and comfortable; and consequently he that torments himself about the getting of these things, contradicts himself in his own design, because he makes his life miserable, that he may make it comfortable.

3. The sin of covetousness in getting, consists in seeking the things of this life, with the neglect of things infinitely better, and which are of far greater and nearer concernment to us. He is a covetous man, who so minds the world, as to neglect God, and his soul; who is so busy and intent upon making provision for this life, as to take no care of the other; so concerned for a few days of his pilgrimage here, as to have no consideration and regard for his eternal abode in another world. God allows us to provide for this life, and considers the necessities which do continually press us while we are in the body: but while we are making provision for these dying bodies, he expects that

that we should remember we have immortal souls S E R M.
X C. which since they are to have an endless duration in another world, ought to be provided for with far greater care. 'Tis an inordinate desire of riches, when men so lay out all their care and industry for the obtaining of them, as if nothing else were to be regarded, as if no consideration at all were to be had of another world, and of that better part of ourselves which is to continue and live for ever. All desires and endeavours after riches, which take men off from the business of religion, and the care of their souls, which allow men neither the leisure and opportunity, nor the heart and affection to love GOD, and to serve him, are to be referred to this sin of covetousness, which is here condemned by our SAVIOUR in the text.

III. There is covetousness likewise in possessing or using an estate : and this consists chiefly in these three things.

First, when men are fordid towards themselves, and cannot find in their hearts to use and enjoy what they possess ; are continually adding to their estate, without any design of enjoyment ; and take infinite pains to raise a huge fortune, not that they may use it, but that they may be said to have it. This is a degree of covetousness even beyond that of the rich man in the parable after the text : for he, it seems, after he had " enlarged his barns " to his mind, and " laid up goods for many years " designed at last to have " taken his ease," and have fallen to the enjoyment of what he had gotten ; " to have eat and drank, and to have been merry ;" and this, tho' it proved but a foolish design in the issue, he being cut off in that very instant when he

SERM. was come to the point of satisfaction and enjoyment ;
 XC. } yet is it infinitely more reasonable, than to take great
 pains to get an estate, with a full resolution never to
 be the better for it.

Secondly, men are covetous in keeping an estate, when they do not use it charitably, when they cannot find in their hearts to spare any thing out of their abundance, to the relief of those who are in want. Tho' a man get an estate without covetousness, and have an heart to enjoy it, yet so far he is covetous, as he is uncharitable. He loves money more than he ought, who having enough to spare, chooseth rather to keep it, than to do good with it, and to use it to one of the principal ends for which God gives an estate.

Thirdly, they likewise are covetous, who place their chief trust and happiness in riches, who (as the expression is, Job xxxi. 24.) "make gold their hope, and say to the fine gold, thou art my confidence." And this is the reason why covetousness is so often in scripture called idolatry ; because the covetous man sets up his riches in the place of God, putting his trust and confidence in them, and setting his whole heart upon them, loving them as he should love God only, "with all his heart, and soul, and strength:" and therefore mammon, which signifies riches, is in scripture represented as a deity, and the covetous man, as a servant, or worshipper of mammon.

So that in scripture he is a covetous man who placeth his chief felicity in a great fortune, and will venture to lose any thing, rather than to part with that ; who will quit his religion, and violate his conscience,

science, and run the hazard of his soul, rather than
forfeit his estate, or the hopes of advancing it to his
mind.

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And this in times of trial and difficulty, is the great temptation to which the covetous man is exposed. When a man may not only save himself, but get considerable advantage by departing from the truth; and in changing his religion, may have a good sum of money to boot, or which is equal to it, a good place; this to a covetous mind is a very strong temptation, and almost irresistible. When error and delusion can bid so high, and offer so good terms, no wonder if it gain some profelytes among the covetous and ambitious part of mankind. This the apostle gives warning of, as a great temptation to rich men in times of suffering, 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. "They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare: for the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have lusted after, they have erred from the faith." The young man in the gospel is a sad instance of this kind, who chose rather to leave CHRIST, than to part with his great possessions. And such a one was Demas, who forsook the apostles, and christianity it self, to cleave to this present world.

Thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to, the nature of this vice, which our SAVIOUR in the text cautions men so earnestly against; "take heed and beware of covetousness." I shall now proceed in the second place to shew the evil and unreasonableness of this vice. But that shall be the subject of another discourse.

S E R M O N XCI.

The evil and unreasonableness of covetousness.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

SERM.
XCI.

The second sermon on this text.

I Have made entrance into a discourse upon these words, in which I have told you there are three things observable:

First, the manner of the caution which our SAVIOUR here gives, “take heed and beware.”

Secondly, the matter of the caution, or the sin which our SAVIOUR here warns his hearers against, “take heed and beware of covetousness”: and

Thirdly, the reason of this caution, because “a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

In discoursing of the second of these, viz. the matter of the caution, I proposed,

1. To consider wherein the nature of this vice of covetousness does consist.

2. To shew the evil and unreasonableness of it.

The first of these I have dispatched, and now go on to the second, viz. to shew the great evil and unreasonableness of the vice of covetousness.

Now covetousness will appear to be very evil and unreasonable, upon these following accounts.

I. Because it takes men off from religion, and the care of their souls. II. Because

II. Because it tempts men to do many things which are inconsistent with religion, and directly contrary to it. SERM.
XCI.

III. Because it is an endless and insatiable desire.

IV. Because the happiness of human life doth not consist in riches.

V. Because riches do very often contribute very much to the misery and infelicity of men.

First, covetousness takes men off from religion, and the care of their souls. The covetous man is wholly intent upon this world; and his inordinate desire after these things, makes him to neglect God, and the eternal concerns of his soul. He employs all his time, and care, and thoughts about these temporal things, and his vehement love and eager pursuit of these things steals away his heart from God, robs him of his time, and of all opportunities for his soul, and diverts him from all serious thoughts of another world, and the life to come. And the reason of this is that which our SAVIOUR gives, Matt. vi. 24. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God, and mammon." No man can serve two masters so different as God and the world are; because they will give cross commands, and enjoin contrary things. God calls upon us to mind the duties of his worship and service, to have a serious regard to religion, and a diligent care of our souls: but the cares of the world, and the importunity of business, and an eager appetite of being rich, call us off from these divine and spiritual employments, or disturb us in them. God calls upon us to be charitable to those that are in want, to be willing to distribute, and ready to commu-

communicate to the necessities of our brethren: but our covetousness pulls us back, and hales us another way, and checks all merciful and charitable inclinations in us. GOD calls us to self-denial, and suffering for the sake of him, and his truth, and commands us to prefer the keeping of faith and a good conscience, to all worldly considerations whatsoever: but the world inspires us with other thoughts, and whispers to us “to save our selves, not to be righteous over much,” and rather to trust GOD with our souls, than men with our bodies and estates.

If we set our hearts and affections strongly upon any thing, they will partake of the object which they are conversant about; for “where our treasure is (as our LORD hath told us) there will our hearts be also.” If a great estate be our chief end and design, if riches be our treasure and our happiness, our hearts will be found among the stuff. We cannot bestow our affections freely upon two objects. We cannot intensely love GOD, and the world; for no man can have two ultimate ends, two principal designs. Our riches may increase; but if we set our hearts upon them, and give them the chief place in our affections, we make them our lord and master. Whatever we make our ultimate end, we give it a sovereignty and empire over us; we put our selves under its dominion, and make our selves subject to all its commands. So that if “it bid us go, we must go; come, we must come; do this, we must do it; because we are under authority:” The world is our master, and we are its slaves. Now he that is under the rule and dominion of this master, must withdraw his obedience from GOD, and in many cases decline obedience to his laws.

This worldly covetous disposition was that which made those in the parable to make so many excuses, when they were invited to the supper, Luke xiv. 18. "One had bought a farm, and he could not come: another had bought so many yoke of oxen, and therefore he desired to be excused." Riches do so fill the covetous man's heart, and the cares of the world so possess his mind, that he hath no room left in his soul for any other guests: *Intus existens prohibet alienum*, "that which is full already can receive no more." The covetous man's heart is taken up with such things as keep out GOD and CHRIST, and better things. "If any man love the world, and the things of it" to this degree, St. John tells us "that the love of the FATHER is not in him." In the parable of the sower, Mat. xiii. 7. Our SAVIOUR represents to us "the cares of the world, which choke the word of GOD, by thorns which sprung up among the seed, and stifled the growth of it." The cares of the world will not suffer the word of GOD "to take deep root in our hearts," and to have any permanent effect upon them: and, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. GOD gives this as a reason why the people of Israel would not hearken to the words of his prophet, because their hearts were upon the world. "They come unto thee (says GOD there to the prophet) as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." A heart that is deeply engaged in the world, will stand out against all the invitations, and promises, and threatnings of GOD's

word. When the word of GOD invites such persons, it is like making love to those who have already fix'd their hearts and affections elsewhere; the promises and threatnings of the gospel signify but very little to such men, because their hearts are set upon worldly things, and all their affections are bent that way; all their hopes and desires are worldly; to be rich, and abound in wealth; and all their fears are of poverty and loss. Now such a man can only be moved with the promises and threatnings of temporal things; for no promises have any effect upon us, but such as are of some good, which we care for and value: nor are any threatnings apt to move us, but such as are of some evil which we dread, and are afraid of. And therefore when eternal life, and the happiness of another world, are offered to a worldly-minded man, he does not desire it, he is not at all sensible of the value of it; the man's heart is full already of other hopes and desires, and "the full soul loatheth the honey-comb." Promise to such a man the kingdom of heaven, and the pleasures of God's presence, and the joys of eternity, this does not signify to such a man any good or happiness that he is sensible of, or knows how to relish. And on the other hand, threaten him with the loss of GOD, and eternal separation from that fountain of happiness, and with the unspeakable anguish and torments of a long eternity; these things, tho' they be terrible, yet they are at a distance, and the covetous man is inured to sense, and is only to be moved with things present and sensible; he cannot extend his fears so far as another world, so long as he finds himself well and at ease, as to the things of this present life.

If we would affect such a man, we must offer to his consideration something that is fit to work upon him; threaten him with breaking open his house, and rifling his coffers, and carrying away his full bags; with questioning his title to his estate, or starting a precedent mortgage, or something of the like nature: these things indeed are dreadful and terrible to him; now you speak intelligibly to him, and he understands what you mean: tell him of a good bargain, or an advantageous purchase, offer him decently a good bribe, or give him notice of a young heir that may be circumvented, and drawn in, then you say something to him that is worthy of his regard and attention; the man may be tempted by such offers and promises as these: but discourse to him with the tongue of men and angels, of the excellency of virtue and goodness, and of the necessity of it, to the obtaining of a glory and happiness that shall neither have bounds nor end; “and lo! thou art unto him as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument; for he hears thy words, but he will not do them;” as the prophet expresseth it, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. Such discourses as these they look upon as fine talk, or a melodious sound, that vanisheth into air, but leaves no impression behind it. Perhaps even these dull and stupid kind of men are affected a little for the present with the liveliness of the romance, and the poetical vein of the preacher; but these things pass away like a tale that is told, but have no lasting effect upon them. So effectually doth covetousness, and the love of this present world, obstruct all those passages, through which the con-

sideration of religion and heavenly things should enter into our minds.

Secondly, as covetousness hinders men from religion, and takes them off from a due care of their souls; so it many times tempts and engageth men to do many things contrary to religion, and inconsistent with it: it is the natural source and fountain of a great many evils, and the parent of most of the worst of vices. He that will engage deep in the world, must use much more guard and caution than most men do, to do it without sin. How many temptations is the covetous man exposed to in the getting and in the securing, and in the spending and enjoying of a great estate? It is no easy task to reckon them up, and much more difficult to escape or resist them; and yet each of these temptations brings him into the danger of a great many sins. For,

I. In the getting of an estate, he is exposed to all those vices which may seem to be serviceable in this design. Nothing hath been the cause of more and greater sins in the world, than covetousness, and making haste to be rich. It is Solomon's observation, Prov. xxviii. 20. "He that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent." He does not say he cannot be innocent, but he speaks as if there were all the probability in the world that he will not prove to be so; but being so much in haste, will almost unavoidably fall into a great many oversights and faults. And the heathen poet makes the same observation in more words.

*Inde ferè scelerum cause, nec plura venena
Miserit, aut ferro grassatur sæpius ullum.*

Humanæ

The evil and unreasonableness of covetousness.

1457

S E R M.

XCI.



Humanæ mentis vitium, quam sæva cupido

Immodici censûs: nam dives qui fieri vult,

Et citò vult fieri; sed quæ reverentia legum,

Quis metus aut pudor est unquam properantis avari ?

“ This, says he, is the cause of most sins: nor is
“ there any vice of which the mind of man is ca-
“ pable, that hath been guilty of more murders
“ and poisonings, than a furious desire of immode-
“ rate wealth; for he that will be rich, will make
“ haste to be so: and what reverence of laws, what
“ fear of shame was ever seen in any man that was
“ in haste to be rich?” And this is the sense of
what the apostle says concerning this vice of cove-
tousness, this peremptory resolution of being rich,
1 Tim. vi. 9, 10, “ They that will be rich, fall in-
“ to temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish
“ and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruc-
“ tion and perdition. For the love of money is the
“ root of all evil.” If this vice of covetousness once
reigns in us, if we once have fix’d our end, and set
up this resolution with ourselves, that we will be
rich, we shall then make every thing stoop and sub-
mit to this design. A covetous man will make his
principles and his conscience to bend to his resolu-
tion of being rich, and to bow to that interest.
The eager desire of riches makes men to pursue
them in indirect and uncharitable ways, by falshood
and perjury, by undermining and over-reaching, by
dissembling and flattery, by corrupting and imba-
sing of commodities, by false weights and measures,
by taking fees with both hands, and making use of
their power and wit to oppress and defraud their
brother, by imposing upon his ignorance and sim-
plicity,

SREM. plicity, or by making a prey of his poverty and
 XCI. necessity.

Covetousness many times makes men cruel and unjust; nay, it makes them guilty of the worst sort of cruelty and oppression. For (as one says well) the covetous man oppresseth his neighbour, not for any good to himself; for he does not enjoy what he tears and rends from others; so that he is of that most hateful kind of beasts of prey, that kill other creatures, not to eat them, but that they may see them lie dead by them. Lions and wolves kill out of hunger; but the covetous man, like a serpent or scorpion, stings and bites others to death, not for his need, but for his pleasure and recreation. Covetousness is the parent of the most monstrous sins; because it fixeth a man in a resolution of getting an estate by any means. If falseness and deceit, violence and oppression will further this end; the earnest desire of the end tempts men to use any sort of means whereby the end may be compassed; and tho' a man may have some averfeness from them at first, yet that wears off by degrees, and the strong desire of the end, reconciles a man at last to the love and liking of the means, how wicked and unwarrantable soever. Covetousness tempted Achan to steal the accursed thing, and Gehazi to lye to the prophet, and Ahab to oppress and murder Naboth. Nay, a small sum tempted the covetous mind of Judas to betray his master, and his SAVIOUR. And how do many men every day strain their consciences to get an estate, and hazard their own souls for money; nay exchange their souls, which are of more value than the whole world, for a very small portion of it?

II. There

II. There are likewise many other temptations which a covetous man is exposed to in the keeping and securing of an estate, when he hath got it. A covetous and worldly-minded man, when it comes to the trial, is in great danger of quitting his religion, and “making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.” When his estate comes to be in hazard, he is very apt to fall off from the truth; ’tis an hundred to one but in these circumstances, he will choose rather to violate his conscience, than to forfeit his estate. What the devil falsely said of Job, is true of the covetous man, “he does not serve God for nought.” Upon these terms it was, that CHRIST and the young man parted; “he had great possessions,” and it troubled him to part with them. When Demas was brought to the trial, and put to it, whether he would stick to the profession of the gospel, or his worldly possessions, he quitted St. Paul, and declared for the world, 2 Tim. iv. 10. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this “present world.” So far has his covetous humour befotted, him as to make him prefer his present interest in these temporal things, before those eternal rewards which the gospel offered.

III. There are likewise many temptations which men are exposed to in the enjoying and spending of a great estate. It is hard to have a great estate, and not to be mastered by the love of it; nor to have our cares and thoughts, our hearts and affections swallowed up by of it. ’Tis no easy thing for a man that hath riches, not to overvalue them, and love them more than he ought; not to be puffed up by them, and so place his trust and confidence in them, Prov. xviii. 11. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city,
“ and

SERM.
XCI.

“ and as an high wall in his own conceit.” The covetous man setteth up his riches in the place of God, and is apt “ to fall down before this golden calf, “ and worship it : to say to the gold, thou art my “ hope, and to the fine gold, thou art my confidence : “ to rejoice, because his wealth is great, and because “ his hand hath gotten much.”

Riches are a great temptation to irreligion and atheism. Upon this account Agur wisely prays to God for a moderate estate, because of the danger of both the extremes of riches and poverty ; because of the great and violent temptations which men are exposed to in both these conditions, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. “ Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me “ with food convenient for me.” Why not riches ? “ lest I be full and deny thee, and say who is the “ LORD ?” And much more do riches tempt men to pride and insolence towards others, Prov. xviii. 23. “ The poor useth intreaties, but the rich answereth “ roughly.” Mens spirits are commonly blown up and bloated with their fortunes, and their pride, and stomach, and passion, do usually increase in proportion to their wealth.

And many times riches tempt men to luxury and intemperance, and all manner of excess. Rich men have a mighty temptation to allow themselves all manner of unlawful pleasures ; because he who hath a great estate, is furnished with that to which hardly any thing can be denied. And this is not inconsistent with a covetous humour ; for there are many times, men who are covetous in getting, for no other end and reason, but that they may “ spend it upon their lusts.” As covetousness sometimes starves other vices, so some-

times

times it serves them, and is made subordinate to a man's ambition, or lust, or some other reigning vice. SERM.
XCI.

There is no such absolute inconsistency between riches and virtue, but that it is possible that a man that is very rich may be very good. But yet if we consult experience, I doubt it will be found a true observation, that there are but very few rich men, who are not insupportable either for their vanity or their vices; so that our SAVIOUR had reason for that severe question, "how hard is it for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of GOD?" and well might he upon this account pronounce the poor, (the poor in estate, as well as the poor in spirit) blessed, as we find he does, Luke vi. 20. "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of GOD." They oftener enter there than the rich.

Thirdly, covetousness is likewise evil and unreasonable, because it is an endless and insatiable desire. A covetous mind may propose to itself some certain bounds and limits, and a man may think that when he is arrived to such an estate, and hath raised his fortune to such a pitch, that he will then sit down contented and satisfied, and will seek after no more. But he deceives himself in this matter; for when he hath attained to that which he proposed to himself, he will be never the nearer being satisfied. So Solomon tells us, Eccles. v. 10. "He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase;" for no degree of wealth can satisfy a covetous mind. He may think so beforehand, that if he had so much it would be enough; but when he hath attain'd it, he will be still reaching after more; for covetousness is a disease of the

mind, and an unnatural thirst, which is inflamed by that which should quench it. Every desire that is natural, is satisfied and at rest, when it hath once obtained the thing it desired. If a man be hungry, he is satisfied when he hath eaten; or if he be thirsty, the thirst is allay'd and quenched when he hath drank to such a proportion as nature doth require; and if he eat and drink beyond this measure, nature is oppressed, and it is a burden to him. But covetousness is not the thirst of nature, but of a diseased mind. It is the thirst of a fever, or of a dropsy; the more a man drinks, the more he desires, and the more he is inflamed. In like manner, the more the covetous man increaseth his estate; the more his desires are enlarged and extended, and he finds continually new occasions and new necessities; and every day as he grows richer, he discovers new wants; and a new poverty to be provided against, which he did not think of before, comes into his mind: *Et minus hæc optat, qui non habet*; “and he that is without these things, covets them less than he that hath them.” So far is a covetous man’s attaining to riches from giving him satisfaction, that he who hath scarce any thing at all, is many times much nearer to contentment, than he that hath got so much; nay so unreasonable is this appetite, as to desire more, even when the man knows not how to bestow what he hath already. This Solomon observed long since (for the vices and humours of men are much the same in all ages) Eccles. iv. 8. “There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet there is no end of all his labour, neither is his eye satisfied with riches, neither saith he, for whom do I labour

“bour, and bereave my soul of good? This also is
“vanity, yea it is a fore travel.” And indeed what SERM.
XCI.
can be greater vanity and folly, than to be at certain pains and labour all the days of a man’s life, and yet to be uncertain all the while, for whom it is that he drudgeth, and taketh all these pains.

And if this be the nature of this vice, the more it gets, still to covet the more; then nothing can be more unreasonable, than to think to gratify this appetite, because at this rate, the man can never be contented, because he can never have enough; nay, so far is it from that, that every new accession to his fortune, sets his desires one degree farther from rest and satisfaction: for a covetous mind having no bounds, it is very probable that the man’s desire will increase much faster than his estate; and then the richer he is, he is still the poorer, because he is still the less contented with his condition. However it is impossible that the man’s desire should ever be satisfied; for desire being always first, if the man’s desire of riches advanceth and goes forward as fast as riches follow, then it is not possible for riches ever to overtake the desire of them, no more than the hinder wheels of a coach can overtake those which are before: because as they were at a distance at first setting out, so let them go never so far, or so fast, they keep the same distance still.

So that it is the vaineſt thing in the world, for a man to design his own satisfaction by the perpetual increase of his fortune, because contentment doth not arise from the abundance of what a man hath, but it must spring from the inward frame and temper of our minds; and the true way to it, is not to enlarge

our estate, but to contract our desires; and then it is possible that a man's money and his mind may meet; otherwise the pursuit is endless, and the farther a man follows contentment, it will but flee so much the farther from him; and when he hath attained the estate of a prince, and a revenue as great as that of France, or the Turkish empire, he shall be farther from being satisfied, than when he began the world, and had no more beforehand than would just pay for his next meal.

I should now have proceeded to the fourth thing, whereby the unreasonableness of covetousness doth appear; because the happiness of human life doth not consist in riches. And this is the argument which I shall more especially insist upon, because it is that which our SAVIOUR useth here in the text, to take men off from this vice. "The life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." And this certainly is one of the best and most reasonable considerations in the world, to moderate mens affections towards these things. Every reasonable desire propounds some end to itself. Now to what purpose should any man desire to increase his wealth so vastly beyond the proportion of his necessities and real occasions? What benefit and advantage would it be to any man, to have a hundred times more than he knows what to do withal? But I shall not enlarge upon this argument at present, but refer it to another opportunity.

S E R M O N X C I I .

The evil and unreasonableness of
covetousness.

L U K E xii. 15.

And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

AFTER I had, in my first discourse upon S E R M .
X C I I . this subject, given you an account of the nature of the vice of covetousness, I proceeded in the next place to represent the great evil and unreasonableness of it. The third sermon on this text.

First, because it takes men off from religion, and the care of their souls.

Secondly, because it tempts men to many things which are inconsistent with religion, and directly contrary to it.

Thirdly, because it is an endless and insatiable desire. Thus far I have gone; I proceed to the

Fourth thing, whereby the unreasonableness of covetousness will yet further appear. Namely, because the happiness of humane life doth not consist in riches, and abundance. And this I shall insist upon somewhat the more largely, because it is the argument which our SAVIOUR makes use of here in the text, to take men off from this sin. “ The life of man consisteth not “ in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. “ there-

SERM. " therefore take heed, and beware of covetousness."

XCI.

And this certainly is one of the best and most reasonable considerations in the world, to moderate our affections towards these things. For every reasonable desire propounds some end to it self. Now to what purpose should any man desire to increase his wealth so vastly, and beyond the proportion of his necessities and real occasions? what benefit and advantage could it be to any man, to have an hundred, or perhaps a thousand times more than he knows what to do withal.

And as for the other world, no man ever pretended that the heaping up riches here, would be useful to him there; " riches will not deliver him in the " day of wrath." No man was ever so senseless, as to imagine that he could take his estate along with him into the other world; or if he could, that heaven was to be bought with money; or that a great estate, or a great many lordships would recommend him to the favour of GOD. 'Tis true indeed, a man may so use riches in this world, as thereby to promote and further his happiness in the next. But then it is likewise as true, that a man may so demean himself in a poor and low condition, as thereby to render himself as acceptable to GOD, and capable of as great a reward, as the richest man can do. The poor woman's two mites, chearfully given to pious and charitable uses, will go as far in the other world, and find as great a reward there, as the rich man's thousands of gold and silver. And a man may be as truly generous and charitable out of a little, as out of the greatest fortune. Besides that the poor man's contentedness in a mean condition, is more admirable in it self, and more valuable with GOD, than for a rich man to be so.

So

So that the great use of riches respects this world, and the best use of them is in ways of charity; and the poor man's charity, tho' it cannot be of so great an extent in the effects of it, yet in the degree of its virtue and merit it may be equal to it. SERM.
XCII.

Now the two great designs of men, in regard to this world, are these.

1. To maintain and support our lives as long as we can.

2. To make our lives as truly happy and comfortable as we can.

To the first of these ends, namely, the support of our lives, a very little will suffice; and 'tis not much that is necessary to the other, to render our lives as truly comfortable as this world can make them; so that a vast estate is not necessary to either of these ends; for a man may live by having what is necessary, and may live comfortably by having that which is convenient.

No man lives the longer by having abundance; it is many times an occasion of shortning a man's life, by ministring to excess and intemperance; but seldom of prolonging it. And setting aside the vain fancy and conceit of men, no man lives the more happily, for having more than he hath real use and occasion for.

These two heads I shall at present speak to, to make out the full force of this reason, which our SAVIOUR here useth; namely, "that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

I. That riches do not contribute to the support of our lives; nor

II. To the happiness and comfort of them. That is,

is, they are not necessary to either of these ends. For by riches I mean, whatever is beyond a sufficient competency of those things, which are requisite to the real uses and occasions of humane life.

First, riches and abundance do not contribute to the support of our lives. And this our SAVIOUR very well represents to us in the parable immediately after the text, of the rich man, who was continually increasing his estate, so that “ he had goods laid up for “ many years ;” but he lived not one jot the longer, for being provided of the conveniencies of life for so long a time beforehand ; for whilst he was blessing himself, as if he had secured his happiness sufficiently for this World, he was uncertain of his continuance in it ; GOD having decreed to take him out of this world, at that very time when he had determin’d to enter upon the enjoyment of those things, which he had been so long laying up. GOD says to him, “ thou “ fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee ; “ and then whose shall those things be which thou “ hast provided ?” that is, what good then will all these things do thee, when thou hast no further use of and occasion for them ? so that if he had been the poorest man in the world, and had not been provided for the next meal, he might have lived as long as he did with all his stores. You see that in this sense, “ a “ man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the “ things which he possesseth.” For notwithstanding all his great barns, and the abundance of fruits he had stowed in them, he did not live one jot the longer, than the poorest man might have done.

Secondly, nor do riches contribute to the happiness and comfort of our lives. Happiness is not to be bought

bought and purchas'd together with great lordships; S E R M. XCII.
it depends upon a great many causes, among which a competency of the things of this world is one; but riches and abundance is none of them. The happiness of this world consists in these two things.

1. In the enjoyment of good. And,
2. In a state of freedom from evil.

Now riches do not necessarily make a man happy in either of these respects.

First, for the enjoyment of good, a competent estate suitable to the condition and station in which God hath set us in this world, will give a man whatever nature and reason can desire; and abundance cannot make a man happier. If a man had an hundred times more than he needed, he could but enjoy it according to the capacity of a man; for if he consulted his own happiness, and would truly enjoy what he hath, he must eat and drink within the bounds of temperance and health, and must wear no more clothes than are for his convenience. 'Tis true, he hath wherewithal to put on a new suit every day; which is to be uneasy all the days of his life; and may drink, if he pleases, every time out of a new cup; which would be a vain expence, and a great trouble to his servants, without any manner of convenience to himself.

But then if riches fall into the covetous man's hands, they can be no happiness to him, because he hath no heart to enjoy them. He hath indeed the estate of a rich man, but he wants the comfort of it, because he hath the mind of a poor man; and enjoyment is all the felicity that is in a great fortune; what we enjoy is ours, but what we lay up, is from that

time not ours, but some body's else. He that heaps up riches, and enjoys them not, is rich only for his heir, but a beggar for himself.

We are apt to pity poor men, and too apt to despise them; but surely no man's condition is more to be deplored than his, who starves himself in the midst of plenty, and being surrounded with the blessings of GOD, turns them into the greatest curse; for it is a much greater curse, not to use an estate when one has it, than not to have it. It is like a plentiful table without an appetite.

But it may be it is a great happiness to have a great estate, tho' a man never use it; the pleasure of seeing it, and telling it over, may be like the removing of billets, which may warm a man as much as if he had spent and consumed them. But this is real, and the other only imaginary. I doubt not, many covetous men take a great deal of pleasure in ruminating upon their wealth, and in re-counting what they have; but they have a great deal of tormenting care and fear about it; and if they had not, it is very hard to understand where the reasonable pleasure and happiness lies of having things to no end. It is at the best, like that of some foolish birds, which, they say, take pleasure in stealing money, that they may hide it; as if it were worth the while, for men to take pains to dig silver out of the earth, for no other purpose, but to melt it down and stamp it, and bury it there again.

But many necessities may happen, which we cannot foresee, and it is good to provide against them. There is nothing so bad, but something may be said in excuse of it; and I do not deny, but that a provident care against the common accidents of humane life is very commendable; but it is unreasonable to

think

think of providing against all possibilities, which it is impossible either to foresee, or prevent. 'Tis very possible, that after a man hath gotten the greatest estate imaginable, he may lose it all by some fatal accident; and then to what purpose was all this provision made, when that which was so long a time a getting and laying up, is lost at once?

Besides, that it is not easy to conceive what necessity can happen to a covetous man, to give him an occasion of using his estate; he cannot find in his heart to bestow it upon himself in such things as are convenient, nay, almost necessary for the support of his life; for no man can feed his servants more penuriously than he does himself; all the religion he values himself upon, is a strict observance of the lessian diet, which he recommends to those few that can deny themselves to dine with him, in hopes to make better meals upon his estate when he is gone. And if he be so penurious to himself, the necessities of others are not like to move him to be liberal. I can but imagine one occasion that could tempt such a man to lay out what he hath; namely, when one part of his estate is in danger, to spend the other to secure it. And yet even in that case, if his cause were not very clear and good, he would go nigh to lose it, using it as he does himself; that is by starving it. And if this be all, then a man had as good be without an estate, and save himself the trouble either of getting it, or securing it; for if it were all gone, he might live as well as he does, and that with half the care and pains.

Secondly, the happiness of this world consists in a state of freedom from evil. Now the great evils that men are liable to in this world, are such as are incident

to them, either in the course of their lives, or at the time of their death; and riches do not contribute to mens happiness, by freeing them from either of these: I shall speak to these severally.

I. Not from the evils which are incident to men in the course of their lives. These are of two kinds, inward, or outward.

1. Inward evils, by which I mean those of the mind; and our greatest troubles are from within, from the anxiety of our minds and the guilt of our consciences, from the vicious inclinations of our wills, and the irregularity and disorders of our passions. Now riches were an admirable thing indeed, and worth our coveting, if they would help to cure these distempers of our minds; but they are the least fitted for such a purpose of any thing in the world; for not he that hath the greatest estate, but he that hath the fewest and most reasonable desires, and the best governed passions, and the most virtuous inclinations, is the happiest man, and dwells nearest to satisfaction. *Nemo malus felix*, “no bad man can be happy,” tho’ he were possesst of the whole world; because he hath that within him, which frets and discontents him, which galls his spirit, and keeps his mind restless and uneasy; and he that does not enjoy himself, can enjoy nothing else.

Did but men know how much happiness hath been enjoyed by many a pious and virtuous man in a mean fortune, how quiet and easy their minds have been, how much fuller of joy and pleasure, than the heart of any covetous worldling ever was in his most prosperous estate, and when “his corn and wine and oil abounded;” did we (I say) but know this, we should

should not envy the men of mighty fortunes. *Nam* SERM. XCII.
neque divitibus contingunt gaudia solis. “ Rich men are
“ not the only happy people in the world.” If they be
not good as well as rich, happiness is a greater stranger
to their dwellings, than to the cottages of poorer men.

Now riches are so far from helping to make men good, that they are one of the greatest temptations to them in the world to be otherwise; which is the reason why our SAVIOUR says, “ it is so very hard for “ a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven;” because considering the powerful, and almost irresistible temptations of a great estate, and the impotency and weakness of human nature to govern itself in a plentiful fortune, it is very hard for a rich man to be so good as he ought, it requires a great force and firmness of resolution, a very solid and vigorous constitution of mind, to bear a great fortune, and not to be corrupted by it; and a man hath never more reason to implore GOD’s gracious help and assistance, and to consult his own best and coolest thoughts, to know what he ought to do, and how he ought to demean himself, than when the outward blessings of this life flow in a main upon him; *felicitate corrumpimur,* “ nothing sooner debaucheth men than prosperity;” and he is a very happy man, whom wealth and a good fortune do not make licentious and dissolute; because these tempt men with the power and opportunity to do all the ill that their wicked hearts can design, or desire.

The temptation of riches, and the power that goes along with them, is so forcible and prevalent, that the devil, who is a sagacious spirit, and hath great and long experience in this kind, when he was making the experiment, whether CHRIST was a mere man, or the SON of GOD, reserved this for his last temptation resolving,

resolving, if that would not do, to try him no farther. After he had assaulted him in several kinds, he represents to him at last, that which was sufficient to have surfeited two of the most insatiable desires of human nature, ambition and covetousness, even “all
“ the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,
“ in a moment,” or point of time; he brings all the rays of his glory to one point, that the temptation might kindle and take hold the sooner; and says to him, “all this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down
“ and worship me.” He supposed with great probability, that if he were but a mere man, the strongest and most resolved mind would bend and yield to so dazzling a temptation as this; but when he saw that this temptation was rejected, he found himself baffled, and gave him over; since this did not move him, he concluded now, that he was the SON of GOD indeed, and that it was in vain to tempt him any farther.

From all this it appears, that riches are so far from making men virtuous, that nothing is more dangerous to virtue, than a full condition; if men have not a great degree of grace, as well as discretion to manage it. Solomon tells us, “that the prosperity of fools destroy-
“ eth them.”

And yet how do most of us court this temptation, and are forward to thrust and venture ourselves upon it? There are a great many other things, in which most men make a right judgment of themselves, and will readily acknowledge that they are altogether unfit for them. Every man will not take upon him to be a physician, or a lawyer, to prescribe medicines in dangerous cases, and to give counsel to men in knotty and difficult points about their estates; but every man thinks himself fit enough to be rich, and sufficiently qualified to manage

manage a great estate, if he can but get it; when perhaps there are few things in the world, which men are more insufficient for, than to wield and govern a great fortune, nor wherein there is greater danger of miscarriage. It is not every body's talent to be wealthy and wise, rich and innocent.

2. As for the outward evils of this life, such as want and contempt, bodily pains and diseases, unhappiness in friends and relations, a great estate is by no means a sufficient security or remedy to a covetous man against these.

(1.) As for want. And surely one would think, that if riches were good for any thing, they are a very proper remedy against this evil, and a most certain and infallible cure of it; but experience tells us quite otherwise. Socrates was wont to say, that, "To want nothing, is the privilege of the deity, and proper to God alone; but to stand in need of as few things as may be, is the privilege of a wise and good man, and a state of happiness next to that of God himself; because he that hath the fewest wants is the most easily supplied, and is next to him that is self-sufficient." Now a man of moderate desires hath infinitely fewer wants than a covetous man; and because his desires are moderate, a moderate estate will satisfy them: but the wants of a covetous mind are never to be supply'd, because it hath order'd the matter so cunningly, as to want even that which it hath; such a man does not get riches to supply his wants, but is content to want that he may be rich; infomuch that he hath not the heart to use his estate for the supply of his real necessities. How many do almost starve themselves in the midst of plenty and abundance? There is no greater sign of poverty, than to

S E R M. to be deeply in debt; now the covetous man lives and
 XCII. dies in debt to himself. Some men have been so
 shamefully penurious and stingy to themselves, as
 even to die to save charges, which yet perhaps is the
 most generous thing they ever did in their whole
 lives, in respect to the world; because by this means
 some body may come to the enjoyment of their estates,
 and that great dunghil which they have been so long
 in raking together, may by this means come to be
 spread abroad for the publick benefit.

So that if a covetous man were possessed of the
 wealth of both the Indies, all this would not free him
 from want. A poor man's wants may be satisfied,
 when he hath obtained what he wants: but the cove-
 tous man labours of an incurable want; because he
 wants that which he hath, as well as that which he
 hath not.

(2.) As for contempt, riches will not secure a cove-
 tous man against this neither; nay, so far is it from
 that, that he is commonly the more ridiculous and de-
 spised for living poor in the midst of abundance, than
 if he were really so. Did I say really so? He is the
 most really poor of all other men. For as one says
 well, "the rich poor man is emphatically poor."

(3.) Neither will riches free men from bodily ill-
 ness and pain. The rich are liable to as many
 diseases, and as sharp pains as the poor, and they have
 commonly less patience to bear them than the poor;
 because they have not been inured to other sorts of
 evils. They that have been accustomed to labour,
 are generally best fitted to bear pain; the rich are
 commonly more tender and delicate, and have a
 quicker sense of pain, more matter, and greater quan-
 tity

tivity of humours to feed a disease, and to inflame it to a greater height.

I must not here forget that there is a sort of rich men, I mean the penurious misers, who starve themselves more than the poor, and fare many times more hardly; and for this reason, tho' they be not in danger of the diseases that come from intemperance, and a plentiful table; yet they are liable to the diseases which proceed from starving and emptiness; which the physicians say are more dangerous than the other: so that neither the prodigal nor the niggardly rich man is secured from bodily pains and diseases, by a great estate.

(4.) Neither will riches secure a man from being unhappy in his friends and relations. A great estate will not make a man's children either more dutiful or wise, than the children of meaner persons; and if they be not so, his estate cannot be so great an happiness to him, as they may prove an affliction. Solomon tells us, that the very fear and apprehension of this did very much imbitter the fruit of all his labour; and he seems to speak it sensibly, and very probably with a melancholy reflexion upon his son Rehoboam, Eccles. ii. 18, 19. "Yea, I hated
" all my labour which I had taken under the sun,
" because I should leave it unto the man that shall be
" after me; and who knows whether he shall be a
" wise man, or a fool? yet shall he have rule over
" all my labour, wherein I have laboured, and
" wherein I have shewed my self wise under the
" sun." Who knows whether he shall be a wise man, or a fool? He seems to speak doubtfully: but he had a very shrewd guess what kind of man his

son would make ; for he speaks more despondingly in the next words, (ver. 20, 21.) “ therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun ; ” that is, when I thought seriously of it, I began to think that all the pains I had taken to get an estate, would be but to little purpose ; “ for there is a man (saith he) whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity,” (that is, who by wise and honest means hath rais’d a great estate) “ yet to a man that hath not laboured therein ” (that is, to a man who is endowed with none of these qualities) “ shall he leave it for his portion ; this also is vanity, and a great evil.” †

And as for friends, tho’ the rich man have many that will call themselves so, yet he had almost as good have none ; for he can hardly ever know whether they be so or not, unless he chance to fall into poverty, and then indeed the change of his condition may give him that advantage and opportunity, which otherwise he is never like to have of discerning between his friends and his flatterers. Thus you see that riches are no security against the most considerable evils which attend us in the course of our lives.

II. When we come to die, nothing will minister less comfort to us at that time, than a great estate. It is then a very small pleasure to a man, to reflect how much he hath gotten in the world, when he sees that he must leave it ; nay, like the young man in the gospel, he goes away so much the more “ sorrowful, because he had great possessions.” All the things of this world seem very inconsiderable

ble to a man, when he approaches to the confines of the other : for when he sees that he must leave this world, then he would fain make a virtue of necessity, and begins to change his apprehensions of these things, and to have very slight and mean thoughts of them, when he is convinc'd he can enjoy them no longer. What the philosopher was wont to say of the pleasures of this world, is as true of riches, and all the other enjoyments of it ; that “ if
“ they did but put on the same countenance, and
“ look with the same face, when they come to us, that
“ they will do, when they turn from us, and take
“ their leave of us, we should hardly entertain
“ them.”

Now if a man have placed his chief happiness in this world, as the covetous man does in his riches, his great trouble, when he comes to die, will be, that he must leave them. Nothing could be more severely said to the covetous man, than that which God says to the rich man in the parable ; “ thou
“ fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee,
“ and then whose shall these things be ? ” For of all things in the world, such men cannot endure to think of parting with these things, or that what they have got with such great care and labour, should come to the possession of another.

And therefore when we are so hot and eager in the pursuit of these things, we should do well to consider, how they will appear to us in a dying hour. And this consideration well imprinted upon our minds, will make us very careful, to treasure up other kind of comforts to our selves against such a time, and to labour after those things which we

shall never grow out of conceit withal, but shall value them to the last, and then most of all when we come to die, and leave this world. For as a poet of our own says excellently.

“ ’Tis not that which first we love :

“ But what dying we approve.”

Thus I have done with the fourth thing, whereby the evil and unreasonableness of covetousness doth appear ; namely, that the happiness of humane life doth not consist in a great estate ; “ the life of man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” The great ends of religion, and covetousness, are very different. The great end which religion proposeth to it self, is happiness : but the great end which covetousness proposeth is riches ; which are neither a necessary nor a probable means of happiness. I should now have proceeded to the fifth and last particular ; namely, that riches are so far from being the happiness of humane life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow ; as will appear, if we consider these four things.

First, the labour and care which covetous men are at in the getting of a great estate.

Secondly, the anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of losing it.

Thirdly, the trouble and vexation of having lost it ; and,

Fourthly, the dreadful and heavy account which every man must give of a great estate. But these particulars, together with the application of this whole discourse, I shall refer to another opportunity.

S E R M O N X C I I I .

The evil and unreasonableness of covetousness.

L U K E xii. 15.

And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

IN my two last discourses on this subject, I have represented the evil and unreasonableness of the vice of covetousness in four particulars. I proceed now to the fifth and last particular, whereby I told you the evil and unreasonableness of it would appear, viz.

S E R M .
X C I I I .

The fourth
sermon on
this text.

That riches are so far from being the happiness of humane life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow; as will evidently appear, if we consider these four things.

First, the labour and care which the covetous man is at in getting of a great estate.

Secondly, the anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of losing it.

Thirdly, the trouble and vexation of having lost it.

Fourthly, the heavy and dreadful account which every man must give of a great estate.

First, the labour and care which the covetous man hath in getting a great estate. He, that will be rich, must sweat for it, and refuse no pains and trouble; he must “ rise up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread

SERM. "bread of carefulness." A slave that digs in the
 {
 XCIII. mines, or rows in the galleys, is not a greater drudge
 than some covetous worldlings are; only with this
 difference, that the covetous man thinks that he la-
 bours and takes all these pains for himself; whereas
 the slave understands the matter more truly, and thinks
 that he does it for another.

But besides the pains he takes, he is full of care
 and anxiety. How is he, through the greedy desire of
 having, racked between the hopes of getting, and the
 fear of missing what he seeks? the apostle observes what
 tormenting cares accompany this vice: 1 Tim. vi. 10.
 "The love of money (saith he) is the root of all evil;"
 not only of the evil of sin, but of the evil likewise
 of trouble and disquiet. For it follows, "which while
 "some coveted after, they have pierced themselves
 "through with many sorrows: variety of troubles at-
 "tend them that will be rich."

Secondly, if we consider the anxiety of keeping
 what they have got, together with the fear of losing
 it again, this is another great part of a covetous
 man's infelicity. The rich man here in the parable
 after the text, when he saw his estate coming upon
 him so fast, cries out, "what shall I do"? poor man!
 who would not pity his condition, to see him put to
 this difficulty and distress, and to hear him make as
 heavy a moan as the poorest man could do! now that
 he hath a plentiful harvest, and his crop hath answered,
 if it were possible, his covetous desire, he is in a great
 deal of perplexity, and almost at his wits end how to
 dispose of it; he was horribly afraid lest any of it
 should be lost for want of a secure place to store it
 up in. "What shall I do, because I have no room,
 "where

“where to bestow my fruits”? where was the difficulty of this? why, he was loth to lay out money to secure them. But upon farther consideration, he resolves of the two evils, to choose the least; and he said, “this will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits, and my goods.” But why could he not let the barns he had stand, and build more? no, that he did not think so well, he loved to see all his good things at one view, and what a goodly show they would make together. Besides that it is the humour of covetousness, when it breaks out into expence, to over-do; the miser’s buildings are like his feasts, always extravagant. The covetous man (as to the business of expence) is like a coward as to fighting, he declines it as long as he can; but when he is push’d to the last necessity, he grows desperate, and lays about him.

*Tantis parta malis, curâ majore metuque
Servantur, misera est magni custodia census.*

“Riches which are got with so much trouble, are not kept without greater fear and care. A covetous man is nothing more miserable, than in the anxiety and care of disposing and securing what he hath got.” When a man’s desires are endless, his cares and fears will be so too.

Thirdly, as great an evil as any of the former, is the vexation of having lost these things. If by any accident the man happens to be deprived of them, then he takes on heavily, hangs down his head, and mourns, “as a man would do for his first-born;” and is ready to cry out with Micah, “they have taken away my gods, and what have I more?” upon every little loss the covetous man is undone, tho’ he have

have a hundred times more left than he knows what to do withal. So deeply are the hearts of earthly-minded men many times pierced with earthly losses, as with Rachel to refuse to be comforted. Nay, St. Paul observes, “ that the sorrow of the world sometimes worketh death,” 1 Cor. vii. 10.

Fourthly, but the saddest consideration of all is, that heavy and dreadful account that must one day be given, both of the getting and using of a great estate. They that have got an estate by fraud and falsehood, or by oppression and grinding the face of the poor, may read their doom at large, James v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. “ Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you; your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten; your gold and silver is canker’d, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire: ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers, which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped, are entred into the ears of the LORD of Sabaoth; ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton, ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.”

And we must be accountable likewise for the using of our estates. GOD gives them to us in trust, and the greater they are, the more we are to account for; so much as we need is ours, but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our families, in the rank GOD hath placed them; all that is given to us, that we may give it to others, and
indeed

indeed it is not ours; we are the proprietors of it in respect of men, but in respect of GOD we are but trustees, and stewards, and GOD will require an account of us how we have disposed of it. SERM.
XCIII.

And can there be a more reigning madness among men, than to take care only to increase their account more and more, by receiving much; whereas our great care and concernment should be to clear our account, by laying out what we receive, according to the trust reposed in us? how much we shall receive of the things of this world, is in the care and will of our master; but our care and fidelity are seen in laying it out as we ought. Among men (says one) it is well enough, if a steward can give an account of so much laid out, and so much in cash, and upon this he shall have his discharge: but we cannot this way clear our account with GOD; for it is not offering him his own again that will satisfy him, as we may learn from the parable of the talents. So that upon the whole matter, we should be so far from envying the rich, that we should rather envy the safety and happiness of those who are not intrusted with such dangerous blessings, and who are free from the temptations of a plentiful fortune, and the curse of a covetous mind, and from the heavy account of a great estate.

I come now, in the last place, to make some application of this discourse to our selves.

I. Let our SAVIOUR'S caution take place with us, let these words of his sink into our minds, "take heed and beware of covetousness." Our SAVIOUR, I told you, doubles the caution, that we may double our care. It is a sin very apt to steal upon us, and

SERM.
XCIII.

fly to insinuate it self into us under the specious presence of industry in our callings, and a provident care of our families: but however it may be coloured over, it is a great evil, dangerous to our selves, and mischievous to the world. Now to kill this vice in us, besides the considerations before-mentioned taken from the evil and unreasonableness of it, I will urge these three more.

1. That the things of this world are uncertain.

2. That our lives are as uncertain as these things: and,

3. That there is another life after this.

1. The uncertainty of the things of this world. This should very much cool our affections toward them, that after all our care and diligence for the obtaining of them, we are not sure to enjoy them; we may be deprived of them by a thousand accidents. This consideration Solomon urgeth, to take men off from an over-eager pursuit of these things, Prov. xxiii. 5. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." After we have sat brooding over an estate many years, it may all on a sudden, before we are aware, take wing, and fly away, like an eagle towards heaven, soaring suddenly out of our sight, and never to return again.

And the same argument St. Paul useth, to take off mens affections from the world, 1 Cor. vii. 31. because, "the fashion of this world passeth away; *παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.*" He compares the things of this world to a scene, which is presently changed, and vanisheth almost as soon as it appears.

Now

Now seeing these things are so uncertain, we should take heed how we fix our hearts too much upon them; we should not make love to any thing that is so fickle and inconstant as this world is. We should be afraid to contract too near and intimate a friendship with any thing which will forsake us, after we have courted it with so much importunity, and purchas'd it with so much pains, and endeavour'd to secure it with so much caution and tenderness.

2. Our lives are as uncertain as these things. If our estates remain with us, we are continually in danger of being removed from them. And (as one says) it is folly to build our hopes upon a match, where both parties are so uncertain and inconstant. Why should we place our dearest affections upon things which we are not sure to enjoy one moment? "thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, and then whose shall those things be?" I remember Seneca tells us a real story, just answerable to the rich man in the parable, of an acquaintance of his, who by long and great industry had arrived to a vast estate; and just when he began to enjoy it, after one of the first good meals which perhaps he ever made in his life, that very night his soul was taken from him, for presently after supper he died. *In ipso actu bene sedentium rerum, in ipso procurrentis fortunæ impetu.* "In the height of his prosperity, and in the full career of his good fortune."

But if we live to enjoy for any time what we have got, we should remember that our life is but a passage through the world, and that we are but "pilgrims and strangers in the world, as all our fathers were, that we have here no abiding-place,

“no continuing city,” but are travelling towards our own country. And why should we load our selves whilst we are upon our journey, and cumber our selves with those things which will be of no use to us there, where we are going?

But the great wonder of all is, that this vice should so strongly reign, and even grow upon men in old age, and get strength, as weakness creeps upon us. This very thought, “that we are to die,” should work in us a great indifferency towards the things of this world. But when men are convinc’d they cannot live long, and that every step they take, they are in danger of stumbling into the grave, this one would think should wean our affections from this world; and yet usually none take so fast hold of it, and embrace it so kindly as old men; like friends, who tho’ they know they must leave one another, yet are loth to part. Do we not see many pursue these things with as much eagerness and appetite, when they are leaving the world, as if they were to stay in it an hundred years longer? So that in this sense also, they are children again, and are as fond of these toys, as if they were just beginning the world, and setting out for their whole life.

3. There is another life after this, to be seriously thought on, and provided for with great care: and did men firmly believe this, they would not with Martha, “busy themselves about many things, but would
“mind the one thing necessary, and with Mary
“choose that better part which could not be taken
“from them.” They would overlook the trifles of this world, and scarce take notice of “the things
“which are seen,” but be only intent upon “the
“things

“ things which are not seen ; because the things
“ which are seen are but temporal, but the things
“ which are not seen are eternal.” The great concernments of another world would employ their utmost care, and their best thoughts.

Whilst we are in this world, we should remember “ that this is not our home, nor the place
“ of our rest ;” and therefore as men do in an inn, we should make a shift with those indifferent accommodations which the world will afford us, and which we can have upon easy terms, without too much trouble and stir, because we are not to continue long here ; and in the mean time we should cheer up our selves with the thoughts of the pleasure and the plenty of our FATHER’S house, and of that full contentment and satisfaction which we shall meet withal, when we come to those everlasting habitations.

So that our great care should be to provide for eternity. If we have unbounded desires, let us place them upon such objects as are worthy of them. Let us “ earnestly covet the best things,” and seek after the true riches. We should so mind the world, as to make heaven our great care ; as to make sure to “ provide our selves bags that wax not old,
“ a treasure in the heavens, that faileth not, where
“ no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth,” as our SAVIOUR adviseth, Luke xii. 33. To the same purpose is the counsel of St. Paul, 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. “ Charge them that are rich in this
“ world, that they be rich in good works, willing
“ to distribute, ready to communicate, laying up
“ for themselves a good foundation, or (as the word
“ *Σεμεινόν* may also be rendred) a good treasure,
“ against

“ against the time which is to come, that they may
“ lay hold of eternal life.”

I have told you that all these things will fail in a short space; we shall either be stripp'd of them, or separated from them when we come to die, and shall look over to that vast eternity which we must shortly enter upon; this world, and all the enjoyments of it, will then be as nothing to us, and we shall be wholly taken up with the thoughts of another world, and be heartily sorry that the things of this world have taken up so much of our time and care, and that the great and weighty concerns of all eternity have been so little minded and regarded by us. Now seeing all these things shall be, pardon me, if I earnestly beg of you in the midst of all your worldly cares, to have some consideration for your immortal souls, which are in no wise provided for by a great estate, but are designed for nobler enjoyments than this world can afford. When you are taking care to feed and clothe these dying bodies, remember that better part of your selves which is to live for ever. Let not all your enquiry be, “ what shall I eat? “ or what shall I drink? or wherewithal shall I be “ clothed? ” but sometimes ask your selves this question, “ what shall I do to be saved? ” I have an immortal spirit, it is but fit some care should be taken of that, to train it up to eternity, and to make it “ fit to be made partaker of an inheritance among them that are sanctified.”

The firm belief and serious consideration of the great things of another world cannot surely but cool the heat of our affections towards these dying and perishing thing, and make us resolved not to do
any

any thing whereby we may violate the peace of our consciences, or forfeit our interest and happiness in another world. S E R M.
XCIII.

II. By way of remedy against this vice of covetousness, it is good for men to be contented with their condition. This the apostle prescribes as the best cure of this vice, Heb. xiii. 5. "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have; ἀρκούμενοι τοῖς παροῦσιν," being contented with the present, and thinking that sufficient. A covetous man cannot enjoy the present, for fear of the future; either out of fear that he shall come to want, or out of a sickness and uneasiness of mind, which makes that nothing pleaseth him: but if we could bring our minds to our condition, and be contented with what we have, we should not be so eager and impatient after more.

This contentedness with our present condition doth not hinder, but that men by providence, and industry, and lawful endeavours, may lay the foundation of a more plentiful fortune than they have at present. For provided a man use no indirect and dishonest ways to increase his estate, and do not torment himself with anxious cares, do neither make himself guilty, nor miserable, that he may be rich; provided he do not neglect better things, to attain these, and have not an insatiable appetite towards them; provided he do not idolize his estate, and set his heart upon these things; and if he can find in his heart to enjoy them himself, and to be charitable to others; nothing hinders but that he may be contented with his present condition, and yet take all fair opportunities which the providence of God puts into his hands of enlarging

ing

ing his fortune. It is a good character which the poet gives us of Aristippus,

*Omnis Aristippum decuit color, & status & res;
Tentantem majora, ferè presentibus æquum.*

“Every state and condition became him; for tho’ he endeavoured after more, yet his mind was always in a manner equal to his present condition.”

But if a man be discontented with the present, and restless because he hath no more, the whole world will not satisfy him; and if GOD should raise him from one step to another, he would never think his fortune high enough, and in every degree of it would be as little contented as he was at first. Our SAVIOUR represents this sort of men by the rich man here in the parable, who when his barns were full, and ready to crack, his mind was not filled; therefore he pulls them down and builds greater; and if he had lived ’till these had been full, they must have gone down too, and he would still have built greater. So that tho’ he design’d when he had raised his estate to such a pitch, to have sat down, and taken his ease, yet his covetous humour would have been stirring again, and still have stept in between him and contentment, and for ever have hindred him from arriving at it.

III. By way of direction, I would persuade those who are rich, to be charitable with what they have. If GOD hath blest us with abundance, and we would not be like this rich man here in the parable, we must lay out of our estates, in ways of piety and charity, for the publick good, and for the private relief of those who are in want; for that is the ἀπόδοσις, or moral of the parable; “so is he that layeth up treasures to himself, and is not rich towards GOD.” So shall he be;

such

such an issue of his folly may every one expect, (to be taken away from his estate before he comes to enjoy it) “ who layeth up treasures for himself, but is not rich towards GOD ;” but does not lay up riches with GOD. How is that? By works of mercy, and charity. This our SAVIOUR calls “ laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven ;” Matt. xvi. 20. And at the 33d verse of this chapter, he calls giving of alms, “ providing for ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which faileth not :” they who do thus, who “ are rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate,” are said to “ lay up for themselves a good treasure against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life,” 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. *Extra fortunam est quicquid donatur*; “ whatsoever we give to the poor is safely disposed, and put out of the reach of fortune,” because it is laid up in heaven, where we may expect the return and recompence of it. Charity to our poor brethren is a certain way of transmitting our riches into the other world, for our reception there. So our LORD tells us, Luke xvi. 9. “ I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail (that is, when ye shall leave this world, and the enjoyments of it) they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

At the great day of judgment, when we shall appear before GOD, and, according to our SAVIOUR'S representation of the proceedings of that day, shall hear him thus expostulating with men, “ I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not;

“ sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not ;” what would we then give, how much of our estates, if we had them then at our command, would we not be willing to part withal, to have that comfortable sentence past upon us ; “ come, ye blessed of my FATHER, “ inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the “ foundation of the world ! ” But if we be found among those who would spare nothing out of their abundance to any charitable use and purpose, I have not the heart to tell you how miserable the condition of such persons will be, and how dreadful a doom will be passed upon them.

It is a sad consideration, that there are some persons in the world, who seem to be only defective in this duty ; like the young man in the gospel, who lacked but “ this one thing ” to make him perfect ; “ he had kept the commandments from his youth ; ” and preserved himself from those gross sins which the law did plainly forbid ; and yet for want of “ this “ one thing ” he parted from his SAVIOUR, and, for any thing we know, fell short of eternal life. There are many who are very devout and religious, much in prayer and fasting, and all the other frugal exercises of piety, which cost them no money ; but yet are very defective in alms and charity, which in scripture are so frequently joined with the fastings and prayers of good men ; and by this means, all their devotion and diligence in the other parts of religion is lost, and will not bring them to heaven. And is it not great pity, that they who “ are not far from the kingdom of God should fall short of it ? ” that they, who in most other things bid so fair for heaven, should break with God upon this single point ?

I know men have several ways to deceive their own hearts, and to defend themselves against all these assaults.

First, they say, they are injurious to no man, in not being charitable. And 'tis true, that in human courts the poor can have no action against the rich for want of charity to them ; but yet for all that, they do injuriously detain that which doth not of right belong to them. They are cruel and hard-hearted, and they are guilty of high breach of trust, in respect of GOD, whose stewards they are, and who hath dealt so liberally with them in the things of this life, on purpose to oblige them to be so to others. That which thou storest up, without regard to the necessities of others, is unlawfully detained by thee, since GOD intended it should have been, " for bread to the hungry, and " clothes to the naked," and for help and relief " of " those who are ready to perish." For why art thou rich, and another poor ? but that thou mightest exercise thy charity upon those fitting objects which the providence of GOD presents to thee. It had been easy for GOD (since " the earth is his, and the fulness " thereof ") so to have contrived things, that every man should have had a sufficiency, and have been in a moderate condition ; but then a great many virtues would have been shut out of the world, and lost, for want of opportunity to exercise them. Where then had been the poor man's patience, and the rich man's pity ? and the contentedness of men of moderate fortune ?

Secondly, men say that they have children to provide for. And do so in GOD's name, for he allows us to do it liberally ; but unless their condition and

wealth set them above an ordinary calling, do not choose so to provide for them, as to take them off from all employment, lest you put them in the ready way to be undone; have a care of leaving them no other business, but to spend what you have left them; if you do so, they will in all probability do that work very effectually, and make as much haste to be poor, as you did to make them rich. If men could be but contented to do that which is best for their children, they might do a great deal better for themselves, by disposing what they have to spare in charity.

Thirdly, others would fain excuse themselves from this duty at present by telling what they intend to do when they come to die, that is, when they can keep what they have no longer. It seems then thou wilt leave it to thy executor to do good in thy stead. This shews thou hast no great heart to the business, when thou deferrest it as long as ever thou canst. But why wilt thou trust another with the disposal of thy charity, rather than thyself? This is hardly to offer either “a reasonable, or a living sacrifice to GOD,” to do good only when we are dead. It is well that GOD hath made all men mortal, and that “it is appointed for all men once “to die;” otherwise some men would never do good at all.

Wherefore setting aside these, and all other excuses, which will not be admitted, nor will any of us have the face to plead them at the day of judgment; I say, setting aside all excuses whatsoever, let us resolve to do good with what we have whilst we can; and to that end let us lay aside some portion of what GOD hath blest us withal, for the uses of piety and charity, and let it bear some decent proportion to what GOD hath given us.

There

There is never want of proper objects for our largest charity, and now less than ever. Besides those at home, which present themselves to us in great numbers every day, GOD hath sent us many from abroad, who call loud upon us for our pity and help, both as they are reduced to the greatest extremity, and are sufferers in the best cause, that of our common religion, which ought now to be dearer to us than ever. Let us shew mercy now, as we expect mercy from others, in any day of our distress in this world, and as ever we hope, whenever we come to appear before the judgment-seat of CHRIST, "to find mercy with the LORD in that day."

Consider what I have said upon this argument, and let this extraordinary kind of caution which our SAVIOUR here gives, make a deep impression upon your minds; "take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

S E R M O N XCIV.

Religion, our first and great concernment.

M A T T H. vi. 33.

But seek ye first the Kingdom of GOD, and his Righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

IN the latter part of this chapter, our SAVIOUR S E R M.
XCIV. doth in a long discourse caution his disciples against an inordinate care about the things of this life, which he concludes with a strict charge to make religion

religion their first and great concernment, and above all things to take care to secure to themselves the happiness of another life; “but seek ye first the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness,” &c. In the handling of which words, I shall do these four things.

First, I shall explain what is here meant by “the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness.”

Secondly, What by seeking of these.

Thirdly, I shall lay down some necessary and plain directions, which if we observe, we cannot miscarry in this matter.

Fourthly, I shall set before you some of the most proper and powerful motives and encouragements to the minding of this great interest and concernment; among which, I shall particularly consider the argument or encouragement here used in the text, “and all these things shall be added unto you.”

First, I shall explain to you what is here meant by “the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness.”

I. What is meant by the kingdom of GOD. And there are two famous acceptations of this phrase, and both of them very frequent in the new testament. Sometimes it is used to signify the state of the gospel, or the christian religion, which by the Jews was called the kingdom of GOD, or the kingdom of the Messias, Mark i. 15. “The kingdom of GOD is at hand,” that is, the state or dispensation of the gospel is now approaching, and ready to take place. Luke xvii. 20. The Pharisees demanding of our SAVIOUR, “when the kingdom of GOD should come;” that is, when the reign of the Messias should commence; he answers them, “the kingdom of GOD cometh.

“ cometh not with observation;” that is, not with S E R M. XCIV.
 any temporal pomp and splendor, so as to draw
 the eyes of people after it, as the Jews did vainly ima-
 gine; but “ the kingdom of GOD, ἐν τῷ ὑμῶν ἔστιν
 “ is among you;” not within you, as our translation
 hath improperly rendred it; the kingdom of GOD
 (he tells them) is already come unto you, the Messias
 is among you, and ye are not aware of him. In the
 like sense this phrase is used, Matt. xxi. 43. “ The
 “ kingdom of GOD (that is, the gospel) shall be
 “ taken from you, and given to a nation bringing
 “ forth the fruits thereof.” And so likewise the
 phrase of the kingdom of heaven is used, Matt. xi.
 II. where speaking of John the baptist, our SAVI-
 OUR saith, “ that among them that were born of
 “ women, there hath not risen a greater than John
 “ the Baptist;” that is, there was no greater person
 than he, under the Jewish dispensation; and yet “ he
 “ that is least in the kingdom of heaven,” that is,
 under the dispensation of the gospel, “ is greater
 “ than he.”

Now tho’ this sense of the kingdom of GOD be
 not wholly excluded in the text, yet there is another
 sense of this phrase very usual likewise in the scrip-
 ture, and which is more agreeable to the scope of our
 SAVIOUR’S argument and discourse, and so it signifies
 that future state of happiness and glory which good
 men shall be advanced to in another world, in opposi-
 tion to this life, and the enjoyments of it, which our
 SAVIOUR had before forbidden his disciples to be so
 solicitous about. “ Take ye no thought, saying, what
 “ shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or where-
 “ withal shall we be clothed:” and then it follows
 in

in direct opposition to this inordinate and solicitous care about worldly things, “but seek ye first the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness.” That is, be not so solicitous about the conveniencies and necessaries of this life, as about the happiness of the other, and the means to it. And this sense of this phrase of the kingdom of GOD is so very frequent in the new testament, that I shall not need to give particular instances of it.

II. What is meant by righteousness, “seek ye first the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness.” Righteousness, in the strictest and most proper sense of the word, signifies the particular virtue of justice; and very frequently in the old testament it is used for charity to the poor, or almsgiving, Psal. xxxvii. 25, 26. “I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread; he is ever merciful, and lendeth,” and Psal. cxii. 9. “he hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness endureth for ever.” But righteousness in its largest and most extended sense, comprehends all the virtues of a good man; and so it signifies here in the text, and in many other places of scripture.

So that “the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness,” comprehends the whole business of religion, our last end, which is eternal life and happiness in another world; and the way and means to this end; which is righteousness, or that universal goodness which GOD requires of us, and whereof he himself is a pattern and example to us; for which reason ’tis call’d “his righteousness.” And in this sense of our last end, and the way and means to it, “the
“kingdom

“ kingdom of heaven, and righteousness,” are used in another place, even of this sermon of our SAVIOUR’S upon the mount, Matt. v. 20. “ except your “ righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the “ scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into “ the kingdom of heaven” ; where righteousness is made the necessary means and condition of eternal life. I proceed in the

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Second place, to explain what is meant by “ seeking first the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness.” And this signifies the greatest intention of mind, and earnestness of endeavour about the business of religion, in order to our attaining of eternal happiness ; such a seriousness and earnestness of endeavour as earthly-minded men use about the things of this world. “ For after all these things (says our SAVIOUR immediately after the text,) do the Gentiles seek ; τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητεῖ,” which words signify an intense care, and vigorous endeavour ; “ but seek “ ye first the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness ;” that is, be ye who profess your selves christians, as intent upon the business of religion, and the salvation of your souls, as the heathen, who are in a great measure ignorant of GOD and another life, are about the things of this life.

And here are two things to be explained.

I. What is here meant by “ seeking the kingdom “ of GOD, and his righteousness ;” and

II. What by “ seeking them in the first place.”

For the first : a sincere and earnest “ seeking of “ the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness,” does imply in it these four things.

I. A fix’d design and resolution as to the end ;

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that

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that we do not only propound to our selves the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls as our chief end, but that we be immoveably fixed upon it, and always have it in our aim and design; that here we set up our resolution, if it be possible, to be happy for ever; that we have this end always in our eye, and be firmly resolved to do all that we can towards attaining it.

Not that we are obliged always actually to think upon it; but to have it frequently in our minds, and habitually to intend and design it, so as to make it the scope of all our endeavours and actions, and that every thing we do be either directly and immediately in order to it, or some way or other subservient to this design, or however not inconsistent with it; like the term and end of a man's journey, towards which the traveller is continually tending, and hath it always habitually in his intention, tho' he doth not always think of it every step that he takes, and tho' he be not always directly advancing and moving towards it, yet he never knowingly goes out of the way. And tho' he bait and lodge by the way, and does many other things which do not directly set him forward, yet they are all subservient to his journey, or in prosecution of it; or at least no wilful deviations from it. Thus it should be with us, while we are sojourning in this world; our fix'd aim and design should be to get to heaven, and thither we should be continually tending in our desires and endeavours.

And if this resolution be deeply rooted and fixed in our minds, it will govern all our actions, and keep them steady to their main end. Whereas, if we be uncertain and unresolved upon our great end, and be divided

divided between the happiness of the next life, and the present enjoyments of this, we shall be fickle and unsteady in all our motions. He that hath two ends, can pursue neither vigorously, but while he is moving towards the one, he leans and inclines to the other; and like a needle between two loadstones, is always in a doubtful and trembling condition; inclines to both, but is constant to neither: and this is the meaning of that aphorism of St. James, "the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He that is unresolv'd as to his main end, hath two minds, and can prosecute nothing vigorously: but if our mind be once fixed and resolved, that will determine and govern all our motions, and inspire us with diligence, and zeal, and perseverance in the prosecution of our end.

2. "Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" implies incessant care and diligence as to the means; that we make religion our business, and exercise our selves in the duties of it, both in publick and private, at proper times and seasons, with the same seriousness and application of mind, as men do in their callings and professions, for the gaining of wealth and preferment; especially on the LORD'S-day, which GOD hath taken to himself, and set apart for the duties of his worship and service. Not that we are excused from minding religion at other times; but that those who are pressed and straitned by the necessary cares of this life, may be sure to mind it then, and may have no colour of excuse for the neglect of it at that time, which GOD hath allotted for that very purpose, and which it is unlawful to employ about our worldly affairs. GOD

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expects that we should serve him at other times, that we should live in an habitual sense of him, and (as Solomon expresseth it, Prov. xxiii. 17.) “ Be in the “ fear of the LORD all the day long;” so as to be careful not to offend or transgress in any thing, and so as to redeem all opportunities for the exercise of piety, and devotion; but this day he peremptorily challengeth to himself, and expects we should employ it in his service, and dedicate it to religion to the contemplation of GOD and heavenly things, and the care of our immortal souls, with the same seriousness and diligence, as we do upon other days “ labour for “ the bread which perisheth;” and the less leisure we have upon other days for this purpose, the more intirely should we devote and consecrate this day to the purposes and duties of religion.

Not but that our whole life, and all the actions of it, should be under the government of religion, and directed by the laws and rules of it; and it should be our continual care and endeavour to please GOD in all things, and we should take as much pains, and be as heartily concerned to be good men, as men of the world are to grow rich and great in this world; nay so much more, by how much it is a better and nobler design to improve in grace and virtue, than to prosper and thrive in our temporal estate; and we do not in good earnest “ seek the “ kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness,” if this be not our great study and endeavour, to subdue our lusts, and govern our passions, and, in a word, to reform whatever is amiss in the inward frame and temper of our minds, and in our outward conversation. And indeed nothing does requires greater diligence,

ligence, and attention, and care, than for a man to become truly and thoroughly good, to be meek and humble, and patient and contented, and resigned to the will of God in every condition; to be peaceable, and charitable, and placable, and ready to forgive; these are great and difficult things, and, whatever we think, not the work of a wish, or the effect of a sudden resolution before the receiving of the holy sacrament, no nor the fruit of frequent and fervent prayers, without the hearty concurrence of our own care and endeavour, to render our lives such, as we pray God by his grace to assist and enable us to be.

3. "Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness," does further imply zeal and earnestness in the pursuit of this design: and this is a degree above diligence; for zeal is an ardour and fervency of mind in the prosecution of a thing for which you are greatly concerned, and which we vehemently desire to obtain; it is the hottest and most intense degree of our affection towards any thing, of our desire and love, mixed with anger at every thing that stands in our way and hinders us from obtaining what we seek after; such an heat as ambition does commonly inspire men withal, in the pursuit of power and preferment. Such ought to be the temper of our minds, and the edge of our spirits, "in seeking the kingdom of God," as does usually possess men in seeking the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them. We must remember, that it is a kingdom which we seek for, and aspire after; not like the unstable and tottering kingdoms of this world, but "a kingdom which cannot be shaken," as the apostle calls it.

So that the greatness of the design, and the excellency of what we seek after, will justify and warrant the highest degree of a discreet zeal and fervour in the prosecution of it; and therefore no wonder that the scripture in this matter useth words that import the greatest vehemency and earnestness, bidding us “to strive to enter in at the strait gate, to labour and watch, to run, and wrestle, and fight,” and, in a word, “to give all diligence, to make our calling and election sure.”

Lastly, “seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” does imply patience and perseverance in our endeavours after them, and that we never cease our pursuit of them, ’till we have obtained them; and this, notwithstanding all the difficulties and discouragements, the opposition and persecution that we meet with “for righteousness sake.” For this we must expect, and reckon upon before-hand, to encounter many difficulties, and many discouragements in the ways of religion; for “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life,” as our LORD himself hath told us: nay we must count to be grievously “persecuted for righteousness sake,” and, if God see it good for us, “to pass through many tribulations,” before we shall enter “into the kingdom of God;” and therefore we had need to be armed with a great deal of patience, and a very firm and obstinate resolution, to enable us to bear up, and to hold out against all these; for this is a necessary qualification for our “seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” So our LORD hath told us, Matth. x. 21. “he that endureth to the end, shall be saved;” if we “hope
“ to

“ to receive the crown of life, we must be faithful
“ to the death, Rev. ii. 10.” And to the same pur-
pose St. Paul declares, Rom. ii. 7. that they only
shall be made partakers of “ eternal life, who by patient
“ continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and ho-
“ nour, and immortality.”

You see what is meant by “ seeking the kingdom
“ of God, and his righteousness;” it remains briefly
to be shewn, in the second place, what is meant by
seeking these first; “ seek ye first the kingdom of
“ God, and his righteousness;” that is, let this be
your main and principal design, so as to take place of
all others in your esteem and affections, in your aim
and endeavour; in comparison of this, mind nothing
else, not the comforts and conveniencies, not the
necessaries of life, “ what ye shall eat, and what ye shall
“ drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed.” These
you see our SAVIOUR instanceth in before the text, as
not to be regarded and taken care of, when they come
in competition with “ the kingdom of God, and his
“ righteousness.” And our SAVIOUR tells us else-
where, that not only none of the comforts and neces-
saries of life are to be valued against him, and his
religion; but that even this temporal life itself, as
dear as it is to us, is to be parted withal, and given up,
rather than to quit the profession of his truth and re-
ligion; Matt. x. 37, 38. “ He that loveth father or
“ mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and
“ he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is
“ not worthy of me.” He instanceth in the nearest
relations, those towards whom we have the most ten-
der and relenting affections, and yet he tells us,
that the consideration of his truth and religion ought

to take place of these, nay even of life itself; for so it follows, and “ he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.” St. Luke expresseth it more strongly and vehemently, Luke xiv. 26. “ If any man come to me” (that is, take upon him the profession of my religion) “ and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” When these come in competition with our religion, and the great interest of our eternal salvation, we are to regard and value them no more than if they were the objects of our hatred, but to set aside all consideration of affection to them, so far as it would tempt us from constancy in our religion, and the care of our souls.

So that when our SAVIOUR bids us “ first to seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” his meaning is, that religion, and the concernments of our souls, and the eternal happiness of them in another world, should be our first and chief care; and that all other things should be made subordinate and subservient to this great design, and to be no farther minded by us, than they really are so: for that which is our great end, will subdue all other things, and bring them into subjection to it, and will reject them, and throw them aside, if they be inconsistent with it. If heaven be our utmost aim, and in order to that, it be our great study and endeavour to be righteous and holy, this resolution and design sincerely entertained, will overrule all other considerations, and make all the things of this world to stoop and give way to that which is our chief end, the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls. And thus I have done with the second thing

I proposed, namely, what is meant, by “seeking S E R M.
“ the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;” and X C I V.
what “by seeking them first.”

I proceed in the third place, to lay down some plain rules for our direction and furtherance “in seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;” that is, in the great business of religion.

First, let us always live under a lively and powerful sense of another world; that we are placed here in this world, but for a little while, and that wholly in order to our preparation for a better and happier life. Let this thought be often in our minds: that eternity is the most considerable duration, and the next world the place of our everlasting abode, where we must dwell and continue for ever; and therefore our present state is but of little moment and consideration to us, but only in order to our future and everlasting condition. We may please ourselves here for a little while with toys and trifles, with dreams and shadows of pleasure and happiness, and may be exercised with some troubles and afflictions for a short space, “for a moment (as the apostle calls it) our light afflictions which are but for a moment,” and so indeed it is, compared with all eternity; but the substantial and durable happiness or misery remain for men in the other world, and will certainly be their portion, according as they have demeaned themselves in this world.

Now the serious consideration of this cannot fail to put us upon vigorous preparations for another world, and to make us wholly intent upon our eternal concerns, and to resolve, whatever becomes of us in this world, to take effectual care that we may

be happy for ever. He that firmly believes the immortality of his soul, and a life after death, which will never have an end, must needs take into consideration his whole duration, and bend all his care and thoughts, how he may avoid the greatest and most lasting misery, and secure to himself an immortality of bliss and happiness.

Secondly, let us always be under a conviction of the absolute and indispensable necessity of holiness and righteousness, as the only way and means whereby the kingdom of GOD is to be attained, and that holiness and happiness are not to be separated, the one being a necessary condition and qualification for the other; and consequently, that it is the vainest thing in the world for any man to hope to enter into the kingdom of GOD, without endeavouring after his righteousness; there is so strong a connexion between them, that a man may as reasonably expect to be well and at ease without health, as to be happy without holiness; for this makes us like to GOD, and our likeness and conformity to GOD, is that alone which can make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of GOD. We must be "partakers of the divine nature," in order to our participation of the divine blessedness. And the consideration of this will effectually engage us "to seek the righteousness of GOD," without which we shall never enter into his kingdom; and "to follow holiness, without which no man shall see the LORD."

Thirdly, let us always remember that righteousness is of a great extent, and comprehends in it all goodness; it takes in all the duties of religion, and the practice of all of them; it is a complication

of all graces and virtues, of all the parts and ingredients, of all the duties and offices of a good man. To denominate a man righteous, all causes must concur; all the essential principles and parts of religion and goodness must meet together; knowledge and practice, faith and good works, right opinions and real virtues, an orthodox profession and a holy life, abstaining from sin and doing of righteousness, purity of heart and unspotted manners, godliness and honesty, the bridling of our tongue, and the government of our passions, and “above all things charity, which is the band of perfection.”

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For righteousness is our conformity to the law of God, as unrighteousness and sin is the transgression of it: now this, if it be real and sincere, will be uniform and universal, equally respecting all the laws of God, and every part of our known duty, and will not content itself with an especial regard to one or two precepts of the law, tho' never so considerable, and then allow itself in the neglect and violation of the rest, no, nor with the observation of the duties of one table of the law, if it overlook the other; no, nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. James hath put this very case, and determined it, “that he that shall keep the whole law, save only that he offend in one point, is guilty of all;” that is, he is not sincere in his obedience to the rest: and therefore if we “seek the righteousness of God,” our righteousness must be universal; “as he that hath called us is holy, so must we be holy in all manner of conversation,” in the tenor of our actions, and the whole course of our lives; and any one reigning sin and vice, any gross

SERM. and notorious defect in the virtues of a good life, will
 ACIV. spoil our righteousness, and will effectually shut us
 out of the kingdom of heaven.

Fourthly, let us wisely subordinate the several parts and duties of religion to one another, according to the intrinsecal worth and value of them, that so we may mind every part of religion in its due place, and according to the true nature and importance of it. Knowledge and faith are in order to practice, and a good life; and signify nothing unless they produce that; the means of religion, such as prayer and fasting, diligent reading, and hearing the word of God, reverent and devout receiving of the blessed sacrament, are of less account and value, than that which is the end of all these, which is to make us inwardly and really good, and “fruitful in all the works of righteousness, which by JESUS CHRIST are to the praise and glory of GOD.” And therefore the means of religion which I have mentioned, are to be regarded and used by us, in order to the attaining of these ends, without which they are mere formality and hypocrisy, and instead of finding acceptance with GOD, they are “an abomination to him, and his soul hates them.”

And so likewise the circumstances of religion are less considerable than the substantial means and instruments of it. And therefore all rites and ceremonies are in religion of less consideration, than the substance of God’s worship, and ought always to be subordinate to it. In like manner the moral duties of religion, comprehended under “the two great commandments of the love of GOD, and our neighbour,” because they are of eternal and indis-

pensable

penfable obligation, are to be preferr'd to matters of meer positive institution; and where they cannot stand together, that which is positive ought to be fet afide, and to give way for the present to that which is moral and good in its own nature, and not only, because it is commanded and enjoin'd; for in this case GOD hath exprefly declared, that " he will have " mercy, and not sacrifice." Upon which ground our SAVIOUR declares, that the law of the sabbath ought to give place to works of mercy. Upon the same account peace and charity are to be valued above matters of nicety and scruple, of doubtful dispute and controversy; because the former are unquestionably good, the latter doubtfully and uncertainly so.

All these things ought to be consider'd, and are of great moment to make a man sincerely and wisely religious. For men may keep a great stir about some parts of religion, and be very careful and diligent, zealous and earnest about the means and instruments of religion, and in the exercises of piety and devotion; and yet be destitute of the power and life of it, and fall short of that inward, and real, and substantial righteousness, which alone can qualify us for the kingdom of GOD.

The fifth and last direction I would give, is this; that we have a particular regard to the great duty of charity, or almsgiving, this being very frequently in scripture called righteousness, as being an eminent part of religion, and a great evidence of the truth and sincerity of our piety. And this our SAVIOUR particularly directs to, as the way to " the kingdom " of GOD," Luke xii. 33. After this general exhortation, " to seek the kingdom of GOD," he instanceth

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instanceth in charity, as the direct way to it; “ give
 “ alms, provide for your selves bags that wax not
 “ old, a treasure in the heavens, which faileth not.”
 And elsewhere our SAVIOUR speaks of this grace
 and virtue, as that which, above all others, will make
 way for our admission into heaven, Luke xvi. 9. “ I
 “ say unto you, make to your selves friends of the
 “ mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail,
 “ they may receive you (or ye may be received) into
 “ everlasting habitations”. And St. Paul calls it,
 “ laying up in store for our selves a good foundation ;”
 or (as the word may better be render’d in this place)
 “ a good treasure against the time to come, that we
 “ may lay hold on eternal life,” 1 Tim. vi. 19. St.
 James speaks of it, as a main and most essential part
 of religion, and the great evidence of a true and
 sincere piety, Jam. i. 27. “ Pure religion, and un-
 “ defiled before GOD and the FATHER, is this; to
 “ visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.”
 Finally, our LORD instanceth in this, as the very
 thing which will admit us into, or shut us out of hea-
 ven; by the performance whereof we shall be ab-
 solved, and for the neglect thereof we shall be con-
 demned in the judgment of the great day, Matt. xxv.
 So that this part of righteousness or religion, ought
 in a more especial manner to be regarded by us;
 because upon the performance or neglect of this duty,
 our eternal happiness doth so much depend.

The fourth and last thing only remains to be spoken
 to; which is, to set before you the most proper and
 powerful motives and encouragements, to the mind-
 ing of this great interest and concernment. But this
 will be the subject of another discourse.

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Religion, our first and great concernment.

M A T T H. vi. 33.

But seek ye first the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

TH E S E words, which I began to discourse S E R M.
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upon the last day, are a strict charge and The se-
cond ser-
mon on
this text.
command to all christians, to mind the busi-
ness of religion in the first place, and to take all ima-
ginable care to secure the happiness of another life;

“but seek ye first the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” In the handling of which argument,

First, I explained what is meant “by the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness.”

Secondly, I shew’d what is meant “by seeking these;” and what “by seeking them first.”

Thirdly, I laid down some rules for our direction and furtherance in this great business.

I shall now proceed to represent to you in the

Fourth and last place, some of the most proper and powerful arguments and encouragements, to engage us to the minding of this great interest and concernment; amongst which, I shall in the last place particularly consider the encouragement here given in the text, “seek ye first the kingdom of
“ GOD,

SERM. " GOD, and his righteousness ; and all these things
 XCV. " shall be added unto you."

First, my first argument shall be from the worth and excellency of the things we seek, " the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ;" which are certainly the greatest and best things we can seek. The kingdom of God, is the eternal salvation of our souls, everlasting life and happiness in another world, which, to animate our endeavours, and to tempt our ambition the more, are set forth to us under the notion of a kingdom. And what will not men do to obtain that ? what pains will they not take ? what hazards will they not run ? what difficulties will they not grapple with, to break through if they can, to come to a kingdom ? which when they have obtained, they are exposed to as many, and commonly to more cares and fears, to greater difficulties and dangers in the keeping, than they were for the getting of it : and yet all this men will do for a corruptible crown, for one of the petty kingdoms and principalities of this world, which are continually tottering, and ready to be overturned by open violence, or to be undermined by secret treachery. But the kingdom which I am speaking of, and persuading you and my self to seek after, is not like the kingdoms of men, and of this world ; it is called the kingdom of God, to signify to us the excellency and stability of it ; as much beyond any of the kingdoms of this world, as the heavens are high above the earth, and as God is greater than man ; " a kingdom which cannot be shaken, " a crown which fadeth not away," a scepter which cannot be wrested from us.

But

But to quit the metaphor, and speak to the thing; the kingdom of God imports the eternal salvation of our souls; I say of our souls, which both in respect of the dignity of our nature, and their immortal duration, are infinitely more valuable than any of the perishing things of this world, and ought to be much dearer to us. Other things are without us, they neither constitute our being, nor are essential to our happiness; but our souls are our selves, and the loss of them is our utter ruin and destruction. So that nothing is to be regarded by us with equal care and concernment, as the salvation of our immortal souls; that is, that we may be rescued from eternal misery, and everlastingly happy in another world. And can we be at too much cost and pains upon such a design, to escape so dismal a condition, so dreadful a ruin, as that of body and soul to all eternity? can any man be concerned enough to bring about so great a good to himself? or, can he purchase it too dear, whatever he give or part with for it? a good so desirable, and so durable, as our being happy for ever. When we purchase the things of this world, the riches and honours of it, at the expence of so much time, and care, and trouble, we pay dear for trifles and fancies; but eternal happiness is a jewel of so inestimable a price, that a wise merchant will have it at any rate, and “sell all that he hath to purchase it.”

Of such value is the kingdom of God; and next to it is righteousness, which is the only way and means whereby this kingdom is to be attained, and therefore to be sought by us with the greatest dili-

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gence and earnestness: for that which is the only means to a great and desirable end, and which alone can make us capable of that end, and which in truth is a degree of it, is valuable next to the end, and almost equally with it; and such is righteousness, in respect of the kingdom of GOD; it is the only means to it, it is that alone which qualifies us, and makes us capable of happiness; nay, it is an essential ingredient into it, and that which does in a great measure constitute the happiness of heaven: for that temper of mind, that conformity and likeness to GOD, which holiness and righteousness brings us to, is the true foundation of our happiness, and according to the best apprehensions we have now of it, is the very formal cause and essence of our blessedness. So St. John tells us, 1 Joh. iii. 2. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him;” that is, we do not now distinctly understand wherein the happiness of the next life consists, we are not able to frame a clear and perfect idea of it; but this we know in general, that it consists in our likeness to GOD, in a conformity to the moral perfections of the divine nature, which are expressed by the name of purity and holiness; and therefore every one that hopes for the happiness of heaven, must endeavour after holiness; “every man that hath this hope in him, must purify himself, even as he is pure.”

So that the things which I am pressing you to seek after, are most effectually recommended, by telling you what they are; the kingdom of GOD is eternal life and happiness, and his righteousness is

universal

universal holiness and goodness, without which no man is qualified for this blessed state. Now if there be any thing better than goodness, any thing more desirable than a happiness which hath no bounds, nor no end; do not mind them, nor look after them: but if there be not; then certainly these are worthy of the care and endeavour of our whole life.

Secondly, another consideration that should very much excite and quicken our endeavour and diligence in seeking these things, is the difficulty of obtaining them. This, I confess, is no encouragement, but it is a very good motive and argument to whet our industry in seeking these things, when we plainly see that they are not to be had upon other Terms. And this consideration our SAVIOUR useth to quicken us to strive and to contend earnestly for eternal life, Matt. vii. 14. "because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it?" And Luke xiii. 24. "strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Seeking here, in opposition to striving, is a faint and weak endeavour, which will not carry us through this narrow and difficult passage; and this is the reason why many miscarry, who make some attempts towards heaven; but they do not strive, they do not put forth any vigorous endeavours to get thither.

Now the difficulty of attaining eternal happiness, ariseth from the difficulty of the way and means to it; and it is therefore hard to attain the kingdom of God, because it is hard to attain his righteousness. As desirable as it is, it must be acknowledged very difficult for a man to raise himself to that temper

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and disposition of mind, so to subdue his lusts, and govern his passions, to bridle his tongue, and order all the actions of his life, as is necessary to qualify him for happiness, and to make him fit to be admitted into the kingdom of GOD.

And this difficulty is chiefly in our selves, but greatly increased by temptation and opposition from without: chiefly, I say, in our selves, from the strong bias of our evil and corrupt inclinations, and the strong power of vicious habits and customs, which when they are grown inveterate, do tyrannize over us, and make us perfect slaves, and lead us captive at their pleasure; so that our nature must be quite chang'd, and as the apostle expresseth it, we must be "renewed in the spirit of our minds," our souls must be new moulded and fashioned, we must be, as it were, created, and born again, before we can enter into the kingdom of GOD. In this our SAVIOUR is positive and peremptory, John iii. 33. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of GOD." This difficulty indeed is greatest at first, but it is considerable afterwards, 'till a thorough change be made, and new inclinations planted in us, and the contrary habits of grace and virtue be super-induced.

And that which increaseth the difficulty is outward temptation and opposition from the world, and the devil; which to withstand and resist, requires great courage and resolution, great watchfulness and guard over our selves. But yet for our comfort, these difficulties are not insuperable to that grace and assistance, which GOD is always ready to afford to us upon so good an occasion, and to so good

a purpose; “ greater is he that is in you, than he that ^{S E R M. 1} “ is in the world.” And this, I am sure, is matter ^{XCV.} of great encouragement to us, that tho’ the difficulty of “ working out our salvation” be great, yet if we do in good earnest set about it, GOD is ready to assist and second our sincere endeavours, “ to work in us “ both to will and to do of his own goodness,” and so to prevent us with his gracious favour, and to further us with his continual aid, that finally by his mercy we may obtain eternal life

Thirdly, another powerful argument to care and diligence, is the fatal danger of miscarriage in a matter of so great concernment. We may do many things in religion, and take some pains to get to heaven, and yet fall short of it. The rich young man in the gospel, our SAVIOUR tells us, was “ not “ far from the kingdom of GOD,” and he broke with our SAVIOUR only upon one point, he was too much addicted to the world, and loth to part with his great possessions, and distribute them in charity to the poor, and thereupon he left our SAVIOUR, and for any thing we can find, never returned to him again.

If the world govern and bear sway in our hearts, if we “ mind earthly things” first, and make these our chief care and design, “ the kingdom of GOD “ and his righteousness shall not be added unto us;” if we will not mind them in the first place, they are too good to be accessaries.

And if upon any one point we miscarry, either out of love to the world, or affection to any other lust or vice that we are loth to part withal, our miscarriage is fatal, and the ruin which we bring upon
our

our selves irreparable; for the soul once lost, is lost for ever. If we have neglected the opportunity of “working out our own salvation,” while we are in this world, it will never return into our power again, death will shut the door against us, and we shall never “see the kingdom of God.”

Fourthly, it is a mighty encouragement to us to consider, that if we sincerely “seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” there is not only a fair probability of obtaining them, but all the security we can desire. Men may be in good earnest for the things of this World, may love them with all their hearts and souls (as we see too many do) and seek them with all their might and strength, and yet after all their endeavours may be shamefully frustrated and disappointed of their end. There are many examples of this kind daily before our eyes, and yet men are not discouraged from seeking these things. A fair probability, nay almost a possibility of attaining them, is enough to a worldly-minded man to drudge and toil for them. Why the same affection, the same zeal, the same unwearied endeavour to please God, and to save our souls, would infallibly bring us to heaven. {It was a sad but true saying of cardinal Wolsey, when he was leaving the world, “had I been but as careful to please God, as I have been to serve my prince, he would not have forsaken me now in the time of my gray hairs.”

Nay, it is to be hoped, that less diligence and care about the concerns of our souls, and another life, than many men use about the things of this life, will secure our eternal happiness, or else it is to be feared, that but very few would be saved; and who

would

would not place his industry and endeavour upon a design in which he is sure not to miscarry, if he do but heartily and in good earnest pursue it? especially when it will be of infinite greater advantage to him, than any design he can propound to himself for this world.

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If a man may be certainly happy for ever, upon the same, or easier terms, than he can ordinarily compass any of those little designs which men propose to themselves in this world, who would not seek that which is most worthy the having, and which he is surest to obtain?

Fifthly, and lastly, the encouragement here in the text is not inconsiderable; that if “we seek the kingdom of GOD and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto us.” This certainly is a very tempting consideration; for who would not be glad to reconcile the enjoyment of this world with the hopes of heaven, and eternal happiness? But men do not generally like our SAVIOUR’S method, they would seek the things of this world in the first place, and get to heaven at last; they would be content to seek the one, and have the other cast in and conferred upon them, without their seeking. But this will not be granted, this way will not do. And yet our SAVIOUR has gone as far as one would think could in reason be desired; he hath promised that if we will make religion, and the salvation of our souls, our first and chief care, that “all these things shall be added unto us.” So that the design of going to heaven, and being happy for ever, is no ways inconsistent with a competent portion of the things of this life. “Godliness (the apostle tells us) hath the promise of this life, and of that which is to come.” The business of religion, the practice of a holy and virtuous

virtuous life, is no hindrance to a man's thriving in his temporal estate; nay, in many respects it is apt to promote and advance it; by engaging us to diligence in our calling, and by deriving the blessing of God upon our honest and lawful endeavours; by obliging us to the strict and constant practice of truth and justice, and fidelity in all our dealings and commerce, which are the best way to establish a clear and solid reputation, and good esteem among men, which is an unspeakable advantage in business, and, at the long run, one of the best and most lasting instruments of prosperity and success.

Besides, that religion frees a man from those passions and vices, which do naturally tend to dissipate and ruin mens estates; as intemperance and lewdness, which are every way chargeable vices, and do not only take men off from business, and render them unfit for it; but waste their estates, and bring many other inconveniences upon their persons and families. Religion makes men meek and peaceable, and inoffensive in word and deed, which is a great security against chargeable suits and contentions, and all sorts of injuries and affronts from others. Among all the beatitudes of our SAVIOUR, he only promiseth temporal happiness to meekness, "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." They who provoke and offend no body, are likely to be the least disturbed and disquieted by others in their possessions and enjoyments; "who will harm you (saith the apostle, 1 Pet. iii. 13.) if ye be followers of that which is good?" Some may be so perverse as to persecute a man for his goodness; but it rarely happens; most men have not only a kindness, but a veneration for true goodness.

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By all these ways religion naturally tends to the temporal prosperity of men, and the promoting of their welfare and happiness even in this world; besides that the providence of GOD is very peculiarly concerned for good men, and a special blessing attends them in all their undertakings. So that excepting the case of persecution (which GOD will particularly consider, and reward in another world) the religious and good man, who sincerely “seeks the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness,” stands as fair, and is upon as good terms, for all the lawful enjoyments of this world, as he that makes it his only design to be rich and great in this world; nay, as to the necessaries of this life, and a competency of outward things, he hath a much greater and better security from the providence and promise of GOD, than the men of the world have by all their care and pains.

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Besides, that he hath this considerable advantage, by minding these things only as accessaries, that if he miss of them, he hath something better to support him in the want of them; being secure of a happiness which this world can neither give nor take from him. But now the worldly man, if he be defeated in his designs, is of all men most miserable, because he hath nothing else to comfort him, nothing else to trust to; he fails of his hopes as to this world, and hath done what in him lies to make his case desperate as to the other.

Upon all these considerations and encouragements, you see how reasonable it is, that we should make religion, and the concernment of another life, our great care and business. And yet how are these neglected by the greatest part of mankind! and by the best of us

(God knows) not minded as they ought, and as they deserve! What can we say for ourselves in excuse of so intolerable a folly? There are two or three things which men commonly pretend, if not in justification, yet in mitigation and excuse of this great neglect.

First, they pretend great difficulties and discouragements in the ways of religion. This I have already acknowledged to be true, so far as to awaken our care, and to whet our industry; but by no means to make us despond and give over all care of so great a concernment, because of the difficulties it is attended withal. Men who have no mind to a thing are apt to imagine great difficulties in the attaining of it, and to magnify them in their fancies beyond reason. As the people of Israel, when they were to enter into Canaan (which was the type of the kingdom of heaven) represented the inhabitants of the land, whom they were to conquer, more terrible than in truth they were; reporting to one another, that the land was full of giants, and sons of Anak, men of prodigious stature, and cities walled up to heaven. And this the wise man observes to be the perpetual excuse of the slothful; when they have no mind to a thing, they say "there is a lion in the way;" that is, they fancy to themselves dangers and terrors which are not. Thus men who are averse from religion, and have no mind to be at the trouble and pains to get to heaven, are apt to complain of the monstrous and insuperable difficulties of religion, and how hard it is for a man to mortify his lusts, and subdue his appetites, and govern his passions, and to do all those things which are necessary to bring him to heaven. Well! it is acknowledged

knowledged to be difficult, and is it not so to get an estate, and to rise to any thing in this world? The true pains which men take about these things, shew that they are difficult; only when men have a mind to a thing, and their heart is set upon it, they do not stand to complain of the difficulty, but buckle to it, and grapple with it.

Is religion difficult? and what is not so, that is good for any thing? is not the law a difficult and crabbed study? does it not require great labour, and perpetual drudging to excel in any kind of knowledge, to be master of any art or profession. In a word, is there any thing in the world worthy the having, that is to be gotten without pains? and is eternal life and glory the only slight and inconsiderable thing, that is not worth our care and industry? Is it fit that so great a good should be exposed to the faint and idle wishes, to the cheap and lazy endeavours of slothful men? For what reason? nay, with what conscience can we bid less for heaven and eternal life, than men are contented to give for the things of the world; things of no value in comparison, not worthy the toiling for, not sure to be attained by all our endeavours; things which “perish in the using,” and which, when we have them, we are liable to be deprived of by a thousand accidents? one fit of a fever may shatter our understandings, and confound all our knowledge, and turn us into fools and idiots; an inundation or a fire may sweep away and devour our estates; a succession of calamities may in a few hours make the richest and greatest man as poor as Job, and set him upon a dunghil.

But be the difficulty what it will of attaining “the
“king-

“kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness,” they are to be fought at any rate; because they are absolutely necessary, and we miserable and undone if we have them not. And therefore not to dissemble in the matter, the difficulties of religion are considerable; but then they are much greater at first, and will every day abate and grow less, and the work by degrees will become easy, and turn into pleasure and delight; a pleasure so great, as none knows but he that hath it; and he that hath it, would not exchange it for all the sensual pleasures and enjoyments of this world.

Secondly, others pretend want of time for the minding of so great a work, and 'tis very true, that all persons have not equal leisure for this purpose; some are much more straitned than others, and more taken up with the necessary cares of this life: but GOD hath put no man upon this hard necessity, that for want of time he shall be forced to neglect his body and his health, his family and estate, to save his soul. And yet if any man were brought to this distress, it were well worth his while to secure his eternal salvation, tho' it were with the neglect and loss of all other things. But those who are most straitned for time, have so much as is absolutely necessary: for there is a considerable part of religion which does not require time, but resolution and care: not to commit sin, not to break the laws of GOD, not to be intemperate, “to
“make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts
“thereof,” does not spend time, but saves it for better purposes; so that every man hath time not to do that which he ought not to do: and for the positive part of religion, whether it consists in the exercise of our minds, or in the external acts of religion:

no man is so distressed, but he hath time to think of heaven, and eternity ; time to love God, to esteem him, and delight in him above all things. And this a man may do very frequently, and very acceptably, while he is labouring and travelling about his worldly affairs, while his hand is upon the plough, his heart may be with God ; and while he converseth here upon earth, his thoughts and affections may be in heaven. Every man hath time to pray to God every day, for his mercy and forgiveness, for his grace and assistance, for his preservation and support, and to thank him heartily for all his blessings and benefits. And a little time seriously employed in this kind, would have the same acceptance with God, as the more solemn and longer devotions of those who have more leisure and opportunities for them. To be sure we have all of us time to serve God upon his own day, and to employ it wholly in the exercises of piety, and in the care and consideration of our souls.

But this, when all is said, is the case but of a very few ; most of us have no colour for this complaint ; *non inopes temporis, sed prodigi sumus*, (as Seneca says) “ we are not poor, but prodigal of our time, “ and lavish it away profusely upon folly and vanity.” Our vices and lusts, our pleasures and diversions, consume and divert those precious hours, which should be employed to these better purposes ; nay many times time oppresseth us, and is a burden to us, and lies upon our hands, and we know not how to get rid of it ; and yet we choose rather to let it run waste, than to bestow it upon religion, and the care of our souls ; insomuch that I fear this will be
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the condition of many, that when they were at a loss what to do with their time, and knew not how to spend it, they would not lay it out upon that which was best and most necessary; for this surely is the very best use that can be made of time, to prepare and provide for eternity.

Thirdly, others pretend it will be time enough to mind these things hereafter. But this (as bad excuses seldom hang together, and agree with one another) directly contradicts the former pretence, which supposeth so much time necessary, and more than many have to spare; and yet now they would make us believe that a very little time will suffice for this work, that it may be done at any time, even just when we are going out of this world. But this, of all other, is the strangest interpretation of “seeking the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness first,” to put it off to the very last. This surely is a greater error on the other hand, to think that the business of religion is so quickly to be dispatched, and that the great work of our lives can be crowded into so narrow a corner of it, that the time of sickness and old age, nay, the hour of death, well employed to this purpose, will be sufficient. Alas! what can we then do that is good for any thing? that can in reason be thought either acceptable to GOD, or available for our selves? when we have not sense and understanding enough to dispose of our temporal concernments, and to make our wills, do we think we shall be fit to repent of the sins and miscarriages of our whole lives, and to make our peace with GOD? every man must not expect to have Saul’s fortune, who when he was wearied with seek-

ing his father's asses, met with a kingdom. We must not think when we are tired with pursuing the follies and vanities of this world, to retire into heaven, and "to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." SERM.
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Our SAVIOUR hath taken care to caution us against this desperate folly, by a parable to this very purpose, of the foolish virgins, who having trifled away their time till the bridegroom was coming, and neglected to get oil into their lamps, (by which we are to understand all those good preparations and dispositions which are necessary to qualify us for the kingdom of God) I say, having neglected their opportunity of getting this oil, while they were looking after it too late, the door was shut against them; they thought to have repaired all at last, by borrowing of others, and supplying themselves that way.

And thus many deceive themselves, hoping to be supplied out of another store, when they have no grace and goodness of their own; out of the treasure of the church, from the redundant merit of the saints, and their works of supererogation; of which some believe (I know not for what reason) that there is a great stock which the pope may dispose of, to supply those who have taken no care to get oil into their lamps. But I know not for what reason works of supererogation are supposed; the wise virgins knew not of any merit they had to spare, it was the foolish virgins only that entertained this senseless conceit. I am sure the parable insinuates the quite contrary, that the best and holiest persons (which are represented by the wise virgins) have nothing

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thing to spare for the supply of others, who have been careless of their souls; “the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out; but the wise answered, saying, not so, lest there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for your selves.” It seems they had no works of supererogation that they knew of, but they do ironically send them to a market that was set up somewhere, and where these things were pretended to be sold; but how they sped, the conclusion of the parable tells us, that whilst they were running about in great haste to make this purchase of the merits and good works of others, “the bridegroom came,” and the wise virgins that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the rest were shut out.

And there are those likewise among our selves, who having been careless to qualify themselves for the kingdom of GOD, hope to be supplied out of the infinite treasures of CHRIST’s merits: but this also is a vain hope. For tho’ there be merit enough in the death and sufferings of CHRIST, to save mankind, yet no man can lay claim thereto, who does not perform the conditions of the gospel.

Others think by sending for the minister, when the physician hath given them over, to receive in few hours such advice and direction, as will do their business, as effectually, as if they had minded religion all their lives long; and that a few devout prayers said over them when they are just embarking for another world, will, like a magical wind, immediately waft them over into the regions of bliss and immortality.

But

But let us not deceive our selves ; we may defer the business so long, 'till we shall get nothing by our late application to GOD, and crying to him, " LORD, LORD, open unto us," but that severe answer, " depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I know ye not whence ye are." If we would not have this our doom, let us " first seek the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness;" that so, " having our fruit unto holiness, our end may be everlasting life."

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The wisdom of religion.

P S A L. cxix. 96.

I have seen end of of all perfection ; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

THis psalm seems to have a great deal more of poetical number and skill in it, than at this distance from the time and age in which it was written, we can easily understand : the main scope and design of it is very plain and obvious ; namely, to magnify the law of GOD, and the observation of its precepts, as that wherein true religion doth mainly consist. And indeed if we attentively read and consider it, every part of this psalm does with great variety of expression, and yet very little difference of the sense, descant upon the same ground, viz. the excellency and perfection of the law of GOD. And the words of the text seem to be as full and

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comprehensive of the sense and design of the whole psalm, as any one sentence in it; “ I have seen an
“ end of all perfection, but thy commandment is ex-
“ ceeding broad.”

These words are variously rendered, and understood by interpreters, who yet in this variety do very much conspire and agree in the same sense. The chaldee paraphrase renders the words thus, “ I have seen an
“ end of all things, about which I have employ’d
“ my care; but thy commandment is very large.” The Syriac version thus, “ I have seen an end of all
“ regions and countries” (that is, I have found the compass of this habitable world to be finite and limited) “ but thy commandment is of a vast extent.” Others explain it thus, “ I have seen an end of all
“ perfection;” that is, of all the things of this world, which men value and esteem at so high a rate; of all worldly wisdom and knowledge, of wealth and honour, and greatness, which do all perish and pass away; “ but thy law is eternal, and still abideth
“ the same;” or, as the scripture elsewhere expresseth it, “ the word of the LORD endureth for ever.”

Thy law; that is, the rule of our duty natural and revealed; or, in a word, religion, which consists in the knowledge and practice of the laws of GOD, is of greater perfection, than all other things which are so highly valued in this world: for the perfection of it is infinite, and of a vast influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole man, to the happiness of body and soul, to our whole duration both in this world, and the next, of this life, and of that which is to come. And this will clearly appear, if we consider the reasonableness and the wisdom of religion, which
consists

consists in the knowledge of GOD, and the keeping of his laws.

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First, the reasonableness of religion, which is able to give a very good account of it self, because it settles the mind of man upon a firm basis, and keeps it from rolling in perpetual uncertainty; whereas atheism and infidelity wants a stable foundation, it centers no where but in the denial of GOD and religion, and yet substitutes no principle, no tenable and constituent scheme of things in the place of them; its whole business is to unravel all things, to unsettle the mind of man, and to shake all the common notions and received principles of mankind; it bends its whole force to pull down and to destroy, but lays no foundation to build any thing upon, in the stead of that which it pulls down.

It runs upon that great absurdity which Aristotle (who was always thought a great master of reason) does every where decry, as a principle unworthy of a philosopher; namely, a progress of causes *in infinitum*, and without end; that this was the cause of that, and a third thing of that, and so on without end, which amounts to just nothing; and finally resolves an infinite number of effects into no first cause; than which nothing can be more unskilful and bungling, and less worthy of a philosopher. But this I do not intend at present to insist upon, having treated largely on the same subject upon another * occasion. I shall therefore proceed in the

Second place, to consider the wisdom of religion, “the fear of the LORD is wisdom”, so saith the psalmist; it is true wisdom indeed, it is “the begin-

* Vide Sermon 1st, of the first Volume published by the Author.

“ning of wisdom,” *caput sapientiæ*, the top and perfection of all wisdom. Here true wisdom begins, and upon this foundation it is raised and carried on to perfection; and I shall in my following discourse endeavour to make out these two things.

First, that true wisdom begins and is founded in religion, in the fear of GOD, and in the keeping of his commandments.

Secondly, that this is the perfection of wisdom; there is no wisdom without this, nor beyond it.

First, true wisdom begins and is founded in religion, and the fear of GOD, and regard to his laws. This is the first principle of wisdom, and the foundation upon which the whole design of our happiness is to be built. This is in the first place to be supposed, and to be taken into consideration in all the designs and actions of men: this is to govern our whole life, and to have a main influence upon all the affairs and concernments of it. As the first principle of humane society, and that which is to run thro’ the whole frame of it, is the publick good; this was always to be taken into consideration, and to give law to all laws and constitutions about it: so religion is the first principle of humane wisdom, by which all our actions are to be conducted and governed; and all wisdom which does not begin here, and lay religion for its foundation, is preposterous, and begins at the wrong end; and is just as if in the forming of humane society, every one in the settlement of the constitution, and the framing of laws, should have an eye to his own private and particular advantage, without regard to the publick good, which is the great end of society, and the rule and measure of government and laws,

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and in the last issue and result of things, the only way to procure the settled welfare, and to secure the lasting interests of particular persons, so far as that is consistent with the publick good. And it would be a very preposterous policy to go about to found humane society upon any other terms, and would certainly end in mischief and confusion.

And such is all the wisdom of men, in relation to their true happiness, which does not begin with religion, and lay its foundation there: which does not take into consideration God and his providence, and a future state of rewards and punishments after this life. All wisdom which does not proceed upon a supposition of the truth and reality of these principles, will certainly end in shame and disappointment, in misery and ruin; because it builds a house upon the sand, which when it comes to be tried by storms of weather, and assaulted by violent storms, will undoubtedly fall, and the fall of it will be great.

And this error every man commits, who pursues happiness by following his own inclination, and gratifying his irregular desires, without any consideration of God, and of the restraint which his laws have laid upon us, not for his own pleasure, but for our good. For when all things are duly consider'd, and all accounts cast up, it will appear upon a just calculation of things, that all the restraints which the laws of God lay upon men, are highly reasonable, and greatly for their benefit and advantage, and do not abridge us of any true pleasure or happiness; but are wise and merciful provisions of heaven, to prevent our harm and mischief; so that we are not wise, if we act without regard to God, and his laws, and are
not

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not willing to be govern'd by him, who loves us better than we do ourselves, and truly designs our happiness, and commands us nothing but what directly tends to it. For the laws of GOD are not arbitrary constitutions, and mere instances of sovereign will and power; but wise rules and means to procure and advance our happiness.

And in like manner, all that wisdom which men use to compass their worldly designs, of riches and greatness, without consideration of the providence of GOD, and dependence upon it for the success of our affairs, is all perfect folly and mistake. For tho' the design be never so well laid, and vigorously prosecuted, and no means which humane wisdom can devise for the attaining of our end, have been omitted by us; yet if we leave GOD out of the account, we forget that which is principal, and signifies more to the success of any design, than all other things put together. For if GOD favours our designs, the most improbable shall take effect; and if he blow upon them the most likely shall miscarry. Whenever he pleaseth to interpose to cross the counsels and designs of men, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to all."

So that it is great folly not to consider the providence of GOD in all our designs and undertakings, not to implore his favour and blessing, without which nothing that we take in hand can prosper. That which is principal to any purpose, ought to be considered in the first place, nothing being to be attempted either without or against it. And such is the providence

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dence of GOD in all humane affairs; it is more considerable to the promoting or hindring of any event, than all things in the world besides; and therefore all policy, which sets aside GOD and his providence, is vain; because “there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the LORD.”

So likewise all that wisdom which only considers and regards this short life, and the narrow concerns of it, and makes provision only for our welfare in this world; and therefore can only be tempted with the hopes of temporal advantages, and terrified only with the danger of temporal evils and sufferings; but hath no sense of an immortal spirit within us, no prospect of a life after death, no consideration of a happy or miserable eternity, of rewards and punishments, infinitely greater than all the temptations and terrors of time and sense; I say, all this is a preposterous and pernicious wisdom, and proceeds upon a false supposition, and a quite contrary scheme of things to what really is; and consequently our whole life, and all the designs and actions of it do run upon a perpetual mistake, and a false stating of our own case; and whatever we do pursuant to this mistake is foolish and hurtful, and so far from conducing to our true interest, that it is all either besides it, or contrary to it; because we act upon a supposal only of this life, and a being only in this world, and that there is nothing either to be feared or hoped for beyond it; and being thus grossly mistaken, we set our hearts only upon temporal things, and study our present security and satisfaction, and in all our counsels and actions are swayed only by the consideration of temporal good and evil, of the present ease and pleasure, the disturbance and pain of
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SERM. XCVI. our fleshly and sensual parts; without any sense of our own immortality and of that everlasting state which remains for us in another world.

But there is (my brethren) most certainly, there is another life after this; we are not beasts, if we do not make ourselves so; and if we die, we shall not die like them, neither shall our last end be like theirs. For whatever we may think or wish, it shall not be in our power to extinguish our own beings when we have a mind to be rid of them, and to choose whether or no we shall live for ever.

And if this be a false scheme of things which we have framed to ourselves, and proceeded upon (as undoubtedly it is) then our whole life is one great error, and a perpetual mistake, and we are quite wrong in all that we design to do. Our wisdom hath begun at the wrong end, and we have made a false calculation and account of things, and have put our case otherwise than it is; and the farther we proceed upon this mistake, our miscarriage will be so much the more fatal in the issue. But if our wisdom begin at the right end, and our case be truly stated, that God hath put into these frail and mortal bodies of ours, immortal spirits that shall live for ever; and hath sent us into this world to sojourn here for a little while, and to be disciplined and trained up for eternity; and that after a short proof and trial of our obedience, we shall be translated into an everlasting state of unspeakable happiness or misery, according as we have demeaned ourselves in this world; if we believe this to be truly our case, our interest is then plainly before us, and we see where our happiness lies, and what remains for us to do,

do, in order to the obtaining of it, and what we are to expect to suffer if we do it not.

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Now this foundation being laid, it is evident, that the best thing we can do for ourselves, is to provide for our future state, and to secure the everlasting happiness of another life. And the best way to do that, is to live in obedience to those laws which our maker and our sovereign hath prescribed to us; and according to which he will one day sentence us to eternal rewards or punishments.

It is evident likewise, that all our sensual appetites and desires are to be bounded by the rules of reason and virtue, which are the laws of GOD; and that no present ease and pleasure, trouble and suffering, are to be considered and regarded by us, in competition with the things which are eternal; and that sin is of all other the greatest evil, and most mischievous to our main interest, and therefore with all possible care to be avoided; and that the favour of GOD is to be sought, and the salvation of our souls to be provided for at any pains and expence whatsoever, and even with the hazard and loss of our dearest interests in this world, yea and of life itself.

And now if this matter hath been rightly stated, then religion, and the fear of GOD, is the first principle and foundation of true wisdom, and that which we are to consider, and take along with us in all the designs and actions of our lives, and all wisdom which does not begin here, is preposterous, and will prove folly in the issue.

Secondly, as religion is the beginning of wisdom, so it is the perfection of it, it is the highest point of wisdom in which we can be instructed. “ The fear

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“ of the LORD (says Solomon, Prov. xv. 33.) is the instruction of wisdom.” “ A good understanding (says David, Psal. cxi. 10.) have all they that do his commandments.” The practice of religion is the perfection of wisdom; and he understands himself best, who lives most according to the Laws of GOD. And this I might shew, by instancing in particular virtues, the practice whereof is much wiser, and every way more for our interest, than the contrary vices; but this is too large an argument to engage in, and therefore I shall content my self at present, briefly to shew, that the chief characters and properties of wisdom do all meet in religion, and agree to it.

The first point of wisdom is to understand our true interest, and to be right in our main end; and in this, religion will best instruct and direct us. And if we be right in our main end, and true to the interest of it, we cannot miscarry; but if a man mistake in this, he errs fatally, and his whole life is vanity and folly.

Another property of wisdom is to be steady and vigorous in the prosecution of our main end, to oblige us hereto, religion gives us the most powerful arguments, the glorious happiness, and the dismal misery of another world.

The next point of wisdom is, to make all things stoop, and become subservient to our main end. And wherever religion bears sway, it will make all other things subordinate to the salvation of our souls, and the interests of our everlasting happiness; as the men of this world make every thing to submit and give way to their covetous, and ambitious, and sensual designs.

Another part of wisdom is to consider the future, and to look to the last end and issue of things. It is

a common folly among men, to be so intent upon the present as to have little or no regard to the future, to what will be hereafter. Men design and labour for this present life, and their short continuance here in this world, without taking into serious consideration their main duration, and their eternal abode in another world. But religion gives us a clear prospect of a life after death, and overlooks time, and makes eternity always present to us, and minds us of making timely provision and preparation for it. It takes into consideration our whole duration, and inspires us with wisdom, to look to the end of things, and to what will be hereafter, as well as to what is present.

It is likewise a great property of wisdom, to secure the main chance, and to run no hazard in that. And this religion directs us to take care of, because the neglect of it will prove fatal.

Another mark of wisdom is, to lay hold of opportunities, those especially, which, when they are once past, will never return again. There are some seasons wherein great things may be done, which if they be let slip, are never to be retrieved. A wise man will lay hold of these, and improve them; and religion inculcates this principle of wisdom upon us, that this life is the opportunity of doing great things for ourselves, and of making ourselves for ever; this very day and hour may, for ought we know, be the last and only opportunity of repentance, and making our peace with GOD: therefore "to day, whilst it is called to day," let us set about this necessary work, "lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;" to-morrow it may be too late to begin

it, and the justice of God may cut us off whilst we are wilfully delaying it; and the opportunities of saving our immortal souls, may vanish, and be for ever hid from our eyes.

The next property of wisdom, is to foresee dangers, and to take timely care to prevent them. “The prudent man (saith Solomon) foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself;” that is, shelters and secures himself against it; “but the simple pass on, and are punished;” that is, the evil overtakes them, and their folly is punished in their fatal ruin. Now the greatest danger is from the greatest power; even from “him who is able to save and to destroy;” “I will tell you (says the wisdom of God) whom ye shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell.”

Again, another main point of wisdom, is to do as little as we can to be repented of, trusting rather to the wisdom of prevention, than to that of remedy. Religion first teacheth men innocency, and not to offend; but in case we do, (as “in many things we offend all”) it then directs us to repentance, as the only remedy. But this certainly is folly, to sin in hopes of repentance, that is, first to make work for repentance, and then run the hazard of it; for we may certainly sin, but it is not certain that we shall repent. And if it were, yet it is great folly to lay in beforehand, and to make work for trouble; *na tu stultus hominico es, qui malis veniam precari, quàm non peccare,* was a wise saying of old Cato; “thou art (says he) a silly man indeed, who choosest rather to ask forgiveness, than not to offend.” If a man had the best remedy in the world, he would not make himself

self sick to try the virtue of it; and it is a known comparison, and a very fit one, that repentance is *tabula post naufragium*, “a plank after shipwreck;” but I am greatly afraid that thousands of souls who have trusted to it, have perished before they could get to land, with this plank in their arms.

The last character of wisdom I shall mention is, in all things to consult the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, without which nothing else can make us happy; and this obedience to the laws of God does naturally procure. “Great peace have they (says David) that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.” “The work of righteousness,” says the prophet, “shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.” The fear of God, and the keeping of his commandments, is the best preservative against the troubles of a guilty conscience, and the terrifying apprehensions of a future judgment. And this is the great wisdom of religion, that whosoever liveth according to the rules and precepts of it, prevents the chief causes of discontent, and lays the surest foundation of a perpetual satisfaction of mind, a jewel of inestimable price, which none knows but he that has it; and he that hath it, knows the value of it too well to part with it for “the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season,” and which always prove “bitterness in the end” and for the little sweetness which they yielded, leave a terrible sting behind them.

Thus have I briefly represented the reasonableness and wisdom of religion. It is of infinite perfection, and of a vast influence and extent, it reacheth to the whole man, the happiness of soul and body; and to

our whole duration, the happiness of this world and the next; for “godliness (that is, true religion and “piety) hath the promise of this life, and of that “which is to come.”

But now where are the effects of true religion, in the full compass and extent of it, to be found? such real effects as do in any measure bear a proportion to the power and perfection of their cause? for nothing certainly is more excellent and amiable in its definition than true religion is; but, alas! how imperfect is it in the subject? I mean in us, who ought to shew forth the power and perfection of it, in the practice and actions of our lives, the best demonstration of the excellent frame and temper of our minds.

What a conflict and struggling do the best men find between their inclination and their duty? how hard to reconcile our practice and our knowledge, and to make our lives to agree with the reason of our minds, and the clear conviction of our consciences? how difficult for a man in this dangerous and imperfect state, to be in any measure either so wise or so good as he ought? how rare is it for man to be good-natur'd, gentle and easy to be intreated, without being often betray'd into some weakness and sinful compliances, especially in the bad company of our betters? how next to impossible is it to be strict and severe in our lives, without being sour? to govern our lives with that perpetual caution, and to maintain that evenness of temper, as not to be sometimes peevish and passionate? and when we are so, not to be apt to say with Jonah, “we do well to be angry?”

There are two precepts in the new testament, that seem to me to be the nicest of all other, and hardest

to be put in practice. One is that of our blessed SAVIOUR, "be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves." S E R M.
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how hard is it to hit upon the just temper of wisdom and innocency; to be wise, and hurt no body; to be innocent, without being silly? the other is, that of the apostle, "be angry and sin not." How difficult is this, never to be angry but upon just cause? and when the cause of our anger is just, not to be transported beyond due bounds, either as to the degree of our anger, or as to the duration and continuance of it; this is so very nice a matter, that one would be almost tempted to think that this were in effect a prohibition of anger in any case; "be ye angry, and sin not;" be ye so, if ye can without sin. I believe whosoever observes it, will find that it is as easy to suppress this passion at any time, as to give way to it, without offending in one kind, or other. But to proceed,

How hard a matter is it, to be much in company, and free in conversation, and not to be infected by it? to live in the midst of a wicked world, and yet to keep ourselves free from the vices of it? to be temperate in the use of things pleasing, so as neither to injure our health, nor to lose the use of our reason, nor to offend against conscience? to fast often, without being conceited of it, and bargaining as it were with GOD for some greater liberties in another kind; and without censuring those who do not tie up themselves to our strict rules either of piety or abstinence? when perhaps they have neither the same opportunities of doing it, nor the same reason to do it that we have; nay perhaps have a much better reason for not doing just as we do: for no
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man is to prescribe to others his own private method, either of fasting, or of devotion, as if he were the rule, and his example a kind of proclamation, enjoining all his neighbours the same days of fasting and prayer which he himself, for reasons best known to himself, thinks fit to observe.

And then how hard is it to be chearful without being vain? and grave and serious, without being morose? to be useful and instructive to others, in our conversation and discourse, without assuming too much authority to our selves? which is not the best and most effectual way of doing good to others; there being something in the nature of man, which had rather take a hint and intimation from another, to advise himself, and would rather choose to imitate the silent good example which they see in another, than to have either his advice or his example imposed upon them.

How difficult it is to have a mind equal to every condition, and to be content with mean and moderate things? to be patient in adversity, and humble in prosperity, and meek upon sudden and violent provocations? to keep our passions free from getting head of our reason, and our zeal from out-running our knowledge? to have a will perfectly submitted and resigned to the will of GOD, even when it lies cross and thwart to ours, so that whatever pleases GOD, should please us? to be resolute, when our duty happens to be difficult and dangerous; or even to believe that to be our duty (tho' it certainly be so) which is very inconvenient for us to do? to hold out and be unwearied in well-doing? to be careful to preserve our lives, and yet upon a great occasion,
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and whenever GOD calls for them, to be content to lay them down ?

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To be wise and innocent ; “ men in understanding,” and yet “ in malice children ? ” to have many great virtues, and not to want that which gives the great lustre to them all, I mean real and unaffected modesty, and humility ? In short,

How difficult is it, “ to have regard to all GOD’s commandments, and to hate every evil and false way ? ” to have our duty continually in our eye, and ready to be put into practice upon every proper occasion ? to have GOD, and the consideration of another world always before us, present to our minds, and operative upon our practice ? to live as those that know they must die, and to have our thoughts perpetually awake, and intent upon the great and everlasting concerns of our immortal souls ?

These are great things indeed, easy to be talked of, but hard to be done ; nay not to be done at all, without frequent and fervent prayer to GOD, and the continual aids and supplies of his grace ; not without an earnest endeavour on our parts, a vigorous resistance of temptations, and many a sore conflict with our own perverse wills and sensual inclinations ; not without a perpetual guard and watchfulness over our lives, and our unruly appetites and passions.

Little do unexperienced men, and those who have taken no great pains with themselves, imagine what thought and consideration, what care and attention, what resolution and firmness of mind, what diligence and “ patient continuance in well-doing,”

are requisite to make a truly good man ; such a one as St. Paul describes, that is, “ perfect and entire, “ and wanting nothing ; ” that “ follows God “ fully ; ” and fulfils every part of his duty, “ having a conscience void of offence towards God, and “ towards man.” Who is there among us, that is either wise enough for his own direction, or good enough for the peace and satisfaction of his own mind ; that is so happy as to know his duty, and to do it ; as to have both the understanding and the will to do in all things as he ought ?

After our best care, and all our pains and endeavours, the most of us will still find a great many defects in our lives, and cannot but discern great and manifold imperfections in our very best duties and services ; insomuch that we shall be forced to make the same acknowledgment concerning them, which Solomon does concerning the imperfection of all things under the sun ; “ that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbred.” And when all is done, we have all of us reason to say, not only that “ we are “ unprofitable servants, having done nothing but “ what was our duty to do ; ” but have cause likewise, with great shame and confusion of face, to acknowledge that we have been in many respects “ wicked and slothful servants,” and so very far from having done what was “ our duty to do,” that the greatest part of the good which the most of us have done, is the least part of the good which we might and ought to have done.

The practice of religion, in all the parts and instances of our duty, is work more than enough for
the

the best and greatest mind, for the longest and best order'd life, "the commandment of GOD is exceeding broad;" and an obedience in any good measure equal to the extent of it, extremely difficult. And after all, as the man in the gospel said with tears to our SAVIOUR, concerning the weakness of his own faith, "LORD, I believe, help thou my unbelief," Mark ix. 24. So the best of men may say, and say it with tears too, concerning every grace and virtue wherein they excel most, "LORD, I aspire, I endeavour " after it, be thou pleased to assist my weakness, and " to help me by thy grace continually to do better."

The sum of all is this, if we be careful to do our best, and make it the constant and sincere endeavour of our lives to please GOD, and to keep his commandments, we shall be accepted of him: for GOD values this more than "whole burnt-offerings " and sacrifices," more than "thousands of rams, " and ten thousands of rivers of oil;" because this is an essential part of religion, "to love GOD with all " our hearts, and minds, and strength, and to love " our neighbours as our selves." The duties comprehended in these two great commandments, sincerely practised by us (though with a great deal of imperfection) will certainly be acceptable in the sight of GOD, in and through the merits and mediation of JESUS CHRIST the righteous. "Blessed are " they" (saith St. John very plainly, in the conclusion of that obscure book of his Revelation) "blessed " are they that do his commandments, that they " may have right to the tree of life," Rev. xxii. 14.

I speak now to a great many who are at the upper end of the world, and command all the pleasures

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fures and enjoyments of it; but the time is coming, and (whether we think of it or not) is very near at hand, when we shall “ see an end of all perfection,” and of all that is desirable upon earth, and upon which men are apt to value themselves so much in this world; and then nothing but religion, and the conscience of having done our duty to God and man, will stand us in stead, and yield true comfort to us. When we are going to leave the world, how shall we then wish that we had made religion the great business of our lives; and in the day of God’s grace and mercy, had exercised repentance, and made our peace with God, and prepared our selves for another world; that after our departure hence, we might be admitted into “ the presence of God, where is ful-
“ nefs of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures
“ for evermore.”

Let no man therefore, of what rank or condition soever he be in this world, think himself too great to be good, and too wise to be religious, and to take care of his immortal soul, and his everlasting happiness in another world; since nothing but this will approve it self to be true wisdom at the last. All other things will have an end with this life; but religion and the fear of God is of a vast extent, and hath an influence upon our whole duration, and, after the course of this life is ended, will put us into the secure possession of a happiness which shall never have an end.

I will conclude this whole discourse with those words of our blessed SAVIOUR, “ if ye know these
“ things, happy are ye if ye do them.” “ Which
“ thou, who art the eternal spring of truth and good-
“ nefs,

“ nefs, grant that we may all know and do in this
 “ our day, for thy mercies fake in JESUS CHRIST ;
 “ to whom, with the FATHER and the HOLY
 “ GHOST, be all honour and glory, dominion and
 “ power, now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XCVII.

The nature and influence of the
 promises of the gospel.

2 P E T E R i. 4.

*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious
 promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the
 divine nature.*

THE connexion of these words with the for-
 mer is somewhat obscure, but it seems to be
 this. The apostle had in the verse before
 said, “ that the divine power of CHRIST hath by
 “ the knowledge of the gospel given us all things
 “ that pertain to life and godliness;” that is by the
 knowledge of the gospel we are furnish’d with all
 advantages which conduce to make men happy in the
 next life, and religious in this ; and then it follows,
 “ whereby are given unto us exceeding great and
 “ precious promises.” whereby this seems to refer
 to the whole of the foregoing verse ; as if it had been
 said, “ CHRIST by the gospel hath given to us all
 “ things that conduce to our future happiness ; and
 “ in order thereto, all things which tend to make
 “ men holy and good.” Or else life and godliness
 are,

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 The first
 sermon on
 this text.

are, by a hebraism frequent in the new testament, put for a godly life. And then among all those things which conduce to a godly life, the apostle instanceth in the promises of the gospel which do so directly tend to make men “partakers of a divine nature.”

In the handling of these words, I shall,

First, consider the promises here spoken of; “whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.”

Secondly, the influence which these promises ought to have upon us; “that by these ye might be made partakers of a divine nature.”

First, we will consider the promises which are here spoken of; “whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.” And because the chief promises of the gospel are here intended, I shall take occasion from this text to handle the doctrine of the promises, which is frequently discours’d of in divinity, but not always so clearly stated. And to this purpose, it will be proper to take into consideration these four things.

I. What the promises are which are spoken of; “whereby are given unto us promises.”

II. Why they are said to be so great and precious; “exceeding great and precious promises.”

III. We will consider the tenor of these promises.

IV. When men are said to have a right to them, so as they may apply them to themselves. These four heads will comprehend what I have to say upon this argument.

I. What the promises are which the apostle here speaks of; “whereby are given unto us promises.” And no doubt, the apostle here intends those great and excellent

excellent promises which CHRIST hath made to us in the gospel. So that to satisfy our selves in this enquiry, we need only to consider what are the principal promises of the gospel. Now the great promises of the gospel are these three.

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1. The promise of the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance.

2. The promise of GOD'S grace and HOLY SPIRIT to assist our obedience.

3. The promise of eternal life to reward it.

1. The promise of the pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance. The gospel hath made full and clear promises to this purpose; that if we believe the gospel, and will forsake our sins, and amend our wicked lives, all that is past shall be forgiven us, and that CHRIST died for this end, to obtain for us remission of sins in his blood. The light of nature, upon consideration of the mercy and goodness of GOD, gave men good hopes, that upon their repentance GOD would forgive their sins, and turn away his wrath from them. But mankind was doubtful of this, and therefore they used expiatory sacrifices to appease the offended deity. The Jewish religion allowed of no expiation, but for legal impurities, and involuntary transgressions, such as proceeded from ignorance and inadvertency; but not for "sins of presumption," and such as were committed "with an high hand." If men sinn'd wilfully, there was no sacrifice appointed by the law for such sins. But the grace of the gospel justifies us from the greatest sins, upon our faith and sincere repentance. So St. Paul tells the Jews, Acts xiii. 38, 39. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and
"brethren,

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“ 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.” There was no general promise of pardon, nor way of expiation under the law; perfect remission of sins is clearly revealed, and ascertain’d to us only by the gospel.

2. Another great promise of the gospel, is the promise of GOD’S grace and HOLY SPIRIT to assist our obedience. Our blessed SAVIOUR hath promised, “ that our heavenly FATHER will give his HOLY “ SPIRIT to them that ask him.” ’Tis true indeed, there was a peculiar promise of the HOLY GHOST to the apostles and christians of the first ages, which is not now to be expected; namely, an extraordinary and miraculous power, whereby they were qualified to publish the gospel to the world, and to give confirmation to it. But now that the christian religion is propagated and settled in the world, the great end and use of these miraculous gifts is ceased: but yet the SPIRIT of GOD doth still concur with the gospel, and work upon the minds of men, to excite and assist them to that which is good. And tho’ this operation be very secret, so as we cannot give an account of the manner of it, yet the effects of it are very sensible, and this influence of GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT is common to all christians in all ages of the world. This proposition is universally true, and in all ages and times; “ if any man hath not the SPIRIT of CHRIST, he is none of his.”

It must be acknowledged, that the SPIRIT doth not now work upon men in that sudden and sensible manner,

manner, as it did in the first times of christianity; because then men were strongly possess'd with the prejudices of other religions, which they had been brought up in; and therefore as more outward means of conviction were then necessary, so likewise a more powerful internal operation of the SPIRIT of GOD upon the minds of men, to conquer and bear down those prejudices, and to subdue them to the obedience of faith. But now the principles of religion and goodness are more gradually instill'd into the minds of men, by the gentle degrees of pious instruction and education; and with these means the SPIRIT of GOD concurs in a more humane way, which is more suited and accommodated to our reason, and offers less violence to the nature of men. So that this promise of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT is now made good to us, as the necessity and circumstances of our present state do require. GOD does not use such extraordinary means for the producing of those effects, which may be accomplish'd in a more ordinary way. The assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT is still necessary to men, to incline and enable them to that which is good; but not in that manner and degree that it was necessary at first: because the prejudices against christianity are not now so great, and many of those advantages which were necessarily wanting at first, are now supplied in an ordinary way; and therefore it is not reasonable now to expect the same extraordinary operation of the SPIRIT of GOD upon the minds of men, which we read of in the first beginning of christianity.

3. There is likewise the promise of eternal life to reward and crown our obedience. And this the

scripture speaks of as the great promise of the gospel, 1 John ii. 25. "This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life." And upon this account, the new covenant of the gospel, is preferred before the old covenant of the law, because it is "established upon better promises." All the special and particular promises of the law were of temporal good things, and these were the great encouragements that were given to obedience, under that imperfect dispensation: but now "godliness hath not only the promise of the life that now is, but of that which is to come;" as the apostle tells us, 1 Tim. iv. 8. The gospel hath clearly revealed to us a happy state of immortality after this life, of which men had but very obscure and doubtful apprehensions. So the apostle tells us, 2 Tim. i. 10. "That it is now made manifest, by the appearance of our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Holy men had good hopes of it before; but they had no sure, distinct apprehensions of it, no such full assurance concerning it, no such clear and express promises of it, as the gospel hath given us.

Thus you see what those great promises are which the gospel hath given us, namely, the promise of the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance; the promise of GOD'S grace and HOLY SPIRIT to assist our obedience, and the promise of eternal life and happiness to reward it. These are the three eminent promises of the gospel, and in all probability those which the apostle here calls "great and precious promises," which brings me to the

IId Thing

The Thing which I propounded to consider, namely, SERM.
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 why they are said to be exceeding "great and pre-
 cious," τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, "the
 greatest and the most valuable promises." And
 to satisfy us that they are such, the very considera-
 tion of the blessings and benefits that they carry in
 them will be sufficient: if we consider the condition
 that mankind was in, when GOD was pleased to make
 these gracious declarations to us, we shall see great
 reason to set a high value upon every one of these
 promises. Mankind was extremely degenerated, "all
 flesh had corrupted its ways, and the whole world
 was guilty before GOD," and liable to all that mis-
 ery which the sinner had reason to apprehend from the
 incensed justice of the Almighty. We had forfeited
 that happiness to which our immortal nature was de-
 signed, and, which made our condition more sad, we
 were "without strength" to recover ourselves out of it,
 by our repentance for what was past (if GOD would
 have accepted of it) and by our future obedience.
 Now the promises of the gospel offer relief to us in all
 these respects, and thereby obviate all the difficulties
 and discouragements which mankind lay under.

The gracious promise of pardon frees us from guilt,
 and secures us from the terrible wrath of GOD, which
 our guilty consciences did so much dread; and with-
 out this promise, mankind would have been under the
 greatest doubts and discouragements. For when men
 are afraid their sins are greater than will be forgiven
 them, they are apt to fall into despair, and despair is
 an effectual bar to repentance; for when men think
 their condition is desperate, they care not what they
 do,

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And the promise of GOD's grace and HOLY SPIRIT, to assist and enable us to do our duty, does fully answer all the discouragements and objections from our own weakness, and the power of temptation. We may "do all things through CHRIST strengthening us;" and how weak soever we are of ourselves, we are "strong in the LORD, and in the power of his might." If GOD be for us, who or what can stand against us? The devil is a very powerful enemy, and much too strong for flesh and blood to encounter in its own strength; but there is another principle in the world, which is mightier and more powerful than he, the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, who is always ready to help, when we do not repulse and refuse his assistance; "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world," says the apostle, 1 John iv. 4. The SPIRIT of GOD dwells in all those who are willing to admit him, and is ever ready to assist those who comply with his blessed motions, and do vigourously put forth their own endeavours.

And then the promise of eternal life, that answers all the difficulties of our obedience, and sets us above any thing that the world can threaten us withal, for our constancy to GOD, and his truth. A wise man will be content to suffer any thing, or to quit any thing, upon terms of far greater advantage: and what greater consideration can be offered to encourage our constancy and obedience, than an eternity of happiness? So that the apostle had reason to call these, "exceeding great and valuable promises;" so valuable, that if any one of them had been wanting, our redemption and recovery had either been absolutely impossible, or extremely difficult. I proceed to the

III^d thing

III^d thing I propounded, which was to consider the tenor of these promises; that is, whether GOD have made them absolutely to us, without requiring any thing to be done on our part, or upon certain terms and conditions to be performed by us. That GOD may (if he please) make an absolute promise of any blessing or benefit to us, there is no doubt; and that God's grace does prevent many, and is before-hand with them, is as little to be doubted: the SPIRIT of GOD goes along with the gospel, moving and inclining men to yield obedience to it, many times before any inclination and disposition thereto on their parts. But as to this promise of GOD's grace and HOLY SPIRIT, the great question is not about the first motion of it, but the continuance of this assistance, and the increase of it; and this, I think, may safely be affirmed, is promised only conditionally, as also the pardon of sin, and eternal life. And concerning each of these, the matter may quickly be decided, by plain texts of scripture.

Concerning the promise of the grace and assistance of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, the scripture takes notice of two conditions. First, that we beg it earnestly of GOD: and this our SAVIOUR expresseth "by asking, "seeking, and knocking," which signifies the importunity of our requests; "our heavenly FATHER will "give his HOLY SPIRIT to them that thus ask it." And then, secondly, that we improve and make use of the grace which GOD affords us; "to him that "hath, shall be given, and from him that hath not, "shall be taken away even that which he seems to "have." That is (as appears plainly from the scope of the parable) to him that useth that grace, and those

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 XC VII.

those advantages which God affords him, more shall be given ; but from him that makes no use of them, and therefore is as if he had them not, shall be taken away that which he but seems to have, because he makes no use of it.

Concerning the pardon of sins ; the scripture plainly suspends that upon the general condition of repentance, and the change of our lives ; “ repent, “ that your sins may be forgiven you : ” and upon the condition of our forgiving others ; “ if ye forgive men their trespasses, then will your heavenly FATHER also forgive you ; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your FATHER forgive your trespasses,” says our SAVIOUR, Matth. vi. 14, 15.

And then the promise of eternal life, is every where in scripture suspended upon the condition of faith and repentance, and perseverance in well-doing. “ He that believes (says our SAVIOUR) shall be saved,” which indeed implies the whole condition of the gospel. “ He that believes,” that is, he that effectually assents to the doctrine of CHRIST, and is so persuaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, “ shall be saved.” But if obedience were not included in the scripture notion of faith, yet the scripture elsewhere expressly makes it the condition of our eternal salvation. Heb. v. 9. CHRIST is there said to be “ the author of eternal salvation to them “ that obey him ; ” thereby implying that none shall be saved by CHRIST, but those that obey the gospel. Heb. xii. 14. “ Follow holiness, without “ which no man shall see the LORD,” Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. “ To them who by patient continuance in
 “ well-

“ well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and im-
“ mortality;” GOD will give “ eternal life; but to
“ them that are contentious, and obey not the
“ truth;” that is, the gospel, “ but obey unrighteousness,
“ teousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and
“ anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil”.

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XCVII.

I cannot well imagine what can reasonably be answered to such plain texts; but I will tell you what is commonly answered; namely, that GOD gives the condition which he requires; and therefore though these promises run in a conditional form, yet in truth they are absolute; because he that makes a promise to another, upon a condition which he will also perform, doth in effect make an absolute promise. As if a man promised another such an estate, upon condition he pay such a sum for it, and does promise withal to furnish him with that sum, this in effect amounts to an absolute promise of the estate.

And this is very well argued, if the case were thus. But GOD hath no where promised to work the condition in us, without the concurrence of our own endeavours. GOD may, and oftentimes doth, prevent men by his grace; but he hath no where promised to give his HOLY SPIRIT but to them that ask it of him. And he hath no where promised to continue his grace and assistance to us, unless we will use our sincere endeavours; nay, in case we do not, he hath threatned to take away his grace and assistance from us. And if this be so, then the promises of the gospel do not only seem to be conditional, but are really so. And it is a wonder that any man should doubt of this, who considers how frequently in the new testament the gospel is represented

sent to us under the notion of “ a covenant,” since a covenant in the very nature of it doth imply a mutual obligation between the parties that enter into it. But if the gospel contain only blessings which are promised on God’s part, without any thing required to be done and performed on our part, in order to the obtaining of those blessings, then the gospel is nothing else but a promise, or deed of gift, making over certain benefits and blessings to us ; but can in no propriety of language in the world be called “ a covenant:” but if there be some things required on our part, in order to our being made partakers of the promises which God hath made to us (as the scripture every where tells us there is) then the promises are plainly conditional. To instance in the promise of forgiveness of sins ; “ repent, that your sins may be blotted out ;” that is, upon this condition that ye repent of your sins, they shall be forgiven, and not otherwise. Can there be any plainer condition in the world, than this in those words of our SAVIOUR ? “ If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly FATHER will also forgive your trespasses ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly FATHER forgive your trespasses.”

This is so far from being any prejudice to the freeness of God’s grace, who is infinitely gracious in offering such great blessings to us upon any condition that we can perform ; that it were one of the absurdest things in the world to imagine God should grant to men forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, let them behave themselves as they will.

IV. The last thing I proposed for the explaining
of

of this doctrine of the promises of **GOD**, was to consider when men may be said to have a right to these promises, so as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themselves: and the answer to this is very plain and easy; namely, when they find the conditions of these promises in themselves; and not till then.

When a man hath truly repented of his sins so as to forsake them, and lead a new life; and when he does from his heart forgive those that have offended him, and hath laid down all animosity against them, and thoughts of revenge; then hath he a right to the promise of pardon and forgiveness, and may apply to himself in particular what the scripture saith in general, “ that **GOD** will blot out all his transgressions, and “ remember his iniquities no more.” When a man doth constantly and earnestly implore the assistance of **GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT**, and is ready to yield to the motions of it, and does faithfully make use of that strength and assistance which **GOD** affords him, then he may expect the continuance of his grace, and further degrees of it. When a man makes it the constant and sincere endeavour of his life, to please **GOD**, and “ to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the **LORD** blameless, and is effectually “ taught by the grace of **GOD** to deny ungodliness “ and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world,” then he may with comfort and joy “ wait for the blessed “ hope, and the glorious appearance of the great “ **GOD**, and our **SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST** ;” then he may with confidence depend upon **GOD**, “ in “ sure and certain hope of that eternal life, which “ **GOD**, that cannot lye, hath promised.” When he

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can say with St. Paul, " I have fought a good fight," " I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," then he may likewise triumph, as he did, " henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God the righteous judge shall give me in that day."

Upon these terms, and in these cases, men may upon good grounds apply to themselves these " exceeding great and precious promises" of the gospel; and so far as any man is doubtful and uncertain of the performance of the conditions which the Gospel requires, so far he must necessarily question his right and title to the blessings promised. And if any man think this doctrine too uncomfortable, and be willing to reject it upon this account, I shall only say this, that men may cheat themselves, if they please, but most certainly they will never find any true and solid comfort in any other. This is a plain and sensible account of a man's confidence and good hopes in the promises of God; but for a man to apply any promise to himself, before he finds the condition in himself, is not faith, but either fancy or presumption.

And therefore it is a very preposterous course which many take, to advise and exhort men, with so much earnestness to apply the promises of God to themselves, and to tell them that they are guilty of great unbelief in not doing it. That which is proper to exhort men to, is to endeavour to perform the condition upon which God hath promised any blessing to us; and when men find the condition in themselves, they will without any great persuasion take comfort from the promise, and apply it to themselves; but till they discern the condition in them-

them-

themselves, it is impossible for a man that understands himself, to apply the promise to himself; for till the condition be performed, he hath no more right to the promise, than if such a promise had never been made. And 'tis so far from being a sin in such a man, to doubt of the benefit of such a promise, that it is his duty to do so; and no man that understands himself, and the promises of GOD, can possibly do otherwise.

Therefore 'tis a vain and groundless trouble which perplexeth many people, that they cannot apply the promises of GOD to themselves; whereas the true ground of their trouble should be this, that they have not been careful to perform the condition of those promises which they would apply to themselves; the other is an endless trouble; let them but look to the condition, and the promise will apply it self. I speak all this on purpose to free men from those perplexities wherewith many have entangled themselves, by false apprehensions of the promises of GOD, either as if they were not made to us upon certain conditions to be performed by us, or as if any man could comfortably apply them to himself, before he hath performed those conditions upon which GOD hath made such promises. For if men will believe that which is not true, or expect things upon such terms as they are not to be had, they may trouble themselves eternally, and all the world cannot help it.

I have now done with the first thing I propounded to speak to, namely the promises which are here spoken of. The second thing, (*viz.*) what influence these promises ought to have upon us, "that by them we may be partakers of the divine nature," I shall reserve to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XCVIII.

The nature and influence of the
promises of the gospel.

2 P E T E R i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

SERM.
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The second sermon on this text.

I Made entrance into these words the last day, in the handling whereof I proposed to do these two things.

First, to consider the promises here spoken of; “whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises.”

Secondly, the influence which these promises ought to have upon us; “that by these ye might be partakers of a divine nature.”

The first of these I have done with, and proceed now to the

Second, viz. The influence which these promises ought to have upon us; “whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of a divine nature.” Not that we can partake of the essence and nature of GOD, as some have blasphemously affirmed, pretending, in their canting and senseless language, to be “godded with GOD, and christed with CHRIST.” In this sense it is impossible for us to “partake of the divine nature,” for this would be for men to become gods, and to be advanced to the
stat

state and perfection of the deity. But the word *φύσις* doth frequently in scripture signify a temper and disposition; and to be “partakers of a divine nature,” is to be of a divine temper and disposition, to have our corrupt natures rectified and purged from all sinful lusts, and irregular passions, and from all vicious and corrupt affections; and therefore it follows in the text, “having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; and besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.” So that we are “made partakers of a divine nature,” as the apostle here explains it, these two ways; by cleansing ourselves from the lusts of the flesh, which the apostle here calls “the corruption or defilement which is in the world through lust;” and by a diligent endeavour after all christian graces and virtues, faith and temperance, and patience, a sincere love of the brethren, and an universal charity and good-will towards all men.

And that this is the proper influence and efficacy of the great promises of the gospel upon the hearts and lives of men, the apostle St. Paul fully declares to us, 2 Cor. vii. 1. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit;” that is, from the lusts of the flesh and of uncleanness, and from all evil and corrupt affections of the mind, such as wrath, envy, malice, hatred, strife, revenge, cruelty, pride, and the like; “perfecting holiness in the fear
“GOD;”

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“GOD;” that is, continually aspiring still more and more after further degrees of holiness, and virtue, and goodness, which are the great perfections of the divine nature. And thus by a constant and sincere endeavour “to cleanse ourselves from all impurity of the flesh and spirit,” and by practising all the virtues of a good life, we shall by degrees raise and advance ourselves to a god-like temper and disposition, imitating in all our actions the goodness, and mercy, and patience, and truth, and faithfulness of GOD, and all those other perfections of the divine nature, which are comprehended under the term of holiness. This is that which the apostle here calls “partaking of a divine nature;” or, as our blessed SAVIOUR expresseth it, “to be perfect, as our FATHER which is in heaven is perfect.”

This the gospel designs to raise us to; and one of the great instruments whereby this is effected, are those “exceeding great and precious promises” which I have insisted upon: and they are capable of effecting it these two ways:

First, by way of internal efficacy and assistance; and,

Secondly, by way of external motive and argument: both these ways some or other of these promises have a mighty influence upon us (if we be not wanting to ourselves) to raise us to a god-like temper and disposition, that is, to the greatest perfection of virtue and goodness which we are capable of in this life.

First, by way of internal efficacy and assistance. And this influence the promise of GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT, and of his gracious help and assistance thereof,

of,

of, hath upon the minds of men, inclining them to that which is good, and enabling them to do it. For the HOLY SPIRIT is promised to us, in consideration and commiseration of that impotency and weakness which we have contracted in that degenerate and depraved condition into which mankind is sunk; to help us, who are “without strength” to recover ourselves out of that evil and miserable state into which by wilful transgression we are fallen; “to quicken us who are dead in trespasses and sins,” (as the scripture expresseth the condition of unregenerate persons) to “raise us to a new life,” and to cherish this principle of spiritual life, which is commonly weak at first, and to carry it through all discouragements and oppositions; to excite us continually to our duty, and to enable us to the most difficult parts of obedience, such as are most contrary to our natural inclinations, and against the grain of flesh and blood, to bear down the strength of sin and temptation; and in all our conflicts with the world, and the flesh, the devil, and all the powers of darkness, to make us victorious over them; and, in a word, to be a principle within us, more mighty and powerful than the lusts and inclinations of our evil hearts, than the most obstinate and inveterate habits of sin and vice, and than all the temptations and terrors of sense. So that if we will make use of this assistance, and lay hold of this strength which GOD affords us in the gospel, and (as the apostle expresseth it) “be workers together with GOD,” we need not despair of victory and success; for our strength will continually increase, and the force and violence of our lusts will be abated, GOD will give us more grace, and we shall

“walk

“ walk from strength to strength, and our path will
 “ be” (as Solomon says of the way of the righteous)
 “ as the light which shines more and more unto the
 “ perfect day.”

For the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD conducts and manageth this great work of our sanctification and salvation from first to last, by opening our hearts to let in the light of divine truth upon our minds, by representing to us with advantage such arguments and considerations as are apt to persuade us to embrace it, and yield to it; by secret and gentle reprehensions softning our hard hearts, and bending our stiff and stubborn wills to a compliance with the will of GOD, and our duty. And this is that great work which the scripture calls our “ regeneration, and sanctification,” “ the turning us from darkness to light, and from “ the power of satan unto GOD, a new creation, and “ a resurrection from the death of sin, to the life of “ holiness.” And then by leading and directing us in the ways of holiness and obedience; by quickning our devotion, and stirring up in us holy desires and dispositions of soul, rendring us fit to draw near to GOD in prayer, with a due sense of our own wants and unworthiness, and an humble confidence in the goodness of GOD, that he will grant us those good things that we ask of him; in supporting and comforting us in all our afflictions and sufferings, especially for truth and righteousness sake; and by sealing and confirming to us the blessed hopes of eternal life. Thus the SPIRIT of GOD carries on the work of our sanctification, and makes us “ partakers of a “ divine nature,” by way of inward efficacy and assistance.

Secondly,

Secondly, the promises of the gospel are apt likewise to have a mighty influence upon us by way of motive and argument, to engage and encourage us “to
“ cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and
“ spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.”
For,

First, a full pardon and indemnity for what is past, is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our duty, and a forcible argument to keep us to it for the future. For since GOD, who hath been so highly injured and affronted by us, is so willing and ready to forgive us, as not only to provide and purchase for us the means of our pardon, by the grievous sufferings of his dear SON, but to offer it so freely, and invite us so earnestly to accept of it, and to be reconciled to him ; the consideration of this ought in all reason, ingenuity, and gratitude, to melt us into sorrow and repentance for our sins, and a deep sense of the evil of them, and to inflame our hearts with a mighty love to GOD, and our blessed REDEEMER, “ who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his
“ own blood ;” and to make us extremely unwilling, nay, most firmly resolved never more to offend that merciful and gracious GOD, who is so slow to punish, and so forward to forgive ; and effectually to engage us to a dutiful and constant and chearful obedience to GOD’s holy laws and commandments, lest by our wilful transgression and violation of them, we should run ourselves into a deeper guilt, and aggravate our condemnation. Now that by the tender mercies of our GOD we are made whole, we should be infinitely afraid “ to sin any more, lest worse things come
“ to us ;” lest we relapse into a more incurable

state, and bring a heavier load of guilt and misery upon ourselves.

Secondly, the promise of GOD's grace and HOLY SPIRIT is likewise a very powerful argument and encouragement to holiness and goodness, engaging us "to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," that our souls and minds may be a fit temple for the HOLY GHOST, which will not dwell in an impure soul: and likewise encouraging us hereto, by this consideration, that we have so unerring a guide to counsel and direct us, so powerful an assistant "to strengthen us with all might in the inner man," to stand by us in all our conflicts with sin and Satan, and make us (as the apostle expresseth it) "more than conquerors" over all our spiritual enemies. For tho' we be weak, and our lusts strong, our enemies many, and temptations mighty and violent; yet we need not be disheartned, so long as we know that "GOD is with us, and the grace of his HOLY SPIRIT sufficient for us," against all the strength of sin and hell; tho' our duty be hard, and our strength small, yet we cannot fail of success, if we be sure that the omnipotent grace of GOD is always ready to second our sincere, tho' never so weak, endeavours. So that when we see all the enemies of our salvation drawn up in array against us, we may encourage ourselves, as the prophet Elisha did his servant, when he told him, "that an host compassed the city with horses and chariots," and said, "alas! my master, how shall we do?" And "he answered, fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them;" 2 Kings vi. 16. Or as Hezekiah comforted the people, when they were

were afraid of the mighty force of the king of Assyria, 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8. "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid, nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our GOD, to help us, and to fight for us." This is the case of every christian; the force that is against us is finite and limited; but the almighty GOD is on our side, and fights for us; and every one of us may say with St. Paul, Phil. iv. 13. "I can do all things through CHRIST which strengthneth me."

Thirdly, the promise of eternal life and happiness, if duly weighed and considered, hath a mighty force in it to take us off from the love and practice of sin, and to encourage our obedience, "and patient continuance in well-doing." The assurance of enjoying unspeakable and endless happiness in another world, and of escaping extreme and eternal misery, is a consideration of that weight, as one would think could not fail of its efficacy upon us, to put all temptations to sin out of countenance, and to bear down before us all the difficulties and discouragements in the way of our duty. And if this make no impression upon us, if heaven and hell be of no weight with us, it will be in vain to use any other arguments, which in comparison of this, are "but as the very small dust upon the balance." For if on the one hand the hopes of perfect comfort and joy, and felicity, perpetual in duration, and vast beyond all imagination "such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entred into the heart of man to conceive:" and if on the other hand, the dread of the terrible

wrath of GOD, and of the vengeance of eternal fire, together with the insupportable torments of a guilty conscience, and the perpetual stings of bitter remorse and anguish for the wilful folly of our wicked lives, and the rage of horrible despair of ever getting out of so miserable a state; if neither of these considerations, if both of them will not prevail upon us “to cease to be evil, and to resolve to be good,” that we may obtain one of these conditions, and may escape the other; there is no hope that any words that can be used, any arguments and considerations that can be offered, should work upon us, or take place with us. He that is not to be tempted by such hopes, nor to be terrified by such fears, is proof against all the force of persuasion in the world.

And thus I have done with the two things which I proposed to consider from these words; the nature of these promises, and the influence they are apt, and ought to have upon us, to raise us to the perfection of virtue and goodness, which the apostle here calls our being “partakers of a divine nature.” All that now remains is, to make some useful reflexions upon what hath been discoursed upon these two heads.

First of all, if we expect the blessings and benefits of these “exceeding great and precious promises” of the gospel, we must be careful to perform the conditions which are indispensibly required on our parts. It is a great mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the souls of men, to imagine that the gospel is all promises on GOD’s part, and that our part is only to believe them, and to rely upon GOD for the performance of them, and to be very confident

confident that he will make them good, tho' we do nothing else but only believe that he will do so. That the christian religion is only a declaration of GOD's good-will to us, without any expectation of duty from us; this is an error which one could hardly think could ever enter into any who have the liberty to read the bible, and do attend to what they read, and find there.

The three great promises of the gospel all are very expressly contain'd in our SAVIOUR's first sermon upon the mount. There we find the promise of blessedness often repeated; but never absolutely made, but upon certain conditions, and plainly required on our parts; as repentance, humility, righteousness, mercy, peaceableness, meekness, patience. Forgiveness of sins is likewise promised; but only to those that make a penitent acknowledgement of them, and ask forgiveness for them, and are ready to grant that forgiveness to others, which they beg of GOD for themselves. "The gift of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT" is likewise there promised; but it is upon condition of our earnest and importunate prayer to God. The gospel is every where full of precepts, enjoining duty and obedience on our part, as well as of promises on GOD's part, assuring blessings to us; nay, of terrible threatenings also if we disobey the precepts of the gospel. St. Paul gives us the sum of the gospel in very few and plain words, declaring upon what terms we may expect that salvation which the gospel offers to all men, Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14. "The grace of GOD which
" bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men;
" teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly
" lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and
" godly

SERM.
XCVIII.

“ godly in this present world, looking for that blef-
 “ fed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great
 “ GOD, and our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST; who
 “ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from
 “ all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar
 “ people, zealous of good works.” And then he
 adds, “ these things speak and exhort, and rebuke
 “ with all authority;” intimating, that tho’ men
 were very averſe to this doctrine, it ought to be in-
 culcated with great authority and earneſtneſs, and
 thoſe who oppoſed and deſpiſed it, to be ſe-
 verely rebuked: and with great reaſon, becauſe
 the contrary doctrine does moſt effectually under-
 mine and defeat the whole deſign of the chriſtian
 religion.

Secondly, from hence we learn, that if the promiſes of the goſpel have not this effect upon us, to make us “ partakers of a divine nature,” it is our own fault, and becauſe we are wanting to our ſelves. GOD is always ready to do his part, if we do not fail in ours. There is a divine power and efficacy goes along with the goſpel, to make way for the entertain- ment of it in the hearts of men, where they put no bar and obſtacle to it. But if men will reſiſt the motions of GOD’S bleſſed SPIRIT, and quench the light of it, and obſtinately hold out againſt the force of truth; GOD will withdraw his grace and HOLY SPIRIT from them. The goſpel would raiſe us to the perfection of all virtue and goodneſs, and the promiſes of it are admirably fitted to relieve the infirmities and weakneſs of humane nature, and “ to renew us after the image
 “ of GOD, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs;” to take us off from ſin and vice, and to allure us to good-
 neſs,

ness, and to assist and encourage us in the practice of it: but if we will not comply with the gracious design of God in the gospel, and suffer these promises to have their due influence and efficacy upon us; we wilfully deprive our selves of all the blessings and benefits of it, “ we reject the counsel of God against our selves, and receive the grace of God in vain;” and by rejecting and despising his promises, we provoke him to execute his threatenings upon us.

Thirdly, and lastly, if the promises of the christian religion are apt in their own nature to work this great effect upon us, to make us like to God, and to bring us to so near a resemblance of the divine perfections, to make us good and just, and merciful and patient, and “ holy in all manner of conversation, to purge us from our iniquities, and to make us a peculiar and excellent people, zealous of good works;” I say, if this be the proper tendency of the gospel, and the promises of it, how doth this upbraid the degenerate state of the christian world at this day, which does so abound in all kind of wickedness and impiety? so that we may cry out as he did, upon reading the gospel; *profectò aut hoc non est evangelium; aut nos non sumus evangelici*; “ either this is not the gospel which we read, and the christian religion which we profess; or we are no christians.” We are so far from that pitch of goodness and virtue which the christian religion is apt to raise men to, and which the apostle here calls the “ divine nature,” that a great part of us are degenerated into beasts and devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy lusts, indulging ourselves in those devilish passions of malice and hatred, of strife and discord, of revenge and cruelty, of sedition and disturbance

disturbance of the publick peace to that degree, as if the grace of GOD had never appeared to us to teach us the contrary. And therefore it concerns all those who have the face to call themselves christians, to demean themselves at another rate, and for the honour of their religion, and the salvation of their own souls, “ to have their conversation as becometh “ the gospel of CHRIST;” and by departing from the vicious practices of this present evil world, to do what in them lies to prevent the judgments of GOD which hang over us ; or if they cannot do that, “ to “ save themselves from this untoward generation.”

S E R M O N XCIX.

The support of good men, under their sufferings for religion.

I P E T E R iv. 19.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of GOD, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator.

SERM.
XCIX.

The first
sermon on
this text.

THIS epistle was written by St. Peter, who was the apostle of the circumcision, to the dispersed Jews, who were newly converted to christianity ; and the design of it is to confirm and establish them in the profession of ; and to instruct them how they ought to demean themselves towards the heathen, or gentiles, among whom they lived ; and more particularly to arm and prepare them

them for those sufferings and persecutions, which he foretels would shortly overtake them for the profession of christianity, that when they should happen, they might not be surpris'd and startled at them, as if some strange and unexpected thing were come upon them; at the 12th verse of this chapter, "beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you;" that is, do not wonder and be not astonish'd at it, "as if some strange thing happened unto you."

SERM.
XCIX.

And then he instructs them more particularly, how they ought to behave themselves under those trials and sufferings, when they should happen; not only with patience, which men ought to exercise under all kinds of sufferings, upon what account and cause soever; but with joy and chearfulness; considering the glorious example and reward of them, ver. 13. "but rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of CHRIST's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." And at the 14th verse he tells them, that besides the encouragement of so great an example, and so glorious a reward, they should be supported and assisted in a very extraordinary manner, by the SPIRIT of GOD resting upon them in a glorious manner, as a testimony of the divine power and presence with them; ver. 14. "If ye be reproached for the name of CHRIST, happy are ye; for the SPIRIT of glory and of GOD resteth upon you;" or, as it is in the best copies, "for the SPIRIT of glory and of power, even the SPIRIT of GOD resteth upon you;" that is, the glorious power of the divine SPIRIT is present with you, to comfort and bear

up your spirits under these sufferings. But then he cautions them, to take great care, that their sufferings be for a good cause, and a good conscience; ver. 15. “ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as thief, or as an evil-doer,” (that is, as an offender in any kind against humane laws, made to preserve the peace and good order of the world) “ or as a busy-body in other mens matters;” that is, as a pragmatistical person, that meddles out of his own sphere, to the disquiet and disturbance of humane society: for to suffer upon any of these accounts, would be matter of shame and trouble, but not of joy and comfort; but if they suffered upon account of the profession of christianity, this would be no cause of shame and reproach to them; but they ought rather to give GOD thanks for calling them to suffer in so good a cause, and upon so glorious an account, verse 16. “ Yet if any man suffer as a christian” (if that be his only crime) “ let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify GOD on this behalf; for the time is come, that judgment must begin at the house of GOD;” that is, the wise and just providence of GOD, hath so order’d it at this time, for very good reasons and ends, that the first calamities and sufferings should fall upon christians, the peculiar people and church of GOD, for their trial, and a testimony of the truth of that religion, which GOD was now planting in the world: “ and if it first begin at us,” (that is, at us Jews, who were the ancient people of GOD, and have now embraced and entertained the revelation of the gospel) “ what shall the end be of them, that obey not the gospel of GOD?” (that is, how much more feverely

verely will God deal with the Jews who have crucified the Son of God, and still persist in their infidelity and disobedience to the gospel?) “and if the
“righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the un-
“godly and sinner appear?” (that is, if good men be saved with so much difficulty, and “must
“through so many tribulations enter into the king-
“dom of God,” what will become of all ungodly and impenitent sinners? where shall they appear? how shall they be able to stand in the judgment of the great day?) from the consideration of all which, the apostle makes this inference or conclusion, in the last verse of this chapter, “Wherefore let them
“that suffer according to the will of God, commit
“the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as
“unto a faithful creator.”

Thus you see the connexion and dependence of these words, upon the apostle’s foregoing discourse. I shall explain the several expressions in the text, and then handle the main points contained in them.

The expressions to be explained are these: what is meant by “those that suffer according to
“the will of God?” what by “committing the
“keeping of our souls to God, as unto a faithful
“creator:” and what by “well-doing?”

First, what is meant by “suffering according to
“the will of God?” this may be understood of suffering in a good cause, such as God will approve: but this is not so probable; because this is mentioned afterwards, in the following expressions of “com-
“mitting the keeping of our souls to God in well-
“doing;” that is, in suffering upon a good account: and therefore the plain and genuine sense of this ex-

pression seems to be this; that those who according to the good pleasure of GOD's will, and the wise dispensation of his providence, are appointed to suffer for his cause, should demean themselves so and so; "let them that suffer according to the will of God;" that is, those whom GOD thinks fit to call to suffering. And this agrees very well with the like expression, chapter iiii of this epistle, ver. 17. "For it is better, if the will of GOD be so," (that is, if GOD have so appointed it, and think it fit) "that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing."

Secondly, what is here meant by "committing the keeping of our souls to GOD, as to a faithful creator?" that is, to deposite our lives, and all that belongs to us, in a word, ourselves, in the hands and custody of his merciful care and providence who made us, and therefore we may be sure will faithfully keep what we commit to him: for as we are his creatures, he is engaged to take care of us, and will not abandon the work of his own hands. Besides that he hath promised to be more especially concerned for good men, to support them in their sufferings for a good cause, and to reward them for it; and "he is faithful that hath promised."

And therefore there is great reason and great encouragement, in all our sufferings for God's cause and truth, to commit our souls to his care and custody: our souls, that is (as I said before) our lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, ourselves: for so the word soul is frequently used both in the old and new testament, Psal. vii. 5. "Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it," that is, my life; for so it follows in the next words; "yea,

"let

“ let him tread down my life upon the earth.” And SERM. Psal. liv. 3. “ Oppressors seek after my soul.” And XCIX. Psal. lix. 3. “ they lie in wait for my soul ;” that is, my life. And Psal. xvi. 10, “ Thou wilt not leave “ my soul in hell,” my soul ; that is myself, thou wilt not suffer me to continue in the grave, and under the power of death, but wilt raise me up to life again. And so likewise in the new testament, Mark viii. 35. “ Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it ; “ but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the “ gospel’s, the same shall save it.” The same word which is here rendred life, in the very next verse is rendred soul : “ for what shall it profit a man, if he “ shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? ” that is, his life. And so likewise John xii. 25. “ He “ that loveth his life, shall lose it : and he that hat- “ eth his life in this world,” (in the original the word signifies soul) “ he that hateth his life in this world ; ” (that is, who neglecteth and exposeth his life in this world for the sake of CHRIST) “ shall keep it unto “ life eternal.” And Luke ix. 25. that which the other evangelist renders by the word soul, or life, he renders himself ; “ for what is a man advantaged, “ if he gain the whole world, and lose himself ? ” And so here in the text, “ to commit the keeping “ of our souls to GOD,” is to commit ourselves to his care and providence.

Thirdly, what is here meant by “ committing our- “ selves to him in well-doing ? ” By well-doing is here meant, a fixed purpose and resolution of doing our duty, notwithstanding all hazards and sufferings ; which is called by St. Paul, Rom. ii. 7. “ a patient “ continuance in well-doing.” It signifies some-
times

times acts of goodness and charity; but in this epistle it is taken in a larger sense, for constancy and resolution in the doing of our duty; as chap. ii. 15. "for so is the will of GOD, that with well-doing" (that is, by a resolute constancy in a good course) "ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." And ver. 20. "But if when ye do well, and suffer for it" (that is, if when ye suffer for well-doing) "ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with GOD." And chap. iii. ver. 6. "as long as you do well, and are not afraid with any amazement;" that is, are resolute and constant in your duty, notwithstanding all threatnings and terrors. And ver. 17. "for it is better, if the will of GOD be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing;" that is, for your religion and constancy in so good a cause, as christians, and not as criminals upon any other account.

So that the plain meaning of the words is, as if the apostle had said - therefore being forwarned of suffering and persecution for the cause of religion, the sum of my direction and advice upon the whole matter is this; that since it is the will of GOD that ye should suffer upon this account, commit yourselves in the constant discharge of your duty, and a good conscience, to the particular care and providence of almighty GOD, and your faithful creator.

And now I come to handle the particular points contained in the words; and they are these three.

First, that when men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, they may with confidence commit themselves (their lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more especial care of the divine providence.

Secondly,

Secondly, always provided, that we do nothing contrary to our duty, and a good conscience; for this the apostle means, “by committing ourselves to God, in well-doing.” If we step out of the way of our duty, or do any thing contrary to it, God’s providence will not be concerned for us, to bear us out in such sufferings.

Thirdly, I shall consider what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of God, as “a faithful creator,” affords us in all our sufferings, for a good cause, and a good conscience.

First, when men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, and God’s truth, they may with confidence and good assurance commit themselves, (their lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more especial care of his providence. In the handling of this, I shall consider these three things.

I. When men may be said to suffer really and truly for the cause of religion; and when not.

II. How far they may rely upon the providence of God, to bear them out in these sufferings.

III. What ground and reason there is to expect the more particular and especial care of God’s providence, in case of such sufferings.

I. When men may be said to suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, and God’s truth; and when not. In these cases,

First, when men suffer for not renouncing the true religion, and because they will not openly declare against it, and apostatize from it. But it will be said, that in all these cases the question is, what is the true religion? To which I answer; that all discourses of
this

this nature, about suffering for religion, do suppose the truth of some religion or other. And among christians, the truth of the christian religion is taken for granted, wherever we speak of mens suffering persecution for it. And the plainest case among christians, is, when they are persecuted, because they will not openly deny and renounce the christian religion. And this was generally the case of the primitive christians; they were threatned with tortures and death, because they would not renounce **JESUS CHRIST**, and his religion, and give demonstration thereof, by offering sacrifices to the heathen gods.

Secondly, men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they are persecuted only for making an open profession of the christian religion, by joining in the assemblies of christians for the worship of **GOD**; tho' they be not urged to deny and disclaim it, but only to conceal and dissemble the profession of it, so as to forbear the maintenance and defence of it upon fitting occasions, against the objections of those who are adversaries of it. For to conceal the profession of it, and to decline the defence of it, when just occasion is offered, is "to be ashamed of it," which our **SAVIOUR** interprets to be a kind of denial of it, and is opposed to "the confessing of him before men," Matth. x. 32, 33. "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my **FATHER** which is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my **FATHER** which is in heaven." And this by St. Mark is express'd by "being ashamed of **CHRIST**;" that is, afraid and ashamed to make an open profession of him, and his religion;

religion; Mark viii. 38. "Whoſoever therefore ſhall
" be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adul-
" terous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the
" SON of man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the
" glory of the FATHER, with his holy angels."

SERM.
XCIX.

And this likewiſe was the caſe of the primitive
chriſtians under the moderate emperors, when the
perſecution of them was not ſo hot, as to drive
them to a denial of CHRIST, provided they would
be contented to conceal and diſſemble their religion,
in that caſe they did not hunt them out, nor proſe-
cute them to renounce their religion, if they made no
diſcovery of themſelves. But yet they who ſuffered,
becauſe they would not conceal their profeſſion of
chriſtianity, did truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion.

Thirdly, men do likewiſe truly ſuffer for the cauſe
of religion, when they ſuffer for not betraying it,
by any indirec[t and unworthy means; ſuch as among
the primitive chriſtians was their delivering up their
bibles to the heathen, to be burnt and deſtroyed by
them: for to give up that holy book, which is the
great inſtrument of our religion, is in effect to give
up chriſtianity itſelf, and conſent to the utter ex-
tirpation of it.

And ſuch likewiſe is the caſe of thoſe, who ſuffer
in any kind for not contributing to break down the
fences of religion in any nation, where the provi-
dence of GOD hath given it a legal eſtabliſhment and
ſecurity; or, in a word, for reſuſing to countenance
and further any deſign, which viſibly tends to the
ruin of religion: for to deſtroy religion, and to take
away that which hinders the deſtruction of it, are in
effect much the ſame thing.

Fourthly, men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for the maintenance and defence of any necessary and fundamental article of it, tho' they be not required to renounce the whole christian religion; for what St. Paul says of the article of "the resurrection of the dead," is true of any other necessary article of the christian religion, that the denial of it is a subversion of the whole christian faith; because it tends directly to the overthrowing of christianity, being a wound given to it in a vital and essential part. And this was the case of those, who in any age of christianity have been persecuted by hereticks, for the defence of any article of christianity.

And I cannot but observe by the way, that after the heathen persecutions were ceased, persecution was first begun among the christians by hereticks; and hath since been taken up, and carried much beyond that bad pattern, by the church of Rome, which, besides a standing inquisition in all countries, which are entirely of that religion; (a court, the like whereto, for the clancular and secret manner of proceeding, for the unjust and arbitrary rules of it, for the barbarous usage of mens persons, and the cruelty of its torments, to extort confessions from them, the sun never saw erected under any government in the world, by men of any religion whatsoever) I say, which, besides this court, hath by frequent croisadoes for the extirpation of hereticks, and by many bloody massacres in France and Ireland, and several other places, destroyed far greater numbers of christians, than all the ten heathen persecutions; and hath of late revived, and to this very day continues in the same

or greater cruelties, and a fiercer persecution of protestants, if all the circumstances of it be considered, than was ever yet practised upon them; and yet whilst this is doing almost before our eyes, in one of our next neighbour nations, they have the face to complain of the cannibal laws, and bloody persecutions of the church of England, and the confidence to set up for the great patrons of liberty of conscience, and enemies of all compulsion and force in matters of religion.

Fifthly, men do truly suffer for the cause of God and religion, when they suffer for asserting and maintaining the purity of the christian doctrine and worship; and for opposing and not complying with those gross errors and corruptions, which superstition and ignorance had, in a long course of time, brought into the christian religion. Upon this account many good people suffered in many past ages, for resisting the growing errors and corruptions of the church of Rome, which at first crept in by degrees, but at last broke in like a mighty flood, which carried down all before it, and threatned ruin and destruction to all that opposed them: Upon this account also, infinite numbers suffered among the Waldenses and Albigenes, in Bohemia, and in England, and in most other countries in this western part of christendom. And they who suffered upon this account, suffered in a good cause, and for the testimony of the truth.

Sixthly, and lastly, men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for not disclaiming and renouncing any clear and undoubted truth of God whatsoever; yea though it be not a fundamental point and article of religion.

And this is the case of those many thousands, who ever since the IVth council of Lateran, which was in the year 1215, (when transubstantiation was first defin'd to be an article of faith, and necessary to salvation to be believ'd) were persecuted with fire and sword, for not understanding those words of our SAVIOUR, "this is my body," (which are so easily capable of a reasonable sense) in the absurd and impossible sense of transubstantiation. And though this disowning of this doctrine, be no express and direct article of the christian religion; yet it is a fundamental article of right reason and common sense: because the admitting of transubstantiation, does undermine the foundation of all certainty whatsoever, and does more immediately shake the very foundation of christianity it self. Yea, tho' the christian religion were no ways concerned in this doctrine, yet out of reverence to reason and truth, and a just animosity and indignation at confident nonsense, a man of an honest and generous mind would as soon be brought to declare or swear, that twice two do not make four, but five, as to profess his belief of transubstantiation.

And tho' all truths are not of equal consequence and concernment, yet all truth is of GOD; and for that reason, tho' we are not obliged to make an open profession of all truths at all times, yet we are bound not to deny or renounce any truth, nor to make profession of a known falshood or error: for it is merely because of the intrinsical evil of the thing, that, "it is impossible for GOD to lye;" and the SON of GOD thought it worth his coming into the world, and laying down his life, "to bear witness to the truth." So he himself tells us, John xviii. 37.

“ To this end was I born, and for this cause came
“ I into the world, that I should bear witness to the
“ truth.”

Thus have I shewn you in these plain instances (to which most other cases may be reduced) when men may be said to suffer truly for the cause of religion, and truth.

I shall mention two or three cases wherein men may seem to suffer for the cause of religion, but cannot truly be said to do so.

First, when men rashly expose themselves to danger, and run upon sufferings for the sake of religion. Thus several of the primitive christians voluntarily exposed themselves when they were not called in question, and in the heat of their affection and zeal for GOD and religion, offered themselves to martyrdom, when none enquired after them. This, in the gracious interpretation of GOD, who knowing the sincerity of their zeal, was pleased to overlook the indiscreet forwardness and rashness of it, might be accepted for a kind of martyrdom; but cannot in reason be justified, so as to be fit to be made a pattern, and to be recommended to our imitation. For though GOD may be pleased to excuse the weakness of a well-meaning zeal; yet he can approve nothing but what is reasonable.

To suffer chearfully for the cause of GOD and his truth, when he calls us “ to fight this good fight of
“ faith, and to resist unto blood;” and when we are reduced to that strait, that we must either die for GOD and his truth, or deny them; to suffer, I say, in this case with courage and patience, is one of the noblest of all the christian virtues. But to be perfect
volunteers,

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volunteers, and to run ourselves upon sufferings, when we are not called to them, looks rather like “the sacrifice of fools;” which tho’ GOD may mercifully excuse, and pardon the evil of the action, for the good meaning of it; yet he can never perfectly approve and accept of it. But I think there is little need now-a-days to caution men against this rashness; it is well if they have the grace and resolution to suffer when it is their duty, and when they are called to it.

Secondly, nor can men be truly said to suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer not for their faith, but their fancy, and for the wilful and affected error of a mistaken conscience. As when men suffer for indifferent things, which in heat and passion they call superstition and idolatry? and for their own false opinions in religion, which they mistake for fundamental articles of the christian faith. In this case, their mistake about these things will not change the nature of them, nor turn their sufferings into martyrdom; and yet many men have certainly suffered for their own mistakes. For as men may be so far deluded, “as to think they do GOD good service, “when they kill his faithful servants;” so likewise may they be so far deceived, as to sacrifice their lives, and all that is dear to them, to their own culpable errors and mistakes. But this is zeal without knowledge, not “the wisdom which descends from above,” but that which comes from beneath, and is like the fire of hell, which is heat without light.

Thirdly, and lastly; nor can men truly be said to suffer for the cause of GOD and religion, when they suffer for the open profession and defence of truths

not

not necessary. For tho' a man be obliged to make an open profession of all fundamental and necessary truths; yet he is under no such obligation to make profession of truths not necessary at all times; and unless he be called to deny them, he is not bound either to declare or defend them; he may hold his peace at other times, and be silent about them, especially when the open profession of them will probably do no good to others, and will certainly do hurt to ourselves, and the zealous endeavour to propagate such truths will be to the greater prejudice of charity, and the disturbance of the publick peace of the church.

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It was a good saying of Erasmus (if we understand it, as I believe he meant it, of truths not necessary) *adeo invisæ sunt mihi discordiæ, ut veritas etiam contentiosa displiceat*: “ I am (says he) so perfect a hater of discord, that I am even displeas'd with truth, when it is the occasion of contention.” As a man is never to deny truth, so neither is he obliged to make an open profession of truths not necessary at all times; and if he suffer upon that account, he cannot justify it to his own prudence, nor have comfort in such sufferings; because he brings them needlessly upon himself; and no man can have comfort, but in suffering for doing his duty.

And thus I have done with the first thing I propos'd to enquire into; namely, when men may be truly said to suffer for the cause of religion.

I proceed now to the

II^d enquiry; namely, how far men may rely upon the providence of GOD, to bear them out in such sufferings?

To which I answer; that provided we do what becomes us, and is our duty on our part, the providence of GOD will not be wanting on his part, to bear us out in all our sufferings for his cause, one of these three ways.

First, to secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for humane strength and patience; or,

Secondly, in case of such extraordinary temptation and trial to give us the extraordinary supports and comforts of his HOLY SPIRIT; or else,

Thirdly, in case of a temporary fall and miscarriage, to raise us up by repentance, and a greater resolution and constancy under sufferings. I shall speak severally to these.

First, either the providence of GOD will not be wanting to secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for humane strength and patience to bear. And this is a great security to good men against the fears of final miscarriage, after all their labours, and pains, and sufferings in a religious course, by being over-born at last by the assault of a very violent and powerful temptation. Not but that the best of men ought always to have a prudent distrust of themselves, so as to keep them from security; according to the apostle's caution and counsel, "be not high-minded but fear;" and "let him that stands, take heed lest he fall;" because 'till we come to heaven, we shall never be out of the danger and possibility of falling: but yet for all this, we may hope, by the sincerity and firmness of our resolution, under the usual influence of GOD's grace, "to acquit ourselves like men," in ordinary cases of temptation and suffering. And

And to this end, we should represent to ourselves SER.M.
XCIX. "those exceeding great and precious promises," which he hath made to good men, and his merciful providence, which continually watcheth over them, and steers their course for them in this world, among those many rocks which they are in danger to split upon; that he is able "to stablish us in the truth, and "to keep us from falling, to present us faultless "before the presence of his glory with exceeding "joy, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom;" and that if we do not forsake him, and forfeit his care and protection, he will "keep us by his mighty "power through faith unto salvation;" either by his merciful foresight and prevention of those temptations which would probably be too hard for us; or if he thinks fit they should befall us, by supporting us under them in an extraordinary manner.

For I doubt not, but that the best men do owe their security and perseverance in goodness, much more to the merciful providence of God, preventing the assaults of violent and dangerous temptations, than to the firmness and constancy of their own resolutions. For there are very few persons of so firm and resolute virtue, but that one time or other a temptation might assault them upon such a disadvantage, as would in all probability, not only stagger them, but bear them down. Now herein the providence of God towards good men is very remarkable, in securing them from those temptations which are too strong for them to grapple withal; like a kind and tender father, who, if he be satisfied of the dutiful disposition of his child towards him, will not try his obedience to the utmost, nor permit too

strong a temptation to the contrary to come in his way. So the psalmist represents GOD's tender regard and consideration of the frailty and infirmity of his children, Psal. ciii. 13, 14. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust," that is, he considereth us as men, and deals with us accordingly. Provided we be sincere, he will not suffer us to be set upon by temptations that are too big for us. And therefore our blessed SAVIOUR makes it one of the petitions of that excellent prayer, which he hath recommended to us; "lead us not into temptation;" that is, we should every day beg of GOD, that his providence would keep us out of the way of great and dangerous temptations, as knowing that this will be a greater security to us, than any strength and resolution of our own.

Secondly, or in case of such violent and extraordinary temptations, the providence of GOD will not be wanting to give us the extraordinary support and comfort of his HOLY SPIRIT, to bear us up under them. The providence of GOD did take care of good men in all ages, and did afford comfort to them under great trials and sufferings; but GOD never made so express and general a promise of this, to all good men, as he hath done by the christian religion. Never was so constant a presence and influence of the divine SPIRIT vouchsafed and assured to men under any dispensation, as that of the gospel; wherein the SPIRIT of GOD is promised to all that sincerely embrace the christian religion, to reside and dwell in them; not only to all the purposes

poses of sanctification and holiness, but of support and comfort under the heaviest pressures and sufferings. For which reason the gospel is called “the ministrations of the SPIRIT;” and is upon this account said to be more glorious than any other revelation which GOD had ever made to mankind.

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We are naturally apt to be very much disheartned and cast down at the apprehension of great sufferings, from the consideration of our own weakness and frailty; but the SPIRIT of CHRIST dwells in all true christians, and the same glorious power, which raised up JESUS from the dead, works mightily in them that believe. St. Paul useth very high expressions about this matter, Eph. i. 19. “That ye may know, (saith he, speaking to all christians) what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in CHRIST when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand.” So that every christian is endowed with a kind of omnipotence, “being able (as St. Paul speaks of himself) to do and to endure all things, thro’ CHRIST strengthening him.” Of our selves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world are very powerful; but there is a principle residing in every true christian that is able to bear us up against the world, and the power of all its temptations. “Whatsoever is born of GOD (saith St. John) overcometh the world; for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” The HOLY SPIRIT of GOD which dwells in all true christians, is a more powerful principle of resolution, and courage, and patience, under

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der the sharpest trials and sufferings, than the evil spirit which rules in the world is, to stir up, and set on, the malice and rage of the world against us. "Ye are of GOD, little children" (he speaks this to the youngest and weakest christians) "ye are of GOD, little children, and have overcome; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The malice and power of the devil is very great; but the goodness and power of GOD is greater. And therefore in case of extraordinary temptation, good men, by virtue of this promise of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, may expect to be born up and comforted in a very extraordinary and supernatural manner, under the greatest tribulations and sufferings for righteousness sake.

And this was in a very signal and remarkable manner afforded to the primitive christians, under those fierce and cruel persecutions to which they were exposed. And this may still be expected, in like cases of extraordinary sufferings for the testimony of GOD'S truth. "If ye be reproached (saith St. Peter in this ivth chap. ver. 14) for the name of CHRIST, happy are ye; for the SPIRIT of glory and of GOD resteth upon you." The SPIRIT of GOD is here promised to strengthen and support all that suffer for the name of CHRIST, in a very conspicuous and glorious manner, according to that prayer of St. Paul, Col. i. 11. that christians might be "strengthened with all might, according to GOD'S glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness." For when GOD is pleased to exercise good men with trials more than humane, and such sufferings as are beyond

beyond the common rate of humane strength and patience to bear, he hath engaged himself to endure and assist them with more than humane courage and resolution. So St. Paul tells the Corinthians, who had then felt the utmost rage of persecution, 1 Cor. x. 13, "No temptation or trial hath yet befallen you, but what is common to man;" that is, nothing but what is frequently incident to humane nature, and what by humane strength, with an ordinary assistance of God's grace, may be grappled withal. But, in case God shall call you to extraordinary sufferings, "he is faithful that hath promised, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;" that is, as he hath ordered and appointed so great a temptation or trial to befall you, so he will take care that it shall have a happy issue, by enabling you to bear it, by affording you grace and strength equal to the violence and power of the temptation. For as he is said "to fall into temptation," that is conquered by it; so he is said "to get out of it, or escape it," who is enabled to bear it, and, in so doing, gets the better of it. And for this we may rely upon the faithfulness of God, who hath promised "that we shall not be tried above our strength;" either not above the strength which we have, or not above the strength which he will afford us in such a case.

And why then should we be daunted at the apprehension of any suffering whatsoever, if we be secured that our comfort shall be increased in proportion to our trouble, and our strength in proportion

tion to the sharpness and weight of our sufferings?
or else,

Thirdly, in case of temporary falling, the providence and goodness of GOD will give them the grace and opportunity of recovering themselves from their fall by repentance. For the providence of God may sometimes, for wise ends and reasons, see it fit to leave good men to their own frailty, and to faint and fall shamefully under sufferings, so as to renounce and deny the truth; sometimes to punish their vain confidence in themselves, as in the case of Peter, who declared more resolution, and bore it out with a greater confidence than any of the disciples, when he said to our SAVIOUR, "tho' all men forsake thee, yet will not I;" and yet after this he fell more shamefully than any of the rest, so as to deny his master with horrid oaths and imprecations, and this, tho' our SAVIOUR had prayed particularly for him, "that his faith might not fail." From which instance we may learn, that GOD doth not engage himself absolutely to secure good men from falling, in case of a great temptation and trial; but if they be sincere, he will not permit them to fall finally, though he may suffer them to miscarry grievously for a time, to convince them of the vanity of their confidence in themselves and their own strength.

Sometimes GOD may suffer good men to fall, in order to their more glorious recovery, and the greater demonstration and triumph of their faith and constancy afterwards; which was the case of that happy instrument of our reformation here in England, archbishop Cranmer, who after he had been so great a champion of the reformation, was so overcome

with

with fear, upon the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, as to subscribe those errors of the church of Rome, which he had so stoutly opposed a great part of his life: but he did not long continue in this state, but by the grace of GOD, which had not forsaken him, was brought to repentance; and when he came to suffer, gave such a testimony of it, and of his faith and constancy, as was more glorious, and more to the confirmation of the faith of others, than a simple martyrdom could have been, if he had not fallen; for when he was brought to the stake he put his right hand (with which he had signed the recantation) into the fire, and with an undaunted constancy held it there, till it was quite burnt, for a testimony of his true repentance for that foul miscarriage; and when he had done, gave the rest of his body to be burnt, which he endured with great courage and cheerfulness to the last. So that he made all the amends possible for so great a fault; and the goodness of GOD, and the power of his grace was more glorified in his repentance and recovery, than if he had never fallen.

But what shall we say, when notwithstanding these promises of extraordinary comfort and support, in case of extraordinary sufferings, so great numbers are seen to faint in the day of trial, and to fall off from their steadfastness? of which there were many sad instances, among the primitive christians, and have likewise been of late in our own times, and in places nearer to us. This I confess is a very melancholy consideration, but yet I think is capable of a sufficient answer.

And

And first of all, let this be established for a firm and undoubted principle, “that GOD is faithful to his promise;” and therefore we ought much rather to suppose in all these cases, that there is some default on our part, than any failure and unfaithfulness on GOD’s part. Thus St. Paul determines in a like case, when the promise of GOD seemed not to be made good to the Jews, he lays the blame of it on their unbelief, but acquits GOD of any unfaithfulness in his promise, Rom. iii. 3, 4. “For what if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the faith (or fidelity) of GOD without effect? GOD forbid: yea, let GOD be true, but every man a liar.” This I confess does not answer the difficulty; but yet it ought to incline and dispose us, to interpret what can fairly be offer’d for the removal of it, with all the favour that may be on GOD’s side. I say then,

Secondly, that when good men fall in case of extraordinary temptation, and recover again by repentance, and give greater demonstration afterwards of their constancy and resolution, in the cause of GOD and his truth, the faithfulness of GOD in his promises is sufficiently vindicated, as in the cases I mentioned; because the promise of GOD is not absolute, that good men should be preserved from falling; but that “the temptation shall have a happy issue,” and that they shall not finally miscarry. For promises of this nature are to be interpreted by us, and understood as we do our SAVIOUR’S prayer for Peter before his fall, “that his faith should not fail finally;” but though he fell through too much confidence in himself, he should through the grace of GOD assisting him be enabled to recover by repentance.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, the sincerity or insincerity of men in the profession of the true religion, is a thing which we cannot certainly know, because we do not see into mens hearts; but “ he who knows the heart, and tries “ the spirits of men in a balance,” cannot be deceived in this matter; and where men are not sincere, the promise of God is not concerned to hinder them from discovering themselves; and the fall of such persons, is no reflexion upon the faithfulness of God. And it is reasonable enough to presume, that this may be the case of not a few, and that (like Simon Magus) after they have made a very solemn profession of christianity, “ their hearts may not be right in the “ sight of God.”

Fourthly, if we put the case at the hardest, that some that were very sincere, after they have held out a great while, under the extremity of torments, have at last fainted under them, and yielded to the malice and cruelty of their persecutors, and in this amazement and distraction have not long after expired, without any testimony of their repentance: in this case both reason and charity ought to restrain us from passing any very positive and severe sentence upon the state of such persons. For what do we know, but God whose goodness will certainly make all the allowance to humane frailty that reason can require; “ (for he knows whereof we are made; and remembers that we are but dust;” he mercifully considers every man’s case, and weighs all the circumstances of it in an exact balance;) I say who can tell, but in such a case as I have mentioned, God may graciously be pleased to accept such a degree of constant suffering of great torments for so long a time, for a true mar-

tyrdom, and not expect a more than humane patience and resolution, where he is not pleased to afford more than humane strength and support; and whether he may not look upon their failing and miscarriage at last, in the same rank with the indeliberate actions of men in a frenzy, and besides themselves?

And thus God may be said, “with the temptation “to make a way to escape.” or to give a happy issue to it; since they were enabled to bear it, till being distracted by their torments, their understandings were thrown off the hinges, and incapable of exercising any deliberate acts of reason. And without some such equitable consideration of the case of such persons, it will be very hard to reconcile some appearances of things with the goodness of God, and the faithfulness of his promise.

However, it will become us to abstain from all uncharitableness and peremptory censure of the final estate of such persons, especially till we ourselves have given greater and better testimony of our constancy; and in the mean time, to leave them to the righteous and merciful sentence of their master and ours, to whose judgment we must all stand or fall.

I am sure it will very ill become those, who by the providence of God have escaped those sufferings, and are at present out of danger themselves, to sit in judgment upon those who are left to endure this terrible conflict, and have perhaps held out as long, or longer, than they themselves would have done in the like circumstances. Let us rather earnestly beg of “the “God of all grace and patience,” that he would endue us with a greater measure of patience and constancy, if he see fit to call us to the exercise of it,
and

and (which we lawfully may, after the example of S E R M. our blessed SAVIOUR) “ that if it be his will, he X C I X. “ would let this cup pass from us,” and not try us with the like sufferings, “ lest we also be weary, “ and faint in our minds.” I come now to the

Third and last enquiry which I proposed; what ground and reason there is, for good men to expect the more peculiar and especial care of GOD’S providence in case of such sufferings?

The providence of GOD extends to all his creatures, according to that of the Psalmist, “ the LORD is “ good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his “ works.” But he exerciseth a more particular providence towards mankind; and more peculiar yet towards those who study to please him, by obeying his laws and doing his will. He that is assured of his own heart, that he loves GOD, and would do or suffer any thing for him, can have no cause to doubt but that GOD loves him, and is concerned for his happiness. No man was ever afraid of GOD, that was not conscious to himself that he had offended him, and by the wilful breach of his laws had put himself out of the care of his providence. But on the contrary, if our hearts give us this testimony, that we have made it our sincere endeavour to please him, we are naturally apt to have good assurance and confidence of his favour and good-will towards us. This comfort the mind of every good man is apt to give him, from his own reason, and the natural notions which he hath of GOD.

But to free us from all doubt in this matter, GOD himself hath told us so, and given us plentiful assurance of it in his word, Psal. xi. 7. “ The righteous LORD

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“loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold
 “the upright;” that is, he will be favourable unto
 them. Pſal. xxxiii. 18. “Behold the eye of the LORD
 “is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope
 “in his mercy.” The eye of GOD signifies his
 watchful care and providence over good men. So
 that besides the ſure and well-grounded reasonings,
 from the eſſential perfections of the divine nature,
 the mercy and goodneſs of GOD; “we have a
 “more ſure word of promiſe,” in the expreſs decla-
 rations of GOD’s word, and more particularly in the
 caſe of great temptations and ſufferings. For can we
 think, that the ſcripture ſaith in vain, “wait on the
 “LORD, and be of good courage, and he ſhall
 “ſtrengthen thine heart? Many are the afflictions of
 “the righteous, but the LORD delivereth him out
 “of all? the ſteps of a good man are ordered
 “by the LORD, and he delighteth in his ways,
 “though he fall he ſhall not utterly be caſt down,
 “for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand?
 “the ſalvation of the righteous cometh of the LORD,
 “he is their help in time of trouble?” The ſame
 promiſes we find in the new teſtament. “All things
 “ſhall work together for good, to them that love
 “GOD. GOD is faithful, who hath promiſed, that
 “he will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what ye
 “are able, but will with the temptation make a
 “way to eſcape.” And to mention no more; “hold
 “faſt the profeſſion of your faith without wavering,
 “he is faithful that hath promiſed;” viz. to ſupport
 you under ſufferings, and to reward them.

Thus much for the firſt point, namely, that when
 men do ſuffer truly for the cauſe of religion, they
 may

may with confidence commit themselves to the more peculiar care of the divine providence.

S E R M O N C.

The support of good men, under their sufferings for religion.

I P E T E R iv. 19.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of GOD, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator.

FROM these words I proposed to consider these SERM.
C.
three points.

First, that when men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, they may with confidence commit themselves (their lives, and all that is dear to them) to the peculiar and more especial care of the divine providence. The second sermon on this text.

Secondly, this we may do, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid sufferings, nor to rescue ourselves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conscience; for this is the meaning of “committing ourselves to GOD in well-doing.”

Thirdly, to shew what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of GOD, under the notion of “a faithful creator,” does afford to us, under all our sufferings for a good cause and a good conscience.

The first of these points I have treated on at large in my former discourse. I proceed now to the
Second,

SERM.

C.

Second, namely, when in all our sufferings for the cause of religion, we may with confidence and good assurance, commit ourselves to the peculiar and more especial care of GOD's providence; this is to be understood, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid sufferings, nor to rescue ourselves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conscience, and this I told you was the meaning of "committing ourselves to GOD in well-doing;" for if we either neglect our duty, or step out of the way of it, by doing things contrary to it, the providence of GOD will not be concerned to bear us out in such sufferings. So that in our sufferings for the cause of GOD and religion, "to commit ourselves to him in well-doing," may reasonably comprehend it in these following particulars.

1. Provided always, that we neglect no lawful means of our preservation from sufferings, or our deliverance out of them: in this case men do not commit themselves to the providence of GOD, but cast themselves out of his care and protection; they do not trust GOD, but tempt him, and do as it were try whether he will stand by us, when we desert ourselves, and bring us out of trouble, when we would take no care, would use no endeavours to prevent it. If we will needlessly provoke trouble, and run ourselves upon suffering; if we will neglect ourselves, and the lawful means of our preservation; if we will give up, and part with those securities of our religion, which the providence of GOD, and the laws of our country have given us; if we ourselves will help to pull down the fence which is about us; if we will disarm ourselves, and by our own act expose ourselves
naked

naked and open to danger and sufferings; why should we think in this case, that God will help us, when we would not help ourselves by those lawful ways, which the providence of God hath put into our hands?

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All trust in God, and dependence upon his providence, does imply, that we join prayer and endeavour together; faith in God, and a prudent and diligent use of means: if we lazily trust the providence of God, and so “cast all our care upon him,” as to take none at all ourselves, God will take no care of us. In vain do we rely upon the wisdom, and goodness, and power of God; in vain do we importune and tire heaven with our prayers, to help us against our enemies and persecutors, if we ourselves will do nothing for ourselves: in vain do we hope that God will maintain and defend our religion, against all the secret contrivances and open assaults of our enemies, if we, who are united in the profession of the same religion, and in all the essentials of faith and worship, will for some small differences in lesser matters, which are of no moment in comparison of the things wherein we are agreed: I say, if for such slight matters, we will divide and fall out among ourselves; if when the enemy is at the gates, we will still pursue our heats and animosities, and will madly keep open those breaches, which were foolishly made at first; what can we expect, but that the common enemy should take the advantage, and enter in at them; and whilst we are so unseasonably and senselessly contending with one another, that they should take the opportunity which we give them to destroy us all.

2. Provided likewise, that we do not attempt our preservation or deliverance from suffering, by evil

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evil and unlawful means: we must do nothing that is contrary to our duty, and to a good conscience; nor comply with any thing, or lend our helping hand thereto, that apparently tends to the ruin of our religion, neither to divert nor put off sufferings for the present, nor to rescue ourselves from under them; because we cannot with confidence commit our selves to the providence of GOD, but in well-doing.

This is an eternal rule, from whence we must in no case depart, “ that men must do nothing contrary “ to the rules and precepts of religion, no not for the “ sake of religion itself:” we must not break any law of GOD, nor disobey the lawful commands of lawful authority, to free ourselves from any sufferings whatsoever; because the goodness of no end can sanctify evil means, and make them lawful: we must not “ speak deceitfully for GOD,” nor lye, no, not for the truth; nor kill men, though we could thereby do GOD and religion the greatest service. And tho’ all the casuists in the world should teach the contrary doctrine, (as they generally do in the church of Rome) yet I would not doubt to oppose to all those, the single authority of St. Paul, who expressly condemns this principle, and brands it for a damnable doctrine, “ that evil may be done by us, that “ good may come.” Rom. iii. 8. “ And not as we “ be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that “ we say, let us do evil, that good may come, whose “ damnation is just.” St. Paul, it seems, looked upon it as a most devilish calumny, to insinuate that the christian religion gives the least countenance to such damnable doctrines and doings as these; and pronounceth “ their damnation to be just,” who either teach any such principle,

principle, as the doctrine of christianity, or practise according to it. SERM.
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Let those look to it, who teach, that a right intention, and a good end, will render things, which are otherwise evil and unlawful, not only lawful to be done by us, but in many cases meritorious; especially where the good of the church, and the extirpation of heresy are more immediately concerned. Of this nature are the doctrines of equivocation and mental reservation, and the lawfulness of such artificial ways of lying, to avoid the danger of the law, when they are brought before heretical magistrates; and this is the common doctrine of the most learned casuists of all orders in the church of Rome: and such likewise are their doctrines, of the lawfulness of extirpating hereticks, by the most barbarous and bloody means, and of breaking faith with them, tho' given by emperors and princes, in the most publick and solemn manner; both which are the avowed doctrines of their general councils, and have frequently been put in practice, to the destruction of many millions of christians, better and more righteous than themselves. "But we have not so learned CHRIST, who have heard him, and been taught by him as the truth is in JESUS." They who are rightly instructed in the christian religion, are so far from thinking it lawful to do any thing that is evil, to bring others under suffering, that they do not allow it in any case whatsoever, no, not for the cause of GOD and religion, and to free themselves from the greatest sufferings that can be inflicted upon them.

3. Provided also, that we do trust the providence of GOD, and do indeed commit our selves to it; relying upon his wisdom and goodness, and entirely submitting and resigning up ourselves to his will and disposal, both as to the degree and duration of our sufferings; believing that he will do that for us, which upon the whole matter, and in the final issue and result of things, will be best for us. That blessing, wherewith Moses the man of GOD blest the people of Israel before his death, doth belong to good men in all ages: “ he loveth his
 “ people, and all his saints are in his hand :” Deut. xxxiii. 3. Innumerable are the promises in scripture concerning the merciful providence and goodness of GOD, towards those “ who trust in him, and hope
 “ in his mercy,” Psal. xxxii. 10. “ Many sorrows
 “ shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in
 “ the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.” Psal. xxxiii. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. “ Behold the eye
 “ of the LORD is upon them that fear him: upon
 “ them that hope in his mercy: to deliver their
 “ soul from death, and to keep them alive in fa-
 “ mine. Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is
 “ our help and our shield. For our heart shall re-
 “ joice in him: because we have trusted in his holy
 “ name. Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us,
 “ according as we hope in thee.” Psal. xxxiv. 22.
 “ The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants:
 “ and none of them that trust in him shall be de-
 “ solate.” Psal. xxxvii. 39, 40. “ But the salva-
 “ tion of the righteous is of the LORD, he is their
 “ strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD
 “ shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver
 “ them

“ them from the wicked, and save them because
“ they trust in him.” Pſal. xxxi. 19, “ O how
“ great is thy goodneſs, which thou haſt laid up
“ for them that fear thee ; which thou haſt wrought
“ for them that truſt in thee before the ſons of men ! ”
Pſal. lv. 22. “ Caſt thy burden upon the LORD, and
“ he ſhall ſuſtain thee : he ſhall never ſuffer the righte-
“ ous to be moved.” Pſal. cxxv. 1. “ They that
“ truſt in the LORD ſhall be as mount Zion, which
“ cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.” Iſa.
xxvi. 3, 4. “ Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,
“ whoſe mind is ſtayed on thee, becauſe he truſteth
“ in thee. Truſt ye in the LORD for ever : for in
“ the LORD JEHOVAH is everlaſting ſtrength.”

4. Provided yet further, that we pray earneſtly to GOD for his gracious help and aſſiſtance, for his merciful comfort and ſupport under ſufferings ; that he would be pleaſed to ſtrengthen our faith, and to increaſe and lengthen out our patience, in proportion to the degree and duration of our ſufferings.

All the promiſes which GOD hath made to us, are upon this condition, that we earneſtly ſeek and ſue to him for the benefit and bleſſing of them. Pſal. 1. 15. “ Call upon me in the day of trouble ; I will
“ deliver thee, and thou ſhalt glorify me.” Ezek. xxxvi. 37. After a great deliverance, and many bleſſings promiſed to them, this condition is at laſt added, “ thus ſaith the LORD GOD, I will yet for
“ this be enquired of by the houſe of Iſrael, to do
“ it for them.” And this likewiſe is the tenor of the promiſes of the new teſtament, Matth. vii. 7. “ Ask, and it ſhall be given you : ſeek, and ye
“ ſhall find : knock, and it ſhall be opened unto
“ you.”

SERM. "you." And in this very case that I am speaking
 C. of, GOD expects that we should apply ourselves to
 him, for spiritual wisdom and grace, to behave our-
 selves under sufferings as we ought: Jam. i. 2, 3, 4.
 where speaking of the manifold temptations that
 christians would be exercised withal, he directs them
 to pray to GOD for wisdom to demean themselves
 under persecutions, with patience, and constancy,
 and chearfulness, "my brethren, account it all joy,
 "when ye fall into divers temptations;" (meaning
 the temptations and trials of suffering in several
 kinds) "knowing this, that the trying of your faith
 "worketh patience. But let patience have its per-
 "fect work." And because this is a very difficult
 duty, and requires a great deal of spiritual skill, to
 demean ourselves under sufferings as we ought, there-
 fore he adds in the next words: "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."

And this earnest application we are to make to
 God, for "his grace and seasonable help in time
 "of need;" not to put him in mind of his pro-
 mise, but to testify our dependence upon him, and
 expectation of all good from him. And we must
 likewise use great importunity in our prayers to
 GOD, to assist us and stand by us in the day of trial,
 and the hour of temptation. And therefore our
 SAVIOUR heaps up several words, to denote the
 great earnestness and importunity which we ought
 to use in prayer, bidding us "to ask, and seek,
 "and knock." And to shew that he lays more
 than ordinary weight upon this matter, and to en-
 courage

courage our importunity, he spake two several parables to this purpose; the first, Luke xi. 5. of the man who by meer importunity prevailed with his friend to rise at midnight to do him a kindness, which our SAVIOUR applies to encourage our importunity in prayer, ver. 9. "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." The other is the parable of the importunate widow, and unjust judge, related by the same evangelist, Luke xviii. 1. with this preface to it; "and he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." And to speak the truth, they seem at first sight two of the oddest of all our SAVIOUR'S parables, as if the design of them were to insinuate to us, that GOD is to be prevailed upon by the meer importunity of our prayers, to grant our requests: but our blessed SAVIOUR, who best knew his own meaning, tells us, that all that he design'd by it, was only to signify, "that we ought always to pray, and not to faint;" that is, "to continue instant in prayer," and not to give over after once asking, as if we despaired of prevailing. Not that mere importunity prevails with GOD to give us those things which he is otherwise unwilling to grant; but because it becomes us to be fervent, and earnest, to testify our faith and confidence in the goodness of GOD, and the deep sense we have of our own weakness, and wants, and unworthiness; and likewise that we set a true value upon the blessings and favours of GOD, as worth all the earnestness and importunity we can use: and in this decent and sober sense, the success of our prayers may truly be said to depend

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depend upon our importunity; not that it is necessary to move GOD to grant our requests, but that it becomes us to be thus affected, that we may be the more fitly qualified for the grace and mercy which GOD is willing to confer upon us.

I have been the longer upon this, to give us a right notion of this matter, and that we may the more distinctly understand the true reason why our SAVIOUR does require so much earnestness and importunity of prayer on our part; not at all to work upon GOD, and to dispose him to shew mercy to us (for that he is always inclinable to whenever we are fit for it) but only to dispose and qualify us to receive the grace and mercy of GOD, with greater advantage to our selves.

5. Provided moreover, that we be not confident of our selves, and of the force and strength of our own resolution. We know not our selves, nor the frailty and weakness of our own resolution, 'till we are tried. 'Tis wise advice which Solomon gives us, and never more seasonable than in the day of trial, Prov. iii. 5, 6, 7. "Trust in the LORD with all
"thine heart, and lean not to thine own understand-
"ing; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he
"shall direct thy paths; be not wise in thine own
"eyes;" that is, be not conceited and confident of thine own wisdom and strength, or ability in any kind; there is a secret providence of GOD, which mingles itself with the actions and spirits of men, and disposeth of us unknown to our selves; and what we think to be the effect of our own strength and resolution, of our own wisdom and contrivance, proceeds from an higher cause, which unseen to us, does steer and govern us. So the wise man observes, Prov. xx.

24. “ Man’s goings are of the LORD, how can a
“ man then understand his own ways?” and there-
fore we have reason every one to say with the pro-
phet, Jer. x. 23. “ O LORD, I know that the way
“ of man is not in himself, it is not in man that
“ walketh to direct his steps.” Our feet will soon
slip, if GOD do not “ uphold us by his hand.” Re-
member how shamefully the chief of our LORD’s
disciples miscarried, by too much confidence in him-
self, I mean St. Peter; in whose fall we may all see
our own frailty; if GOD do but permit the devil to
have the winnowing of us, there will be a great deal
of chaff found in the best of us. What St. Paul said
of himself, 2 Cor. xii. 10. “ when I am weak,
“ then am I strong,” we shall all find true, when it
comes to the trial; we are then strongest, when, in
a just sense of our own weakness, we rely most upon
the strength and power of GOD.

6. Provided furthermore, that according to our
ability, we have been much in the exercise of alms
and charity. For well-doing, or doing good is some-
times taken in a narrower sense, not improper here
to be mentioned, tho’ perhaps not so particularly
intended here in the text, “ for works of charity and
“ alms.” As Heb. xiii. 16. “ But to do good, and
“ to communicate” (that is, to the necessities of the
poor) “ forget not, for with such sacrifices GOD is
“ well pleased.” This kind of well-doing is a spe-
cial preservative in times of evil; there is no kind of
grace or virtue to which there are in scripture more
special promises made of our protection and preser-
vation from evil and suffering, of support and com-
fort under them, and deliverance out of them, than

SERM. to this of a charitable and compassionate consideration of those who labour under want or suffering. C.
 Pfal. xxxvii. 3. “Trust in the LORD, and do good, “so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou “shalt be fed:” and ver. 19. speaking of righteous or merciful men, “they shall not be ashamed in “the evil time, and in the days of famine they “shall be satisfied.” Pfal. xli. 1, 2. “Blessed is he “that considereth the poor, the LORD will deliver “him in time of trouble; the LORD will preserve him “and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon “the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him unto the “will of his enemies.”

There are likewise in the apocryphal books excellent sayings for the encouragement of charity, as that which will be particularly considered and rewarded to us in the times of danger and distress, in the days of affliction and suffering, Tob. iv. 7, 8, 9, 10. “Give alms of thy substance, and turn not “thy face from any poor man, and the face of GOD “shall not be turned away from thee; if thou hast “abundance, give alms accordingly; if thou hast “but a little, be not afraid to give according to that “little, for thou layest up for thy self a good treasure against the day of necessity, because that alms “do deliver from death, and suffereth not to come “into darkness.” Ecclus. iii. 31. speaking of him that gives alms, and is ready to do kindness to others; “he is mindful of that which may come hereafter; “and when he falleth he shall find a stay.” And chap. xxix. 11, 12, 13. “Lay up thy treasure according to the commandment of the most high, “and it shall bring thee more profit than gold, shut
 “ up

“ up alms in thy store-houses, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction, it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield, and strong spear.”

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I have often said it, and am verily persuaded of it, that one of the best signs of God's mercy and favour to this poor nation, is, that God hath been pleased of late years to stir up so general a disposition in men to works of alms and charity, and thereby to revive the primitive spirit of christianity, which so eminently “ abounded in this grace,” and taught “ those who believed in God, to be careful to maintain and practise good works.” And nothing gives me greater hopes that God hath mercy still in store for us, than that men are so ready to shew mercy; there are great objects to exercise our charity upon in this time of the general suspension of trade and business, from an apprehension of approaching troubles; by reason whereof, both the numbers and necessities of our poor, are greatly and daily increased among us; and besides the poor of our own nation, God has sent us great numbers from abroad; I mean those who are fled hither for shelter, from that violent storm of persecution which hath lately fallen upon them for the cause of our common religion. According to the compassion we shew to them, we may expect that God will either preserve us from the like sufferings, or graciously support us under them. What do we know, but that God is now trying us, and hath purposely put this opportunity into our hands, of preventing or mitigating, or shortening our own sufferings, according as we extend our charity and pity to those

S E R M. who have suffered so deeply for the cause of GOD, and
 C. his truth.

7. Provided in the last place, and above all, that we be sincere in our religion, and endeavour to be universally good, and “ holy in all manner of conversation,” and “ to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by JESUS CHRIST, to the praise and glory of GOD.” This is the largest sense of well-doing, and the most necessary of all the rest, to prepare us for sufferings, and to give us courage and constancy under them; and likewise to engage the providence of GOD to a tender care of us, and concernment for us, if he shall see it fit to bring us into a state of suffering.

But if we live in open contempt and violation of GOD’s laws, if we make no conscience of our ways and actions, we cannot possibly have any well-grounded trust and confidence in GOD, for “ he hates all the workers of iniquity,” and his providence “ sets it self against them for evil.” Bad men draw many mischiefs and inconveniencies upon themselves, as the natural consequences of their actions; but besides this, the vengeance of GOD haunts and pursues evil-doers, and his just providence many times involves them in many difficulties and dangers, besides and beyond the natural course of things: “ upon the wicked (says David) he will rain snares.” So that as ever we expect the comfortable effects of the divine care and providence, we must live in a dutiful obedience to GOD’s holy will and laws.

Bad men may make a profession of the true religion, and may in some sort believe it, tho’ they do
 not

not live according to it; and yet perhaps for all this, S E R M.
out of a mere generosity and obstinacy of mind, C.

they cannot bear to be threatned and terrified out of the profession of the truth; and will endure a great deal of trouble and inconveniencies, before they will renounce it; knowing themselves to be so far in the right, that they stand for the truth, and hoping perhaps thereby to make some amends for their bad practice. But when all is done, nothing gives a man true courage and resolution, like the testimony of our own hearts, concerning our own sincerity, and the conscience of well-doing. And on the contrary, he that hath not the resolution and patience to mortify his lusts, and to restrain his appetites, and to subdue his irregular passions, for the sake of GOD and religion, will not easily bring himself to submit to great sufferings upon that account. There is considerable difficulty in the practice of religion, and the resolute course of a holy life; but surely it is much easier to live as religion requires we should do, than to lay down our lives for it; and (as I have told you upon another occasion) he that cannot prevail with himself to live a saint, will much more hardly be persuaded to die a martyr. I proceed to the

Third point, namely, what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of GOD under the notion of "a faithful creator," does afford to us under all our suffering for a good conscience and a good cause. "Let them that suffer according to the will of GOD, commit the keeping of their souls to him, in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator." And in this I shall be very brief.

And this is a firm ground of comfort and en-

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C.

couragement to us, under all our sufferings for GOD, to consider him as the author of our beings, or as it is exprest in the text, “ as a faithful creator;” one that is not fickle and inconstant in his affection and kindness to his creatures ; but is true to his own design, and will not abandon and forsake the work of his own hands : so great a benefit as that of our beings, freely conferred upon us, is but an earnest of GOD’s further kindness to us, and future care of us ; if by our ill carriage towards him, we do not render ourselves unworthy and incapable of it : that we are GOD’s creatures, is a demonstration that he hath a kindness for us ; if he had not, he would never have made us ; as it is excellently said in the Wisdom of Solomon, chap. xi. 23, 24. “ Thou hast mercy upon
 “ all, for thou lovest all the things that are, and
 “ abhorrest nothing which thou hast made : for ne-
 “ ver wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou
 “ hadst hated it.” And ver. 26. “ Thou sparest all,
 “ for they are thine, O LORD, thou lover of souls.”

To whom then may we with so much confidence commit ourselves, as to him who freely gave us our being? from whom may we expect so tender a regard and consideration of our case, and all the circumstances of it ; as from this great founder and benefactor? for “ he that made us
 “ knows our frame, and whereof we are made,” and how much we are able to bear ; he considers our strength, or rather our weakness, and what courage and resolution he hath endued us withal, and what comfort and support we stand in need of in the day of tribulation. And as they who make armour, are wont to try that which they think to be
 good

good and well tempered, with a stronger charge, not S E R M. to break and hurt it, but to prove and praise it: fo C.
GOD exerciseth those whom he hath fitted and tempered for it, with manifold temptations, “ that the
 “ trial of your faith,” as St. Peter expresseth it, **1 Pet.**
 i. 7. “ being much more precious than of gold tried
 “ in the fire, may be found unto praise, and honour,
 “ and glory, at the appearing of **JESUS CHRIST.**”

So that this consideration that we are **GOD**'s creatures, does (as I may say) oblige him in faithfulness to his own act, and in consequence of his bringing us into being at first, to be concerned for us afterwards, so as never to abandon us, nor quite to take away his loving-kindness and mercy from us; till we are good for nothing, and do in a manner cease to be what he made us, that is reasonable creatures. A person or people must have proceeded to the utmost degree of degeneracy, when **GOD** will consider them no longer as his creatures, nor shew any pity or favour to them; things must be come to extremity, when **GOD** deals thus with us, as he threatned the people of Israel, **Isa. xxvii. 11.** “ When the
 “ boughs are withered, they shall be broken off, and
 “ set on fire? for it is a people of no understanding:
 “ therefore he that made them will not have mercy
 “ on them, and he that formed them, will shew them
 “ no favour.”

And now I have done with these three points which I proposed to handle from this text, and the discourse which I have made upon them, does all along apply itself, by directing us how we ought “ to commit
 “ ourselves” to the providence of **GOD**, in all cases of danger and suffering, especially for the cause of
GOD

SERM.

C.

God and his truth, viz. in the faithful discharge of our duty and a good conscience, by a firm trust and confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the divine providence, not doubting but that “ he who made “ us, and knows our frame,” will have a tender care of us, and “ not suffer us to be tempted above “ what we are able.”

And as to our present danger, and that terrible storm which threatens us, let us pray to God, if it be his will, to divert it; but if otherwise he hath determined, to fit and prepare us for it. And let us be fervent and earnest in our prayers to him, not that he is moved by our importunity, but that we may thereby be qualified and made fit to receive the mercy which we beg of him.

And let us take this occasion to do that which we should have done without it, “ to break off our “ sins by repentance, and to turn every one of us “ from the evil of our ways;” that hereby we may render God propitious to us, and put ourselves under the more immediate care and protection of his providence; that we may prevent his judgments, and turn away his wrath and displeasure from us, as he did once from a great and sinful city and people, upon their sincere humiliation and repentance, Jonah iii. 10. where it is said of the people of Nineveh, “ That God saw their works, that they turned from “ their evil way, and God repented of the evil that “ he had said he would do unto them, and he “ did it not.” Above all, let us be sincere in the profession of our religion, and conscientious in the practice of it; nothing will bear us up under great trials and sufferings, like “ the testimony of a good
“ con-

“ conscience, void of offence towards GOD and
“ towards men.”

I will conclude this whole discourse, with those apostolical blessings and prayers, Coloss. i. 10, 11.
“ That ye may walk worthy of the LORD, unto
“ all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work,
“ strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness.” And 2 Thef. ii. 16, 17,
“ Now our LORD JESUS CHRIST himself, and
“ GOD even our FATHER who hath loved us,
“ and hath given us everlasting consolation and
“ good hope through grace, comfort your hearts,
“ and stablish you in every good word and work.”
To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever,
Amen.

S E R M O N C I.

Of the work assign'd to every man,
and the season for doing it.

J O H N ix. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.

THESSE words our blessed SAVIOUR spake SERM. CI.
of himself, whilst he was upon earth; in which he tells us, that he was sent by
GOD into the world, and had a certain work and employment appointed him during his abode in it.
A

SERM.
CI.

A great work indeed! to instruct, to reform, and save mankind. A work of great labour, and pains, and patience, not to be done in a short time; and yet the time for doing it was not long, after he came into the world: it was a good while before he began it, and after he began it, the time of working was not long, before the night came and put an end to it: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

But that which our SAVIOUR here speaks of himself, and which properly belongs to him, and no other; may yet be accommodated to every man, with some allowance for the difference and disproportion. For tho' every man be not sent by GOD into the world, after so peculiar a manner, and upon so particular and vast a design: yet upon a general account, every man is sent by GOD into this world, and hath a work given him to do in it, which he is concern'd vigorously to mind and to prosecute with all his might. And tho' every man be not sent to save the whole world, as the SON of GOD was, yet every man is sent by GOD into the world, "to work out his own salvation," and to take care of that in the first place, and then to promote the salvation of others, as much as in him lies. So that every one of us may, in a very good sense, accommodate these words of our SAVIOUR to himself: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work."

I shall therefore at this time take the liberty to handle these words according to this moral accommodation

modation of them, and apply what our SAVIOUR here says of himself, to every man that cometh into the world: and this I shall do, by shewing these three things.

First, that every man hath a work assigned him to do in this world, by him that sent him into it; and may in some sense say, as our blessed SAVIOUR did of himself, "I must work the works of him that sent me."

Secondly, that there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in. "While it is day."

Thirdly, that after this season is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working. "The night cometh, when no man can work."

First, every man hath a work assigned him to do in this world, by him that sent him into it; and may in some sense say, as our blessed SAVIOUR did of himself, "I must work the works of him that sent me." God who made man a reasonable creature, and hath endowed him with faculties, whereby he is capable of knowing and serving him; hath appointed him a work and service suitable to these faculties: and having infused an immortal soul into this earthy body, hath certainly designed him for a state beyond this life, in which he shall be for ever happy or miserable, according as he useth and demeans himself in this world.

So that the work which every one of us hath to do in this world, is to prepare and fit our selves for that eternal duration which remains for us after death. For the life which we live now in this world is a time of exercise, a short state of probation and

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trial, in order to a durable and endless state, in which we shall be immutably fix'd in another world. This world, into which we are now sent for a little while, is as it were GOD's school, in which immortal spirits, clothed with flesh, are trained and bred up for eternity; and therefore the best, the only sure way to be happy for ever, is, so to improve the short and uncertain time of this life, that we may approve our selves to GOD in this world, and enjoy him in the next; or (as St. Paul expresseth it) "that having our fruit unto holiness, our end may be everlasting life."

And this work consists in these three things.

I. In the care of our own salvation.

II. In doing what we can to promote the salvation of others.

III. And in order to both these, in the careful improvement and good husbandry of our time.

I. In the care of our own salvation. And this consists in two things.

1. In the worship of almighty GOD.

2. In the careful and conscientious practice and obedience of his holy laws.

1. The care of our own salvation consists in the pious and devout worship of almighty GOD; that we honour him, and pay him that homage and respect, which is due from creatures to him that made them, and is the great sovereign and judge of the world; that we have an inward reverence and esteem of him, and that we express this by all solemn external acknowledgments of him; as by praying to him for the supply of our wants; by praising him for all the blessings and benefits which we have received at his

hands;

hands; and that we set apart constant and solemn times for the performance of these duties; and then when we are employed in them, we be serious, and hearty, and attentive to what we are about, and perform every part of divine worship with those circumstances of reverence and respect, which may testify our awful sense of the divine majesty, and our inward and profound veneration of him, with whom we have to do. And this is that which is directly and properly religion.

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2. This care of our own salvation does consist likewise in the conscientious and constant obedience and practice of GOD's holy laws, in the conformity of our lives and actions to the laws which he hath given us, whether they be natural, or written upon our hearts, or made known to us by the revelation of his word; that we govern our passions by reason, and moderate our selves in the use of sensual delights, so as not to transgress the rules of temperance and chastity; that we demean our selves towards others, and converse with them with justice and fidelity, with kindness and charity.

These are the sum of the divine laws, and the heads of our duty towards our selves and others; all which are more powerfully enforced upon us by the revelation of the gospel, and the plain promises and threatenings of it; the faith of CHRIST being the most firm and effectual principle both of piety towards GOD, and of universal obedience to all his particular commands.

And this is the great work which GOD hath sent us to do in the world. So the wise man sums up our duty, Eccles. xii. 13. "Fear GOD, and keep his

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“commandments; for this is the whole duty of
 “man.” The fear and reverence of the divine ma-
 jesty is the great foundation and principle of religion;
 but obedience to GOD’s laws, is the life and practice
 of it. GOD does not expect that we should spend the
 greatest part of our time in the immediate acts of
 religion, and in the solemn duties of his worship and
 service; but only that we should allot a fitting portion of
 our time to these, according to the circumstances of our
 condition in this world, and the example of holy and
 good men that are in the like circumstances with our
 selves. For such is the goodness of GOD, that he does
 not only allow us to provide for the necessaries and
 conveniencies of this life; but hath made it our duty
 so to do. It is one of the precepts of the gospel,
 which the apostle chargeth the bishops and teachers
 of the gospel to inculcate frequently upon christians,
 “that they which have believed in GOD, should be
 “careful to maintain good works,” that is, to em-
 ploy themselves in the works of an honest calling,”
 “for necessary uses;” that is, for the support of their
 families, and the relief of those who are in want and
 necessity. And the apostle lays great weight and
 stress upon this, as a very great duty, Tit. iii. 8.
 “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will
 “that thou affirm constantly, that they which have
 “believed in GOD, might be careful to maintain
 “good works. These things are good and profitable
 “unto men;” that is, of general benefit and advan-
 tage to mankind.

So that no man’s calling is a hindrance to religion,
 but a part of it; and by performing the duties of
 piety in their proper seasons, and spending the rest
 of

of our time in any honest and useful employment, we may make our whole life a perpetual serving of GOD; we may glorify GOD in our eating and drinking, and in all other lawful and useful actions of life. In serving the occasions and necessities of life, with sobriety and temperance, and in managing our worldly commerce with justice and integrity, we may serve GOD, and perform considerable duties of religion.

So that provided we do nothing that is sinful, and manage the actions and concernments of this life, with a due regard and subserviency to the great interests of eternity, we may do the work of GOD all the while we are providing for our selves, and employed in the works of an honest calling: for GOD, who hath designed this life in order to the other, considers the necessities of our present state, and allows us to make provision for it.

There are some persons indeed whose birth and condition sets them above the common employments of life, and the works of an ordinary calling: but these also have a work given them to do; for GOD hath sent no man into the world to no purpose, and only to take his pastime therein; *neque enim ita generati sumus à natura, ut ad ludum & jocum facti esse videamur; sed ad severitatem potiùs, & quædam studia graviora atque majora;* “ for we are not (says Tully “ de off. lib. 1.) so framed by nature, as if we were “ made for sport and jest, but for more serious employments, and for greater and weightier business;” and those who are tied to no particular calling, may allow so much larger portions of their time to religion, and the service of GOD; and GOD likewise expects from them, that they should be useful

SERM. to mankind in some higher and nobler way, according
 CI. to the publickness of their station and influence. Such persons may be serviceable to their country, and the affairs of government, and in the care of publick justice, and may employ their time in preparing and rendring themselves more fit for this service. They may find a great deal of work to do in the good government of their families, and in the prudent care and management of their estates, and in reconciling differences among their neighbours, and in considering the necessities of the poor, and providing for their supply.

So that besides the proper work of religion, and the more immediate service of GOD, every man in the world, how exempt soever his condition be from the common care and drudgery of humane life, may find work enough wherein he may usefully employ all his time, and provide for his own, and for the common benefit of mankind; and GOD expects it as a duty from such, that every man should employ himself in some work or other, suitable to the station in which GOD hath placed him in this world.

II. The work which GOD hath given us to do in the world, consists in doing what we can to further and promote the salvation of others. This chiefly lies upon us, who are “the ministers of GOD, and “to whom the word of reconciliation is committed.” We are more especially commission'd and appointed for this work, and are “ambassadors for CHRIST, “to beseech men in his stead to be reconciled to “GOD.” We are sent by GOD in a more peculiar manner, and appointed for this very work, “to “watch for mens souls,” and to be instruments
 and

and means of their eternal happiness. And therefore we who are sent by God in a more peculiar manner, and have this work assigned us to do in the world, ought to be very vigorous and industrious in it; and this, whether we consider the nature of our employment, or the glorious reward of it.

1. If we consider the nature of our employment, both in respect of the honour and the happiness of it. 'Tis the most honourable work that mortal man can be employed in; 'tis the same in kind, and in the main end and design of it, with that of the blessed angels; for we also are "ministring spirits, sent forth by God to minister, for the good of those who shall be heirs of salvation." We are the messengers and ambassadors of God to men, sent to treat with them about the terms of their peace and reconciliation with God, to offer salvation to them, and to direct them to the best ways and means of procuring it. Nay, we have the honour to be employed in the very same work that the Son of God was, when he was upon the earth, "to seek and to save them that are lost; and to call sinners to repentance;" and to carry on that work, whereof he himself laid the foundation, when he was in the world. And what greater honour can be put upon the sons of men, than to help forward that glorious design and undertaking of the Son of God, for the salvation of mankind.

And 'tis an employment no less happy and honourable; 'tis not to drudge about the mean and low concerns of this life; a perpetual toil and care about "what we shall eat and drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed," which is the business of

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“ of a worldly employment; but it is a direct and immediate “ seeking of the kingdom of GOD, and “ his righteousness,” and a continual endeavour to promote these. It does not consist in the labour of our body, and in bodily toil; but in the delightful exercise of our minds, about the best and noblest objects, GOD, and heaven, and eternity; in an earnest and faithful endeavour by all wise ways and means to gain souls to GOD, and “ to turn sinners from the “ errors of their ways,” and to prevent their eternal ruin and destruction; and next to the procuring of our own happiness, to be instrumental to the happiness of others, which is certainly the most pleasant and noble work that we can possibly be employed in; especially if we consider, that by the very nature of our employment, we do at the same time, and by the very same means, carry on both these designs, of the salvation of ourselves and others. So St. Paul tells Timothy, when he exhorts him upon this very consideration, “ to give himself wholly” to this blessed work; because, says he, “ in doing this, thou shalt “ save thyself, and them that hear thee,” 1 Tim. iv. 16. And when two of the greatest and best designs in the world, our own happiness, and the salvation of others, do so happily meet in one, and are jointly carried on by the same labour; this ought to be a great spur and incitement to us, to be vigorous and unwearied, “ and abundant in the work of the “ LORD;” and a mighty encouragement to us “ to “ preach the word, to be instant in season, and out “ of season,” and “ to be examples to others, in “ word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in “ faith, in purity;” as St. Paul chargeth Timothy in

in the most solemn and awful manner, “ before **GOD**, S E R M. CI.
“ and the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, who shall judge
“ the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his
“ kingdom,” 1 Tim. iv. 12. and 2 Tim. iv. 1. And then,

2. If we consider the glorious reward of this work. If we be faithful and industrious in it, it will advance us to a higher degree of glory and happiness in the other world. “ They that be wise” (says the prophet, Dan. xii. 3.) “ shall shine as the brightness of
“ the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.” They that are industrious in this work, as they are “ worthy
“ of double honour” in this world, so they shall shine with a double glory and lustre in the other.

But tho’ this work of promoting the salvation of others, be chiefly incumbent upon those whose office it is to attend upon this very thing; yet we are all of us concerned in it, according to the advantages and opportunities we have for it. Every man is concerned to help forward the salvation of his brother, and not let him perish if he can help it; and it is in every man’s power to contribute something to this blessed work of saving others by seasonable counsel and advice, by kind and gentle reproof, but especially by a holy and exemplary conversation, by a shining virtue, which hath a silent power of persuasion, and I know not what secret charm and attraction to draw and allure others to the imitation of it.

III. And in order to both these, the saving of ourselves and others, this work, which **GOD** hath given us to do in the world, consists in the careful use and good husbandry of our time; for without this, neither

SER M. CI. the one nor the other can be promoted and carried on to any purpose. Time is the season and opportunity of carrying on of any work, and for that reason is one of the most valuable things; and yet nothing is more wastefully spent, and more prodigally squandered away by a great part of mankind than this, which next to our immortal souls, is of all other things most precious; because upon the right use or abuse of our time, our eternal happiness or misery does depend. Men have generally some guard upon themselves, as to their money and estates, and will not with eyes open suffer others to rob and deprive them of it: but we will let any body almost rob us of our time, and are contented to expose this precious treasure to every body's rapine and extortion, and can quietly look on, whilst men thrust in their hands and take it out by whole handfuls, as if it were of no greater value than silver was in Solomon's days, no more than the stones in the street. And yet when it is gone, all the silver and gold in the world cannot purchase and fetch back the least moment of it, when perhaps we would give all the world for a very small part of that time, which we parted with upon such cheap and easy terms.

Good God! what a stupid and senseless prodigality is this! do we consider what we do, when we give away such large portions of our time to our ease and pleasure, to diversion and idleness, or trifling and unprofitable conversation, to the making and receiving of impertinent visits, and the usual and almost inseparable attendants thereof, spiteful observations upon them that are present, and slandering and backbiting those that are absent; (for the great design

design of most people in visits, is not to better one another, but to spy and make faults, and not to mend them; to get time off their hands, to shew their fine clothes, and to recommend themselves to the mutual contempt of one another, by a plentiful impertinence;) when we part with it by wholesale in sleep and dressings, and can spend whole mornings between the comb and the glass, and the afternoon at plays, and whole nights in gaming, or in riot, and lewdness, and intemperance; in all which people commonly waste their money and their time together!

Nay how do even the best of us misplace this precious treasure; and tho' we do not employ it to wicked purposes, and in works of iniquity, yet we do not apply it to the best and noblest use, to the glory of God, and the good and salvation of men! by thus laying out this treasure, we might "lay up for our selves treasures in heaven," and help others on in the way thither.

Thus our blessed SAVIOUR employed his precious time, in "going about doing good," in all kinds, and upon all occasions, healing the bodies, and enlightning the minds, and saving the souls of men: this was his business, and this was his delight; it was "his meat and drink," and his very life, he spent himself in it, and sacrificed his ease, and his safety, and his life to these great ends, for which he came into the world; he considered the goodness and the greatness of this work, and the little time he had to do it in, which made him incessantly industrious in it, and to run the race which was set before him with great speed, and "to work while it is day," be-

SERM. cause he knew "the night would come when no
 CI. "man can work." And this brings me to the

Second thing I observed, from the text, namely, that there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in; "while it is day. I must work "the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day." And this day comprehends all the opportunities of our life, which will soon be over, and therefore had need to be well spent. A great part of our life is past before the season of working begins; it is a great while before the use of our reason begins, and we come to have our senses exercised to discern between good and evil; before our understandings are ripe for the serious consideration of GOD and religion, and for the due care of our souls, and of the eternal concernment of another world; so that this first part of our life is in a great measure useles and unprofitable to us, in regard to our great design. For infancy and childhood are but the dawnings of this day, and no fit time to work in; and youth, which is as the morning of this day, tho' it is the flower of our time, and the most proper season of all other, for the remembrance of GOD, and the impressions of religion; yet it is usually possess'd by vanity and vice; the common custom and practice of the world, hath devoted this best part of our age to the worst employments, to the service of sin and of our lusts. How very few are there that lay hold of this opportunity, and employ it to the best purposes? and yet the following course of our lives doth in a great measure depend upon it; for most persons do continue and hold on in the way which they set out at first, whether it be good or bad. And those who neglect to improve this first op-
 por-

portunity of their lives, do seldom recover them-S E R M.
selves afterwards. CI. God's grace may seize upon men
in any part of their lives; but according to the most
ordinary methods of it, the foundations and princi-
ples of religion and virtue are most commonly laid in
a pious and virtuous education. This is the great
opportunity of our lives, which setteth and fixeth
most men, either in a good or bad course, and the
fortune of their whole lives does usually follow it, and
depend upon it.

'Tis true indeed our day continues many times a
great while longer, and we are to work while it
continues; and 'tis never too late to begin to do well,
and to enter upon a good course: but there is no such
proper and advantageous season for the beginning of
this work, as in our youth and tender years. "This
" is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation."
God's grace is then most forward and ready to assist
us; and we are then least of all indispos'd for the
receiving of the impressions of it; and the impres-
sions of it do then go deepest into our minds, and
are most lasting and durable. But if we neglect this
opportunity, we provoke God by degrees to with-
draw his grace, and to take away his HOLY SPIRIT
from us, and by degrees we settle in vicious habits,
and are every day more and more "hardened
" through the deceitfulness of sin." It is never too
late to work while the day lasts; but the sooner we
begin this work, and set about it in good earnest, the
easier we shall find it; if we defer it late, every step
will be up the hill, and against the grain.

Thirdly, after this season is expired, there will be
no further opportunity of working; when this day is
once

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once at an end, then “ cometh the night when no
“ man can work.” The night is a time unfit for
work, when we can hardly do any thing, if we had
never so great a mind to it; and there is such a night
coming upon every one of us, and wo be to us if
we have our work to do when the night over-
takes us.

There is usually an evening before this night,
when it will be very difficult for us, and next to impos-
sible, to do this work; and this is the time of sick-
ness and old-age, in which men are commonly unfit
for any work; but most of all, that which requires
the whole force and vigour of our minds, the busi-
ness of religion. If we attempt this work then, we
shall go very heartlesly about it, and do it very imper-
fectly, and be forc'd to slubber it over, and to hud-
dle it up in great haste and confusion, and so as we
can hardly hope that God will accept it. For how
unfit are men to do any thing, when they are full of
the sense of their own infirmities, and life it self is
become so great a burden to them, that they are
hardly able to stand under it! how incapable shall we
then be of doing the greatest and most momentous
work of our lives, when our faculties are almost quite
spent and worn out, and all the powers of life are decay-
ed in us; when our understandings are dark and dull,
our memories frail and treacherous, and our hearts
hard and “ deceitful above all things!” when sick-
ness and old age overtake us, we shall then find to
our sorrow that “ sufficient for that day is the evil
“ thereof;” we shall have need then of nothing else
to do, but to bear our infirmities with patience and
decency; and it is well if we can rally together of the
broken

broken forces of our reason, so much as may be a sufficient guard to us against peevishness and discontent; we had need then have nothing else to do, but to be old and weak, to be sick and die.

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Besides, how can we expect that GOD should accept of any work that we do at such a time? with what face can we put off GOD with the dregs of our life? or how can we hope that he will be pleased with the service of those years, which we ourselves “take no pleasure in? if we offer the lame in sacrifice, is it not evil? and if we offer the blind, is it not evil? offer it now to thy governour, and see if he will be pleased with thee?”

And sickness is commonly as bad a time as old age, and usually incumber'd with greater difficulties, and clog'd with more indispositions. If a violent distemper seize upon us, it many times takes away the use of our reason, and deprives us of all opportunity of consideration; it makes us both insensible of the danger of our condition, and incapable of using the means to avoid it. And if we have neglected religion before, and have put off the great work of our life to the end of it, our opportunity is irrecoverably lost; for there is nothing to be done in religion, when our reason is once departed from us; “the night is then come” indeed, and “darkness hath overtaken us;” and tho' we be still alive, yet are we as unfit for any work, as if we were naturally dead.

And this is no such rare and extraordinary case; for it happens to many; and every man that wilfully defers the work of religion and repentance to a dying hour, hath reason to fear that he shall be thus surpris'd

SER M. surpris'd in his sin and security, and by the just
 CI. judgment of GOD deprived of all the opportunity of
 life and salvation, while he is yet in the land of the
 living.

But if GOD be more merciful unto us, and visit us with such a sickness, as leaves us the use of our understandings, yet all that we do in religion at such a time, proceeds from so violent a cause, from the present terror of death, and the dreadful apprehension of that eternal misery which is just ready to swallow us up, that it is one of the hardest things in the world, not only for others, but even for ourselves, to know whether our resolutions, and this sudden and hasty fit of repentance be sincere or not: for it is natural, and almost unavoidable, for a man to repent, and be sorry for what he hath done, when he is going to execution: but the great question is, what this man would do, if his life were spared? whether his repentance would hold good, and he would become a new man, and change his former course of life, or relapse into it again? and it is by no means certain, that he would not be as bad as he was before: because we see many, who, when they lie upon a sick bed give all imaginable testimony of a deep sorrow, and a hearty repentance for their sins, who yet upon their recovery, return to their former sins with a greater appetite, and make themselves “ten times more the children of wrath than they were before.” So that all the work that we can do at such a time, ought not to be much reckoned upon, and can give us little or no comfort; because it is so infinitely uncertain whether it be real and sincere, and whether the effect of so violent

violent a cause would last and continue, if the cause were removed. Therefore “ we shou’d work while it is day ;” for whatever we do in the evening of our lives, will be done with great difficulty, and with very doubtful success.

But besides this evening, there is “ a night coming when no man can work ;” death will seize upon us, and then our state will be irrecoverably concluded ; after that it will be impossible for us to do any thing towards our own salvation, or to have any thing done for us by others : the prayers of the living will not avail the dead, “ as the tree falls so it lies ; there is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor device in the grave whither we are going,” therefore, according to the counsel of the wise man, “ what our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might.”

This counsel concerns all ages and persons. I will apply it to the young, in the words of the wise preacher, Eccles. xii. 1. “ Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” To them who are in the vigour of their age, in the words of the prophet, Isa. ch. lv. 6. “ Seek the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” And to them that are old, in the words of another prophet, Jer. xiii. 16. “ Give glory to the LORD your GOD, before he causeth darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.” And let us every one of us, of what age or condition soever, apply it to ourselves, in the

words of our blessed SAVIOUR here in the text, “ I
 “ must work the works of him that sent me, while
 “ it is day: the night cometh when no man can
 “ work.”

S E R M O N CII.

Of the great duties of natural religion,
 with the ways and means of know-
 ing them.

M I C A H vi. 6, 7, 8.

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow my
 self 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 oil? shall I give
 my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body
 for the sin of my soul?*

*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what
 doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and
 to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD?*

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IN the beginning of this chapter, the prophet tells the people of Israel, “ that the LORD had
 “ a controversy with them;” and that he might direct them how to take up this quarrel, he brings in one making this inquiry in the name of the people; “ wherewith shall I come before the LORD,
 “ and bow my self before the high GOD?” that is, by what kind of worship or devotion may I address
 my

my self to him in the most acceptable manner? by what means may I hope to appease his displeasure? to satisfy this enquiry, he first instanceth in the chief kinds of sacrifices and expiations that were in use among the Jews and Heathens; “ shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? ” the constant sacrifice that was offered to God by way of acknowledgment of his dominion over the creatures; “ with calves of a year old? ” which was the sin-offering which the high-priest offered for himself. Or will he rather accept of those great and costly sacrifices which were offered upon solemn and publick occasions, such as that was which Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple? “ will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? ” Or if none of these will do, shall I try to atone him after the manner of the heathen, by the dearest thing in the world, the first-born of my children? “ shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ” if God was to be appeased at all, surely they thought it must be by some of these ways, for beyond these they could imagine nothing of greater value and efficacy.

But the prophet tells them that they were quite out of the way, in thinking to pacify God upon these terms, that there are other things which are much better and more pleasing to him than any of these sacrifices. For some of them were expressly forbidden by God, “ as the offering up of our children ; ” and for the rest, they were not good in themselves, but meerly by virtue of their institution, and because they were commanded. But the things

which he would recommend to them, are such as are good in their own nature, and required of us by GOD upon that account. “ He hath shewed thee, “ O man, what is good, and what doth the LORD “ require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, “ and to walk humbly with thy GOD? ”

So that in these words you have,

First, an enquiry which is the best way to appease GOD when he is offended; “ wherewith shall I come “ before the LORD, and bow myself before the “ high GOD? ”

Secondly, the way that men are apt to take in this case; and that is by some external piece of religion and devotion; such as sacrifice was both among Jews and Heathens. “ Shall I come before him with burnt- “ offerings, &c.” By which questions the prophet intimates that men are very apt to pitch upon this course.

Thirdly, the course which GOD himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. “ He “ hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and “ what doth the LORD thy GOD require of thee, &c.”

The first being a mere question, there needs no more to be said of it; only that it is a question of great importance; what is the most effectual way to appease GOD when we have offended him? for who can bear his indignation, and who can stand before him, when once he is angry? Let us consider then, in the

Second place, the way that men are apt to take to pacify GOD; and that is by some external piece of religion and devotion, such as were sacrifices among the Jews and Heathens, “ shall I come before “ him

“ him with burnt-offerings?” This is the way which men are most apt to choose. The Jews, you see, pitched upon the external parts of their religion, those which were most pompous and solemn, the richest and most costly sacrifices, so they might but keep their sins, they were well enough content to offer up any thing else to God; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better.

And thus it is among ourselves, when we apprehend God is displeas'd with us, and his judgments are abroad in the earth, we are content to do any thing, but “ to learn righteousness;” we are willing to submit to any kind of external devotion and humiliation, to fast, and pray, to afflict ourselves and to cry mightily unto God; things some of them good in themselves, but the least part of that which God requires of us.

And as for the church of Rome, in case of publick judgments and calamities, they are the most inquisitive and (as they pretend) the most skilful people in the world to pacify God; and they have a thousand solemn devices to this purpose. I do not wrong them, by representing them enquiring after this manner. “ Shall I go before a crucifix, and bow myself to it, as to the high God? And because the LORD is a great king, and it is perhaps too much boldness and arrogancy to make immediate addresses always to him; to which of the saints or angels shall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the LORD be pleas'd with thousands of pater-nosters, or with ten thousands of ave-marys? Shall the host travel in procession, or myself

“ myself undertake a tedious pilgrimage? Or shall
 “ I list myself a foldier for the holy war, or for the
 “ extirpation of hereticks? Shall I give half my
 “ estate to a convent for my transgression, or chastise
 “ and punish my body for the sin of my soul? ”
 Thus men deceive themselves, and will submit to all
 the extravagant severities, that the petulancy and fol-
 ly of men can devise and impose upon them. And
 indeed it is not to be imagined, when men are once
 under the power of superstition, how ridiculous
 they may be, and yet think themselves religious; how
 prodigiously they may play the fool, and yet believe
 they please GOD; what cruel and barbarous things
 they may do to themselves and others, and yet be
 “ verily perswaded they do GOD good service.”

And what is the mystery of all this, but that men
 are loth to do that without which, nothing else that
 we do is acceptable to GOD? They “ hate to be re-
 “ formed;” and for this reason, they will be con-
 tent to do any thing, rather than be put to the trouble
 of mending themselves; every thing is easy in com-
 parison of this task, and GOD may have any terms
 of them, so he will let them be quiet in their sins,
 and excuse them from the real virtues of a good life.
 And this brings me to the

Third thing, which I principally intended to speak
 to. The course which GOD himself directs to, and
 which will effectually pacify him. “ He hath shewed
 “ thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the
 “ LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to
 “ love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD? ”
 In the handling of which, I shall,

First, consider those several duties which GOD SERM. here requires of us, and upon the performance of CH. which he will be pacified towards us.

Secondly, by what ways and means GOD hath discovered these duties to us, and the goodness of them; "he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, &c."

I. We will briefly consider the several duties which GOD here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us; "What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD?"

It was usual among the Jews to reduce all the duties of religion to these three heads, justice, mercy, and piety; under the first two, comprehending the duties which we owe to one another, and under the third, duties which we owe to GOD.

I. Justice. And I was going to tell you what it is, but I considered that every man knows it, as well as any definition can explain it to him. I shall only put you in mind of some of the principal Instances of it, and the several virtues comprehended under it. And,

First, justice is concerned in the making of laws; that they be such as are equal and reasonable, useful and beneficial, for the honour of GOD and religion, and for the publick good of human society; this is a great trust, in the discharge of which, if men be biassed by favour or interest, and drawn aside from the consideration and regard of the publick good, it is a far greater crime and of worse consequence than any private act of injustice between man and man. And

And then, justice is also concerned in the due execution of the laws; which are the guard of private property, the security of publick peace, and of religion and good manners. And,

Lastly, in the observance of laws and obedience to them; which is a debt which every man owes to humane society.

But more especially justice is concerned in the observance of those laws, whether of God or man, which respect the rights of men, and their mutual commerce and intercourse with one another. That we use honesty and integrity in all our dealings, in opposition to fraud and deceit; truth and fidelity, in opposition to falshood and breach of trust; equity and good conscience, in opposition to all kind of oppression and exaction. These are the principal branches, and instances of this great and comprehensive duty of justice; the violation whereof is so much the greater sin, because this virtue is the firmest bond of humane society, upon the observation whereof, the peace and happiness of mankind does so much depend.

2. Mercy, which does not only signify the inward affection of pity and compassion towards those that are in misery and necessity, but the effects of it, in the actual relief of those whose condition calls for our charitable help and assistance; by feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, and vindicating the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted, and ministring ease and relief to them if it be in our power. And this is a very lovely virtue, and argues more goodness in men than mere justice doth. For justice is a strict debt; but mercy is
favour

favour and kindness. And this perhaps may be the reason of the different expressions in the text, that when God barely commands us “to do justly,” he requires we should “love mercy,” that is, take a particular pleasure and delight in the exercise of this virtue, which is so proper and agreeable to mankind, that we commonly call it humanity, giving its name from our very nature. In short, it is so excellent a virtue, that I should be very sorry that any religion should be able to pretend to the practice of it more than our own.

3. Piety; “to walk humbly with thy God.” “To walk humbly in the fear of the LORD;” so the Chaldee paraphrase renders these words. And this phrase may comprehend all those acts of religion which refer immediately to God; a firm belief of his being and perfections; an awful sense of him, as the dread sovereign and righteous judge of the world; a due regard to his service, and a reverent behaviour of ourselves towards him in all acts of worship and religion, in opposition to atheism and a prophane neglect and contempt of God and religion; a new and monstrous kind of impiety! which of late years hath broke in upon us, and got head among us, not only contrary to the example of former ages, but in despite of the very genius and temper of the nation, which is naturally devout and zealous in religion.

Or else this phrase “of walking humbly with God,” may refer more particularly to the posture and condition of the people of Israel at that time, who were fallen under the heavy displeasure of God for their sins. And then the duty required is, that being

sensible how highly God hath been offended by us, by the general corruption and vitioufness of the age, which like a leprosy hath spread it self almost over the whole body of the nation, and by that open lewdness and that insolent impieties which are daily committed amongst us; I say, that being deeply sensibly of this, we do with all humility acknowledge our sins to God, and repent of them, and implore his mercy and forgiveness, and resolve by his grace “to turn every one from the evil of our ways,” and from “the wickedness that is in our hands;” which God grant we may every one do * this day, according to the pious design and intention of it. And if we be sincere in this resolution, “who can tell but “God will turn and repent, and turn away his anger “from us, that we perish not.” Nay, we have great reason to believe, that he will be pacified towards us. So he hath declared, Isa. i. 16. “Wash ye, make “you clean, put away the evil of your doings from “before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do “well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge “the fatherless, plead for the widow; come now, “and let us reason together, saith the LORD; though “your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as “snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be “as wooll.” But if we continue unreformed, God will say to us, as he does there to the people of Israel, “to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices “unto me? your calling of assemblies I cannot away “with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting; and “when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine “eyes from you; when ye make many prayers, I “will not hear.” To which let me add that excellent

* *This sermon was preach'd upon occasion of a publick fast.*

lent saying of the son of Sirach to this purpose, Eccclus. xxxiv. 25, 26. "He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? so is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things. Who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?"

II. Let us consider by what ways and means GOD hath made known these duties to us, and the goodness and the obligation of them. "He hath shewed, thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee?" I shall mention five ways whereby GOD hath discovered this to us.

1. By a kind of natural instinct.
2. By natural reason.
3. By the general vote and consent of mankind.
4. By external revelation.
5. By the inward dictates and motions of GOD'S SPIRIT upon the minds of men.

First, by a kind of natural instinct, by which I mean a secret impresson upon the minds of men, whereby they are naturally carried to approve some things as good and fit, and to dislike other things, as having a native evil and deformity in them. And this I call "a natural instinct," because it does not seem to proceed so much from the exercise of our reason, as from a natural propension and inclination, like those instincts which are in brute creatures, of natural affection and care towards their young ones. And that these inclinations are precedent to all reason and discourse about them, evidently appears by this, that they do put forth themselves every whit as vigorously in young persons, as in those of riper

reason; in the rude and ignorant sort of people, as in those who are more polish'd and refin'd. For we see plainly that the young and ignorant have as strong impressions of piety and devotion, as true a sense of gratitude and justice and pity, as the wiser and more knowing part of mankind. A plain indication, that the reason of mankind is prevented by a kind of natural instinct and anticipation concerning the good or evil, the comeliness or deformity of these things. And though this do not equally extend to all the instances of our duty, yet as to the great lines and essential parts of it, mankind hardly need to consult any other oracle, than the mere propensions and inclinations of their nature; as, whether we ought to reverence the divine nature, to be grateful to those who have conferred benefits upon us, to speak the truth, to be faithful to our promise, to restore that which is committed to us in trust, to pity and relieve those that are in misery, and in all things to do to others as we would have them do to us. And this would further appear, if we consider these two things.

1. That men are naturally innocent or guilty to themselves, according to what they do in these things. So the apostle tells us, Rom. ii. 14, 15. "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, and do
 " shew the effect of the law written in their hearts,
 " their consciences also bearing witness, and their
 " thoughts by turns (that is according as they do
 " well or ill) accusing or excusing them." There is
 a secret comfort in innocence, and a strange pleasure
 and

and satisfaction in being acquitted by our own minds for what we do. But on the contrary, when we contradict these natural dictates, what uneasiness do we find in our own breasts? nay even before the fact is committed, our conscience is strangely disquieted at the thoughts of it. When a man does but design to do a bad thing, he is as guilty to himself, as if he had committed it. Of this we have a considerable instance, in the first violence that was offered to nature, Gen. iv. 6. "The LORD said unto Cain, why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?" the very thought of that wickedness which he did but then design, did disorder his mind, and make a change in his very countenance. Guilt is the natural concomitant of heinous crimes, which so soon as ever a man commits, his spirit receives a secret wound, which causeth a great deal of smart and anguish. For guilt is restless, and puts the mind of man into an unnatural working and fermentation, never to be settled again but by repentance. "The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest;" which plainly shews that the mind of man hath a kind of natural sense of good and evil; because whenever we offend against nature, our consciences are touched to the quick, and we receive a sting into our soul, which shoots and pains us, whenever we reflect upon what we have done. I appeal to that witness which every man carries in his breast, whether this be not true.

2. Men are naturally full of hopes and fears, according as they follow or go against these natural dictates. A good conscience is apt to fill men with confidence and good hopes. It does not only give ease,

ease, but security to the mind of man, against the dread of invisible powers, and the fearful apprehensions of a future judgment. Whereas guilt fills men with dismal apprehensions of danger, and continual misgivings concerning their own safety. Thus it was with Cain after he had slain his brother; "it shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me." Nay, when a man hath done a secret fault, which none can accuse him of, yet then is he haunted with the terrors of his own mind, and cannot be secure in his own apprehensions; which plainly shews that men are conscious to themselves, when they do well, and when they do amiss; and that the same natural instinct which prompts men to their duty, fills them with good hopes when they have done it, and with secret fears and apprehensions of danger when they have done contrary to it.

Secondly, GOD shews men what is good, by natural reason; and that two ways; by the convenience of things to our nature; and by their tendency to our happiness and interest.

First, reason shews us the convenience of things to our nature; and whatever is agreeable to the primitive design and intention of nature, that we call "good;" whatever is contrary thereto, we call "evil." For example, "to honour and love GOD." It is natural to honour great power and perfection, and to love goodness wherever it is. So likewise, gratitude is natural, to acknowledge benefits received, and to be ready to requite them, and the contrary is monstrous, and universally abhorred; and there is no greater sign that any thing is contrary to nature, than if it be detested by the whole kind. It is agree-

with the ways and means of knowing them.

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able also to nature “to be just,” and “to do to others, as we would have them do to us;” for this is to make our own natural inclinations and desires, the rule of our dealing with others; and “to be merciful;” for no man that hath not divested himself of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling a pain in himself.

Secondly, reason shews us the tendency of these things to our happiness and interest. And indeed the notion of good and evil does commonly refer to the consequences of things, and we call that good, which will bring some benefit and advantage to us, and that evil, which is likely to produce some mischief and inconvenience; and by this rule reason discovers to us that these duties are good.

To begin with piety towards GOD. Nothing can more evidently tend to our interest, than to make him our friend, upon whose favour our happiness depends. So likewise for “gratitude;” it is a virtue, to which if nature did not prompt us, our interest would direct us; for every man is ready to place benefits there where he may hope for a thankful return. Temperance does apparently conduce to our health, which, next to a good conscience, is the most pleasant and valuable thing in the world; whereas the intemperate man is an open enemy to himself, and continually making assaults upon his own life. Mercy and pity are not more welcome to others, than they are delightful and beneficial to ourselves; for we do not only gratify our own nature and bowels, by relieving those who are in misery, but we provoke mankind by our example to the like tenderness, and do prudently bespeak the commiseration

tion of others towards us, when it shall be our turn to stand in need of it. And if we be wise enough, our reason will likewise direct us to be just, as the surest art of thriving in this world; it gives a man a reputation, which is a powerful advantage in all the affairs of this world; it is the shortest and easiest way of dispatching business, the plainest, and least entangled; and though it be not so sudden a way of growing rich, as fraud and oppression; yet it is much surer and more lasting, and not liable to those terrible back-blows and after-reckonings, to which estates got by injustice are.

And natural reason does not only shew us that these things are good, but that "the LORD requires them of us," that is, that they have the force and obligation of laws. For there needs nothing more to make any thing a law, than a sufficient declaration, that it is "the will of GOD;" and this GOD hath sufficiently signified to mankind by the very frame of our natures, and of those principles and faculties which he hath endued us withal; so that whenever we act contrary to these, we plainly disobey the will of him that made us, and violate those laws which he hath enacted in our natures, and written upon our hearts.

And this is all the law that the greatest part of mankind were under, before the revelation of the gospel. From Adam to Moses, the world was almost solely governed by the natural law, which seems to be the meaning of that hard text, Rom. v. 13. "For until the law sin was in the world," that is, before the law of Moses was given, men were capable of offending against some other law, for otherwise

sin could not have been imputed to them, for “ sin
“ is not imputed where there is no law.” And then
it follows; “ nevertheless death reigned from Adam
“ to Moses, even over them that had not sinned
“ after the similitude of Adam’s transgression;” that
is, during that space from Adam to Moses men sin-
ned against the natural law, and were liable to death
upon that account, though they had not offended
against an express revelation from **GOD**, as Adam
had done; for that the apostle seems to mean, by
“ sinning after the similitude of Adam’s tran-
“ gression.”

Thirdly, **GOD** hath shewn us what is good by the
general vote and consent of mankind. Not that all
mankind do agree concerning virtue and vice; but
that as to the greater duties of piety, justice, mercy,
and the like, the exceptions are but few in com-
parison, and not enough to infringe a general con-
sent. And of this I shall offer to you this threefold
evidence.

I. That these virtues are generally prais’d and held
in esteem by mankind, and the contrary vices gene-
rally reprov’d and evil spoken of. Now to praise
any thing, is to give testimony to the goodness of it,
and to censure any thing, is to declare that we be-
lieve it to be evil. And if we consult the history of
all ages, we shall find that the things which are gene-
rally praised in the lives of men, and recommended
to the imitation of posterity are piety and devotion,
gratitude and justice, humanity and charity; and that
the contrary to these are marked with ignominy and
reproach; the former are commended even in ene-
mies, and the latter are branded even by those who

SER M. had a kindness for the persons that were guilty of
 CII. them. So constant hath mankind always been in
 the commendation of virtue, and in the censure of
 vice. Nay we find not only those who are virtuous
 themselves, giving their testimony and applause to
 virtue, but even those who are vicious; not out of
 love to goodness, but from the conviction of their
 own minds, and from a secret reverence they bear
 to the common consent and opinion of mankind.
 And this is a great testimony, because it is the testi-
 mony of an enemy extorted by the meer light and
 force of truth.

And on the contrary; nothing is more ordinary
 than for “vice to reprove sin,” and to hear men
 condemn the like, or the same things in others,
 which they allow in themselves. And this is a clear
 evidence, that vice is generally condemned by man-
 kind, that many men condemn it in themselves;
 and those who are so kind as to spare themselves, are
 very quick-sighted to spy a fault in any body else,
 and will censure a bad action done by another, with
 as much freedom and impartiality, as the most vir-
 tuous man in the world.

And to this consent of mankind about virtue and
 vice, the scripture frequently appeals. As when it
 commands us “to provide things honest in the sight
 “ of all men; and by well-doing to put to silence
 “ the ignorance of foolish men;” intimating that
 there are some things so confessedly good, and owned
 to be such by so general a vote of mankind, that
 the worst of men have not the face to open their
 mouths against them. And it is made the character
 of a virtuous action, if it be “lovely, and commen-
 “ dable,

“ dable, and of good report.” Philip. iv. 8. “ Whatso-
“ ever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of
“ good report, if there be any virtue, if there be
“ any praise, make account of these things ;” intimating to us, that mankind do generally concur in the praise and commendation of what is virtuous.

2. Men do generally glory and stand upon their innocency, when they do virtuously ; but are ashamed, and out of countenance, when they do the contrary. Now glory and shame are nothing else but an appeal to the judgment of others concerning the good or evil of our actions. There are indeed some such monsters as are impudent in their impieties, but these are but few in comparison. Generally mankind is modest, the greatest part of those who do evil are apt to blush at their own faults, and to confess them in their countenance, which is an acknowledgment that they are not only guilty to themselves that they have done amiss, but that they are apprehensive that others think so. For guilt is a passion respecting our selves, but shame regards others. Now it is a sign of shame, that men love to conceal their faults from others, and commit them secretly, in the dark and without witnesses, and are afraid even of a child or a fool : or if they be discovered in them, they are solicitous to excuse and extenuate them, and ready to lay the fault upon any body else, or to transfer their guilt, or as much of it as they can, upon others. All which are certain tokens, that men are not only naturally guilty to themselves, when they commit a fault ; but that they are sensible also what opinions others have of these things.

And on the contrary, men are apt to stand upon their justification, and to glory when they have done well. The conscience of a man's own virtue and integrity, lifts up his head and gives him confidence before others, because he is satisfied they have a good opinion of his actions. What a good face does a man naturally set upon a good deed? and how does he sneak, when he hath done wickedly, being sensible that he is condemned by others, as well as by himself? no man is 'afraid of being upbraided for having dealt honestly or kindly with others, nor does he account it any calumny or reproach, to have it reported of him, that he is a sober and chaste man. No man blusheth, when he meets a man with whom he hath kept his word, and discharged his trust: but every man is apt to do so, when he meets one with whom he has dealt dishonestly, or who knows some notorious crime by him.

3. Vice is generally forbidden and punished by humane laws: but against the contrary virtues there never was any law. Some vices are so manifestly evil in themselves, or so mischievous to humane society, that the laws of most nations have taken care to discountenance them by severe penalties. Scarce any nation was ever so barbarous, as not to maintain and vindicate the honour of their gods and religion by publick laws. Murder and adultery, rebellion and sedition, perjury and breach of trust, fraud and oppression, are vices severely prohibited by the laws of most nations. A clear indication, what opinion the generality of mankind, and the wisdom of nations have always had of these things.

But now against the contrary virtues there never S E R M.
was any law. No man was ever impeached for CII.
“ living soberly, righteously, and godly in this pre-
“ sent world.” A plain acknowledgment, that man-
kind always thought them good, and never were
sensible of the inconvenience of them; for had they
been so, they would have provided against them by
laws. This St. Paul takes notice of as a great com-
mendation of the christian virtues; “ the fruit of
“ the SPIRIT is love, joy, peace, long-suffering,
“ gentleness, kindness, fidelity, meekness, tempe-
“ rance; against such there is no law;” the greatest
evidence that could be given, that these things are
unquestionably good in the esteem of mankind,
“ against such there is no law.” As if he had said,
turn over the law of Moses, search those of Athens,
and Sparta, and the twelve tables of the Romans,
and those innumerable laws that have been added
since; and you shall not in any of them find any
of those virtues that I have mentioned, condemned
and forbidden. A clear evidence that mankind ne-
ver took any exception against them, but are gene-
rally agreed about the goodness of them.

Fourthly, GOD hath shewn us what is good by
external revelation. In former ages of the world, GOD
revealed his will to particular persons in an extraor-
dinary manner, and more especially to the nation
of the Jews, the rest of the world being in a great
measure left to the conduct of natural light. But
in these latter ages he hath made publick revelation
of his will by his SON. And this as to the matter
of our duty, is the same in substance with the law
of nature; for our SAVIOUR comprehends all
under

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under these two general heads, “ the love of God, “ and of our neighbour. ” The apostle reduceth all to three, sobriety, justice and piety; “ the grace of “ God that brings salvation hath appeared to all “ men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and “ worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, “ and godly in this present world.” So that if we believe the apostle, the gospel teacheth us the very same things which nature dictated to men before; only it hath made a more perfect discovery of them. So that whatever was doubtful and obscure before, is now certain and plain; the duties are still the same, only it offers us more powerful arguments and a greater assistance to the performance of those duties; so that we may now much better say, than the prophet could in his days, “ he hath shewed thee, O “ man, what is good; and what it is that the LORD “ requires of thee.”

Fifthly, and lastly, God shews us what is good by the motions of his SPIRIT upon the minds of men. This the scripture assures us of, and good men have experience more especially of it; though it be hard to give an account of it, and to say what motions are from the SPIRIT of God, and what from our own minds; for “ as the wind blows where it listeth, and “ we hear the sound of it, but know not whence it “ comes, nor whither it goes;” so are the operations of the SPIRIT of God upon the minds of men, secret and imperceptible.

And thus I have done with the three things I propounded to speak to. All that now remains, is to make some inferences from what hath been said, by way of application.

First,

First, seeing GOD hath so abundantly provided S E R M.
that we should know our duty, we are altogether in- CII.
excusable, if we do not do it. Because “ he hath
“ shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what the
“ LORD requires of thee;” therefore “ thou art
“ inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art,” who
livest in a contradiction to this light. GOD hath ac-
quainted us with our duty, by such ways as may most
effectually both direct and engage us to the practice
of it; we are prompted to it by a kind of natural
instinct, and strong impressions upon our minds of
the difference of good and evil; we are led to the
knowledge, and urged to the practice of it, by our
nature, and by our reason, and by our interest, and
by that which is commonly very prevalent among
men, the general voice and consent of mankind; and
by the most powerful and governing passions in hu-
mane nature, by hope and by fear, and by shame;
by the prospect of advantage, by the apprehension of
danger, and by the sense of honour; and to take
away all possible excuse of ignorance from us, by an
express revelation from GOD, the clearest and most
perfect that ever was made to the world. So that
whenever we do contrary to our duty, in any of these
great instances, we offend against all these, and do in
the highest degree fall under the heavy sentence of our
SAVIOUR, “ this is the condemnation, that light
“ is come into the world, and men loved darkness
“ rather than light.”

Secondly, you see hence what are the great duties
of religion, which GOD mainly requires of us, and
how reasonable they are; piety towards GOD, and
justice and charity towards men; the knowledge
whereof

whereof is planted in our nature, and grows up with our reason. And these are things which are unquestionably good, and against which we can have no exception; things that were never reprov'd, nor found fault with by mankind, neither our nature nor our reason riseth up against them, or dictates any thing to the contrary. We have all the obligation, and we have all the encouragement to them, and are secure on all hands in the practice of them. In the doing of these things, there is no danger to us from the laws of men, no fear of displeasure from GOD, no offence or sting from our own minds.

And these things, which are so agreeable to our nature, and our reason, and our interest, are the great things which our religion requires of us, more valuable in themselves, and more acceptable to GOD than "whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," more than "thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil;" more than if we offered to him "all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." We are not to neglect any institution of GOD; but above all, we are to secure the observance of those great duties to which we are directed by our very nature, and tied by the surest and most sacred of all other laws, those which GOD hath riveted in our souls, and written upon our hearts: and that mankind might have no pretence left to excuse them from these, the christian religion hath set us free from those many positive and outward observances, that the Jewish religion was incumbred withal; that we might be wholly intent upon these great duties, and mind nothing in comparison of the real and substantial virtues of a good life.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, you see, in the last place, what is the best way to appease the displeasure of GOD towards a sinful nation. GOD seems to have as great a controversy with us, as he had with the people of Israel, and his wrath is of late years most visibly gone out against us; and proportionably to the full measure of our sins, it hath been poured out upon us in full vials. How have the judgments of GOD followed us? and how close have they followed one another? what fearful calamities have our eyes seen? enough to make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle. What terrible and hazardous wars have we been engaged in? what a raging pestilence did GOD send among us, that swept away thousands, and ten thousands in our streets? what a dreadful and fatal fire, that was not to be checked and resisted in its course, till it had laid in ashes one of the greatest and richest cities in the world? what unseasonable weather have we had of late? as if for the wickedness of men upon the earth, the very “ordinances of heaven were changed, and summer, and winter, seed-time, and harvest, had forgotten their appointed seasons.” And which is more and sadder than all this, what dangerous attempts have been made upon our religion, by the restless adversaries of it?

And now surely, “after all this is come upon us for our sins,” it is time for us to look up to him that smites us, and to think of taking up this quarrel. ’Tis time to inquire as they do in the text, “wherewithal shall we come before the LORD, and bow our selves before the high GOD?” and we are apt to take the same course as they did, to endeavour to appease GOD by some external devotion. We have

SERM. now betaken our selves to prayer and fasting, and
 CII. 'twas very fit, nay necessary we should do so; but let
 us not think this is all GOD expects from us. These
 are but a means to a further end, to oblige us for the
 future to the practice of a good life. The outward
 profession of religion is not lost amongst us, there
 appears still in men a great and commendable zeal
 for the reformed religion, and there hath been too
 much occasion for it; but that which GOD chiefly ex-
 pects from us, is reformed lives. Piety and virtue are
 in a great measure gone from among us, the manners
 of men are strangely corrupted, “ the great and
 “ weighty things of the law” are neglected, “ justice
 “ and mercy, temperance and chastity, truth and
 “ fidelity,” so that we may take up David’s com-
 plaint, “ help LORD! for the righteous man ceaseth,
 “ for the faithful fail from among the children of
 “ men.”

And till the nation be brought back to a sober sense
 of religion, from an airy and phantastical piety, to
 real and unaffected devotion, and from a factious
 contention about things indifferent, to the serious
 practice of what is necessary; from our violent heats
 and animosities, to a more peaceable temper, and by
 a mutual condescension on all sides, to a nearer and
 stronger union among our selves, ’till we recover in
 some measure our ancient virtue and integrity of
 manners, we have reason to fear; that GOD will still
 have a controversy with us, notwithstanding all our
 noise and zeal about religion.

This is the true, this is the only course to appease
 the indignation of GOD, and to draw down his fa-
 vour and blessing upon a poor distracted and gasping
 nation,

nation. “ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is
“ good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, SERM.
CII.
“ but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk
“ humbly with thy God?”

I have but one word more, and that is to put you presently upon the practice of one of these duties that I have been persuading you to, and that is “ mercy, and alms to the poor.” If what I have already said, have had its effect upon you, I need not use any other arguments; if it have not, I have hardly the heart to use any. I shall only put you in mind again, that GOD values this above all our external devotion, “ he will have mercy rather than sacrifice;” that this is the way to find mercy with GOD, and to have our prayers speed in heaven; and without this, all our fasting and humiliation signifies nothing. And to this purpose I will only read to you those plain and persuasive words of the prophet, which do so fully declare unto us the whole duty of this day, and particularly urge us to this of charity, Isa. lviii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. “ Is it such a fast that I have
“ chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to
“ bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sack-
“ cloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a
“ fast, and an acceptable day unto the LORD? is
“ not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the
“ bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and
“ to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every
“ yoke? is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry,
“ and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to
“ thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou
“ cover him, and that thou hide not thy self from
“ thine own flesh? then shall thy light break forth as

“ the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth
 “ speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before
 “ thee, and the glory of the LORD shall be thy rere-
 “ ward. Then thou shalt call, and the LORD
 “ shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say,
 “ here I am.”

S E R M O N CIII.

Instituted religion not intended to un-
 dermine natural.

M A T T H E W ix. 13.

*But go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have
 mercy, and not sacrifice.*

SERM.
CIII.

ONE of the most successful attempts that have
 been made upon religion, by the devil and
 his instruments, hath been by setting the laws
 of GOD at variance with themselves, and by dashing
 the several parts of religion, and the two tables of
 the law against one another, to break all in pieces;
 and under a pretence of advancing that part of re-
 ligion which is instituted and revealed, to under-
 mine and destroy that which is natural, and of pri-
 mary obligation.

To manifest and lay open the mischievous con-
 sequences of this design, I shall at this time (by
 GOD's assistance) endeavour to make out these two
 things.

First,

First, that natural religion is the foundation of all instituted and revealed religion.

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Secondly, that no revealed or instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties, but to confirm and establish them.

And to this purpose, I have chosen these words of our SAVIOUR for the foundation of my following discourse; "but go ye and learn what that meaneth; " I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." The occasion of which words was briefly this; the pharisees found fault with him for keeping company, and eating with publicans and sinners. He owns the thing which they objected to him, and endeavours to vindicate himself from any crime or fault in so doing; and that, these two ways.

1. By telling them, that it was allowed to a physician, and proper for his office and profession, to converse with the sick, in order to their cure and recovery. He may abstain, if he pleaseth, from the conversation of others; but the sick have need of him, and are his proper care, and his business and employment lies among them; " he said unto them, " they that be whole need not a physician, but they " that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, " but sinners to repentance;" they who were already good, needed not to be call'd upon to amend and reform their lives, and they that were so conceited of their own righteousness, as the pharisees were, and so confident that they were sound and whole, would not admit of a physician, and thereby rendred themselves incapable of cure; and therefore he did not apply himself to them; but to the publicans and sinners, who were acknowledged on all hands, both by themselves

elves and others, to be bad men; so that it could not be denied to be the proper work of a spiritual physician to converse with such persons.

2. By endeavouring to convince them of their ignorance of the true nature of religion, and of the rank and order of the several duties thereby required; “but go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy and not sacrifice;” which saying is quoted by him out of the prophet Hosea, chap. vi. 6. “I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of GOD more than burnt-offerings;” which text our SAVIOUR cites and applies upon two several occasions; the considering and comparing of which, will give full light to the true meaning of it.

The first is here in the text, upon occasion of the pharisees finding fault with him, for conversing with publicans and sinners; the other is Matth. xii. 7. where the pharisees blaming the disciples of our SAVIOUR for plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath-day, our SAVIOUR tells them, “if he had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless;” that is, if they had understood the true nature of religion, and what duties of it are chiefly and in the first place to be regarded, they would not have been so forward to censure this action of his disciples.

So that the plain meaning of this saying is this, that in comparing the parts of religion and the obligation of duties together, those duties which are of moral and natural obligation are most valued by GOD, and ought to take place of those which are positive
and

and ritual. “ I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,” SE R M. that is, “ rather than sacrifice,” according to the CIII. true meaning of this Hebrew phrase, which is to be understood in a comparative sense, as is evident from the text itself, in Hosea, “ I desired mercy, and not “ sacrifice ; and the knowledge of GOD rather than “ burnt-offerings ;” if they cannot be observed together, let sacrifice be neglected, and the work of mercy be done.

And the reason of this seems very plain ; because shewing mercy, or doing good in any kind is a prime instance of those moral duties, which do naturally and perpetually oblige ; but sacrifice is an instance of positive and ritual observances, and one of the chief of the kind : so that when moral duties, and ritual observances come in competition, and do clash with one another, the observation of a rite, or positive institution, is to give way to a moral duty ; and it is no sin in that case to neglect the observation of such a rite, yea though it were commanded and appointed by GOD himself. And though this may seem to be a breach of the letter of the law ; yet it is according to the true mind and meaning of the law ; it being a tacit condition implied in all laws of a ritual and positive nature, provided the observance of them be not to the hindrance and prejudice of any duty, which is of a higher and better nature ; in that case the obligation of it does for that time give way and is suspended.

And this will appear to be the true meaning of this rule, by comparing more particularly the instances to which our SAVIOUR applies it. His disciples passing through the corn on the sabbath-day, and being hungry,

E R M. hungry, pluck'd the ears and did eat; this our SAVIOUR does justify to be no breach of the law of the sabbath; because in that case, and in such circumstances, it did not oblige: for the disciples being called to attend upon our SAVIOUR to be instructed by him in the things which concerned the kingdom of GOD, that is, in the doctrine of the gospel, which they were to publish to the world, this attendance hindred them from making necessary provisions against the sabbath, they, in obedience to their master, being intent upon a better work; but that they might not starve, the necessities of nature must be provided for; and therefore it was fit that the law of the sabbath, which was but positive and ritual, should give way to an act of mercy and self-preservation; "If ye
 CIII. " had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy
 " and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned
 " the guiltless."

And the reason is the same as to any instrumental part of religion, by which I mean any thing which may be a means to promote piety and goodness; as prayer, hearing the word of GOD, keeping good company, and avoiding bad; the duties of this kind, our SAVIOUR here in the text (where he likewise applies this rule) compares with moral duties. To avoid the company of vicious and wicked persons, is a good means to preserve men from the contagion of their vices, and was always esteemed a duty among prudent men, both Jews and Heathens, and is no wise disallowed by our SAVIOUR: but yet not so a duty, as to hinder a greater duty, nor so strictly and perversely to be insisted upon as if one ought not to converse with bad men in any case, or upon any account, no not for so great and
 good

good an end as to reclaim them from their vices. In this case we ought to consider, that our first and highest obligation is to moral duties, comprehended under “the love of God and our neighbour;” among which one of the chief is to do good to men, and to shew mercy and pity to those that are in misery; and the greatest good that one man can do to another, is to be instrumental to reclaim him from the evil and error of his way; because this is “to save his soul from death;” and we cannot imagine that God ever intended, by any rule of prudence, or positive constitution of the jewish law, so to forbid their accompanying with bad and scandalous men, that it should be unlawful to converse with them in order to their recovery and amendment; “Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.”

And St. Paul was of the same mind in the precepts he gives concerning avoiding the company of scandalous christians, 2 Thes. iii. 14, 15. “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” St. Paul qualifies his precept, lest christians should mistake it, and fall into the jewish extreme, not to converse with those whom they esteemed scandalous and wicked upon any account whatsoever, no not in order to their amendment and reformation. The bond of intimacy and friendship with bad men ought to be broken, and yet the bond of common humanity may be as strong as ever. It is one thing to discountenance bad men, to bring them to shame, and

a sense of their fault; and quite another thing to abandon them to ruin; and even in case of notorious heresy, or wickedness of life, it is one thing to cut them off from the society and communion of christians; and quite another, to cut them off from humane society, to cut their throats, and to extirpate them out of the world.

And yet the matter was carried thus far by the furious zeal of the Jews, when christianity first appeared in the world; they thought that no mercy in such cases was the best service that could be done, and the best sacrifice that could be offered to almighty GOD; and this pattern hath been since, not only closely followed, but out-done by the doctrines and practices of the church of Rome; as we have too much reason to remember upon * this day.

But to proceed in the farther explication of the text, the meaning whereof in short is this; that the ritual and instrumental parts of religion, and all laws and duties concerning them, are of less value and esteem with GOD, than those which are of a moral nature, especially the great duties and offices of piety and humanity, of the love of GOD, and of our neighbour. And if we consider the matter well, we shall see the reason of it to be very plain; because natural and moral duties are approved of GOD, for themselves and for their own sake upon account of their own natural and intrinsical goodness; but the ritual and instrumental parts of religion are only pleasing to GOD in order to these, and so far as they tend to beget and promote them in us; they are not naturally good in themselves, but are instituted and

* *Preached on Nov. 5, 1682.*

appointed by God for the sake of the other; and therefore great reason there is that they should be subordinate, and give way to them when they come in competition with one another.

For this is a known rule, which takes place in all laws, “that laws of less importance should give way to those that are of greater;” *quoties leges ac circumstantiâ colliduntur, ita ut utraque servari non potest, servanda est lex potior.* “Whenever two laws happen to be in such circumstances as to clash with one another, so that both of them cannot be observed, that law which is better and of greater consequence is to be kept.” And Tully gives much the same rule in this matter. “In comparing of laws (says he) we are to consider which law is most useful, and just, and reasonable to be observed.” From whence it will follow, that when two laws, or more, or how many soever they be, cannot be observed, because they clash with one another; *ea maximè conservanda putetur, quæ ad maximas res pertinere videatur.* “It is reasonable that that law should be observed, which is of greatest moment and concernment”

By what hath been said, we may learn what is the meaning of this saying, which our SAVIOUR more than once cites out of the prophet, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.”

From the words thus explained, I shall take occasion to prosecute the two propositions which I mentioned before, namely,

First, that natural religion is the foundation of instituted and revealed religion.

Secondly, that no instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties; but is intended to establish and confirm them. And both these are sufficiently grounded in the reason of our SAVIOUR'S discourse from this rule, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

I. That natural religion is the foundation of instituted and revealed religion; and all revealed religion does suppose, and take for granted, the clear and undoubted principles and precepts of natural religion, and builds upon them. By natural religion, I mean obedience to the natural law, and the performance of such duties as natural light, without any express and supernatural revelation, doth dictate to men. These lie at the bottom of all religion, and are the great and fundamental duties which God requires of all mankind; as, that we should love God, and behave ourselves reverently towards him; that we should believe his revelations; and testify our dependence upon him, by imploring his aid and direction in all our necessities and distresses; and acknowledge our obligations to him for all the blessings and benefits which we receive; that we should moderate our appetites, in reference to the pleasures and enjoyments of this world, and use them temperately and chastly; that we should be just and upright in all our dealings with one another; true to our word, and faithful to our trust; and in all our words and actions observe that equity towards others, which we desire they should use towards us; that we should be kind, and charitable, merciful, and compassionate one towards another; ready to do good to all, and apt not only to pity, but to relieve them

them in their misery and necessity. These, and such like, are those which we call moral duties; and they are of eternal and perpetual obligation, because they do naturally oblige, without any particular and express revelation from GOD. And these are the foundation of revealed and instituted religion, and all revealed religion does suppose them, and build upon them; for all revelation from GOD, supposeth us to be men, and alters nothing of those duties to which we were naturally obliged before. And this will clearly appear if we consider these three things;

First, that the scripture every where speaks of these, as the main and fundamental duties of the jewish religion.

Secondly, that no instituted service of GOD, no positive part of religion, was ever acceptable to him, when these were neglected.

Thirdly, that the great design of the christian religion, was to restore and reinforce the practice of the natural law.

I. That the scripture every where speaks of these as the main and fundamental duties of the jewish religion. When our SAVIOUR was ask'd "which was the first and great commandment of the law;" he answered, "thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self." One would have expected he would have given quite another answer, and have pitched upon some of those things which were so much magnified among the Jews, and which they laid so much weight upon; that he should have instanced in sacrifice, or circumcision, or the

S E R M. the law of the sabbath: but he overlooks all these
 C H I I. as inconsiderable in comparison, and instances only
 in those two great heads of moral duty, “ the love
 “ of God, and our neighbour;” which are of natu-
 ral and perpetual obligation, and comprehend under
 them all other moral duties.

And these are those which our SAVIOUR calls
 “ the law and the Prophets,” and which he says
 “ he came not to destroy, but to fulfil,” Matth. v. 17,
 18, 19, 20. “ Think not that I am come to destroy
 “ the law or the prophets. I am not come to de-
 “ stroy; but to fulfil: for verily I say unto you, ’till
 “ heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in
 “ no wise pass from the law ’till all be fulfilled. Who-
 “ soever therefore shall break one of these least com-
 “ mandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be
 “ called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but
 “ whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall
 “ be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I
 “ say unto you, that except your righteousness shall
 “ exceed the righteousness of the scribes and phari-
 “ sees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of
 “ heaven.”

That our SAVIOUR doth not here speak of the
 judicial or ceremonial law of the Jews, but of the
 duties of the moral law, will, I think, be very plain,
 from these following considerations.

First, that the judicial or ceremonial laws of the
 Jews were to pass away, and did so, not long after;
 but this law which our SAVIOUR speaks of, was to
 be perpetual and immutable; for he tells us, “ that
 “ heaven and earth should pass away, but one jot or
 “ one tittle of this law should not pass.”

Secondly,

Secondly, the observation of the law which our SAVIOUR speaks of, consisted in such things as the scribes and pharisees neglected; for he tells his disciples, upon this occasion, "that except their righteousness did exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." But now the scribes and pharisees were the most accurate and punctual people in the world, in observing the precepts of the judicial and ceremonial law, they were so far from taking away any thing from these observances, that they had added to them, and enlarged them, by innumerable traditions of their own: so exact were they, that they would "pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin," as our SAVIOUR observes; but then they were extremely defective in moral duties; they were unnatural to their parents, and would pretend that their estates were consecrated to GOD, that under this pretence of positive religion, they might excuse themselves from a natural duty, and let their parents starve for GOD's sake; they were covetous, and unjust, and devoured widows houses; in a word, our SAVIOUR tells us, they neglected "the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment, and the love of GOD, and keeping faith with men;" so that it is in these things, that our SAVIOUR means, "that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees," viz. in the practice of moral duties, which were neglected by them; and consequently 'tis the moral law which our SAVIOUR came to confirm and establish.

Thirdly, if we consider the instances which our SAVIOUR gives in his following discourse, by which

we may best judge what he means. He instances in murder, and adultery, and perjury, which are undoubtedly forbidden by the natural law; and then he instances in several permissions which were indulged to them for the hardness of their hearts, but yet did intrench upon the dictates of right reason, and the first and original constitution of things; as the permission of divorce upon every slight occasion, and of revenge, and retaliation of injuries.

Fourthly, if we consider that by the law and the prophets, our SAVIOUR means that which was principally designed and ultimately intended by them; which was the observation of moral duties; which as they were written in the two tables by the immediate finger of God himself, so are chiefly inculcated by the prophets. And so we find this phrase of “the law and the prophets,” elsewhere used by our SAVIOUR, when he mentions that great rule of equity, “that we should do to others as we would have them do to us.” Matth. vii. 12. “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” But how was “this the law and the prophets,” when this rule was never so much as mentioned in either? our SAVIOUR means, that this is the foundation of all those duties of justice and mercy, which are so much inculcated in “the law and the prophets.”

So that our SAVIOUR makes the observation of moral duties to be the principal design of the Jewish law, and as it were the foundation of it, and therefore he calls moral duties, τὰ βαρύτερα τῆ νόμου, “the weightier matters of the law,” Matth. xxiii.

23. " But ye (says he to the scribes and pharisees) SERM.
 " have neglected the weightier things of the law, CIII.
 " judgment, and mercy, and fidelity." The scribes
 and pharisees busied themselves chiefly about ritual
 observances; but our SAVIOUR tells them, that those
 other were the most considerable and important duties
 of the law, and lay at the bottom of the jewish reli-
 gion. And much the same enumeration the prophet
 makes, where he compares sacrifices and these moral
 duties together, Mic. vi. 6, 7, 8. " Wherewith shall
 " I come before the LORD, and bow my self 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 oil? shall I give my
 " first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my
 " body for the sin of my soul? he hath shewed thee,
 " O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD
 " require of thee, but to do justly, and to love
 " mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD?" he
 had required sacrifices but had no regard to them in
 comparison with these.

II. No instituted service of GOD, no positive part
 of religion whatsoever, was ever acceptable to GOD,
 when moral duties were neglected; nay, so far from
 being acceptable to him, that he rejects them with
 disdain and abhorrence. To this purpose there are al-
 most innumerable passages in the prophets; Isa. i.
 11, &c. " To what purpose is the multitude of your
 " sacrifices unto me? when ye come to appear before
 " me, who hath required this at your hands, to
 " tread my courts? bring no more vain oblations;
 " incense is an abomination to me; the new moons
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“ and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot
 “ away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meet-
 “ ing, and when ye spread forth your hands, I
 “ will hide mine eyes from you; when ye make
 “ many prayers, I will not hear.” What is the
 reason of all this? Because they were defective in
 the moral duties of religion; so it follows; “ your
 “ hands are full of blood; wash ye, make ye
 “ clean, put away the evil of your doings from be-
 “ fore mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well,
 “ seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the
 “ fatherless, plead for the widow; come now and
 “ let us reason together, saith the LORD;” imply-
 ing that till they had respect to moral duties, all
 their external worship and sacrifices signified nothing.
 And so likewise, Isa. lxvi. 3. he tells them that no-
 thing could be more abominable than their sacrifices,
 so long as they allowed themselves in wicked prac-
 tices; “ he that killeth an ox is as if he slew a
 “ man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off
 “ a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if
 “ he offered swine’s blood; and he that burneth in-
 “ cense, as if he blessed an idol; yea, they have
 “ chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth
 “ in their abominations.” And to mention but
 one text more out of the old testament, Jer. vii. 4, 5.
 “ Trust ye not in lying words, saying, the temple
 “ of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the tem-
 “ ple of the LORD are these. Thoroughly amend
 “ your ways and your doings, thoroughly execute
 “ judgment between a man and his neighbour;
 “ oppress not the stranger, the fatherless and the
 “ widow, and shed not innocent blood.” If they
 did not practise these duties, and forbear those sins,

all the reverence for the temple and the worship of GOD signifies nothing. You see in the jewish religion what it was that was acceptable to GOD for its self and its own sake, viz. the practice of moral duties; and that all instituted religion, that did not promote and further these, or was destitute of them, was abominable to GOD. And under the gospel our SAVIOUR prefers a moral duty before any gift we can offer to GOD, and will have it to take place, Matth. v. 23, 24. “ If thou bring thy gift unto
“ the altar, and there remembrest that thy brother
“ hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift be-
“ fore the altar, and go thy way, first be recon-
“ ciled to thy brother, and then come and offer
“ thy gift.”

But it should seem by this, and what hath been said before, that GOD prefers goodness and righteousness to men, before his own worship, and obedience to the precepts of the second table, before obedience to those of the first.

But this does but seem so; all that can be collected from this passage of our SAVIOUR, or any thing that hath been already said, are only these two things,

1. That GOD prefers the practice of the moral duties of the second table, before any instituted worship, such as sacrifice was; and before obedience to the laws of religion, which are meerly positive, tho’ they do immediately concern the worship of GOD.

2. That if we neglect the duties of the second table, of goodness and righteousness towards men, GOD will not accept of our obedience to the pre-

cepts of the first, nor of any act of religious worship that we can perform. This our SAVIOUR means when he says, “leave there thy gift before the altar, first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift;” intimating, that so long as we bear a revengeful mind towards our brethren, GOD will not accept of any gift or sacrifice that we can offer to him; or indeed of any act of religious worship that we can perform.

Thirdly, the great design of the christian religion is to restore and reinforce the practice of the natural law, or which is all one, of moral duties; and therefore our SAVIOUR begins his first sermon, by promising blessedness to the practice of these duties; of purity, and meekness, and righteousness and peaceableness, and mercifulness, and patience, and submission to the will of GOD under persecutions and sufferings for righteousness sake; and tells us (as I shewed before) that he came not to release men from the practice of these duties, but to oblige them thereto more effectually; and that as these were the “law and the prophets,” that is, the main duties and the foundation of the jewish religion, so were they much more to be so of the christian. This the scriptures of the new testament do every where declare to be the great design of the gospel, and the christian religion, to instruct us in these duties, and to engage us effectually to the practice of them. In that known and excellent text, Tit. ii. 11, 12. “The grace of GOD (which is in and by the doctrine of the gospel) hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present
“ world.”

“ world.” And herein St. James tells us, the true nature, and the force and virtue of the christian religion doth consist, James i. 27. “ pure religion, and “ undefiled before GOD and the FATHER is this, to “ visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, “ and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.” And chap. iii. 17. “ The wisdom which is from “ above” (that is, that heavenly and divine knowledge revealed to us by the gospel) hath these properties, and is apt to produce these effects ; “ it is “ first pure, and then peaceable, gentle, and easy “ to be intreated, full of mercy, and of good “ fruits.”

And the planting of these dispositions in us is that which the scripture calls “ the new creature, and the “ image of GOD,” Eph. iv. 20, &c. The apostle speaking there of the vices and lusts wherein the gentiles lived, tells christians that they were otherwise instructed by the gospel ; “ but you have not “ so learned CHRIST, if so be that ye have heard “ him, and have been taught by him, as the truth “ is in JESUS, that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt “ according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in “ the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the “ new man, which after GOD is created in righteousness, and true holiness,” or, (as the words perhaps may better be rendred) “ in the holiness of truth ;” for it immediately follows, “ wherefore putting away “ lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.”

And this is that which the apostle elsewhere makes to be all in all in the christian religion. “ In “ CHRIST JESUS, neither circumcision availeth any “ thing,

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“ thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,” Gal. vi. 15. which the apostle in the chapter before expresseth thus; “ in CHRIST JESUS neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh (or is inspired) by charity.” And yet more expressly, 1 Cor. vii. 19. “ circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.” By the comparing of which texts, it appears, that the main thing in christianity is the practice of moral duties, and this is “ the new creature,” and this the proper effect of the christian faith to produce these virtues in us. And indeed the great design of the christian religion and every thing in it, of the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, of the pardon of our sins, and justification in his blood, of all the promises and threatenings of the gospel, and of the assistance therein promised, is to engage, and encourage and enable to the practice of moral duties.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to, namely, that natural religion is the foundation of instituted and revealed religion; and all revealed religion does suppose it, and builds upon it. I proceed to the

Second, namely, that no revealed and instituted religion was ever designed to take away the obligation of natural duties, but was intended to confirm and establish them. And this also will be evident, if we consider these three things.

1. That all revealed religion calls men to the practice of natural Duties. This the jewish religion did. The first laws which God gave them, and which he distinguished

distinguished from the rest, by writing them in tables of stone with his own finger, were the precepts of the moral law. And the great business of the prophets whom GOD raised up among them from time to time, was to reprove not so much their defects in their sacrifices, and in the duties of instituted worship, as the breach of the natural law by their vices and immoralities; and to threaten them with the judgments of GOD, if they did not reform and amend their faults.

And now under the gospel, the preceptive part of it is almost wholly made up of moral duties, namely, those which are comprehended under those two great commandments, “of the love of GOD, and our neighbour.” In the christian religion, there is very little that is merely positive and instituted, besides “the two sacraments, and praying to GOD in the name and mediation of JESUS CHRIST.”

2. The most perfect revelation that ever GOD made to mankind (I mean that of the christian religion) doth furnish us with the best helps and advantages for the performance of moral duties; it discovers our duty more clearly to us; it offers us the greatest assistance to enable us to the performance of it; it presents us with the most powerful motives and arguments to engage us thereto; so that this revelation of the gospel is so far from weakening the obligation of natural duties, that it confirms and strengthens it, and urgeth us more forcibly to the practice of them.

3. The positive rites and institutions of revealed religion are so far from entrenching upon the laws
of

of nature, that they were always designed to be subordinate and subservient to them; and whenever they come in competition, it is the declared will of GOD, that positive institutions should give way to natural duties, and this I have shewn to be plainly the meaning of this saying in the text, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." If circumstances be such, that one part of religion must give place, GOD will have the ritual and instituted part to give way to that which is natural and moral.

It is very frequent in scripture, when the duties of natural religion, and rites of divine institution come in competition, to slight and disparage these in comparison of moral duties, and to speak of them as things which GOD hath no pleasure in, and which in comparison of the other he will hardly own that he hath commanded. "When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands." Isa. i. 12. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, thou desirest not in burnt-offerings," Psal. li. 16. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy."

But GOD no where makes any comparison to the disadvantage of natural duties; he never derogated from them in any case; he never said "he would have such a thing, and not mercy," or "that he hath rather such a rite of religion should be performed, than that men should do the greatest good, and shew the greatest charity to one another." It is no where made a question, "will the LORD
" be

“ be pleased that we deal justly every man with his
“ neighbour, and speak the truth one to another?
“ that we be kind and tender-hearted, and ready to
“ forgive? that we be willing to distribute and give
“ alms to those that are in need?” there is no such
question as this put in scripture; nay it is positive
in these matters, that “ with such sacrifices GOD is
“ well pleased.” I instance in this virtue more especi-
ally of kindness and compassion, because it is one
of the prime instances of moral duties; as sacrifice
is put for all the ritual and instituted part of religion,
and this disposition of mind our SAVIOUR makes
the root of all moral duties, “ love is the fulfilling of
“ the law;” and the apostle speaks of it as the
great end and scope of the gospel; “ the end of
“ the commandment is charity.” And this temper
and disposition of mind he advanceth above know-
ledge, and faith, and hope; “ the greatest of these
“ is charity:” and without this, he will not allow
a man to be any thing in christianity; this he makes
our highest perfection and attainment, and that
which abides and remains in the future state; “ cha-
“ rity never fails.”

This our SAVIOUR most effectually recommends
to us, both in his doctrine, and by his example;
this he presseth as a peculiar law of his religion,
and the proper mark and character of a disciple.
This he requires us to exercise towards those who
practise the contrary towards us; “ to love our ene-
“ mies, and to do good to them that hate us.”
And of this, he hath given us the greatest example
that ever was; “ when we were enemies to him,”
he loved us so as hardly ever any man did his friend,

so as “to lay down his life for us;” and he instituted the sacrament for a memorial of his love to mankind, and to put us in mind how we ought to love one another.

And now the application of what hath been said upon this argument, to the occasion of this day, is very obvious, and there are two very natural inferences from it.

First, from what hath been said upon this argument, it plainly appears what place natural and moral duties ought to have in the christian religion; and of all natural duties, “mercy, and goodness.” This is so primary a duty of humane nature; so great and considerable a part of religion, that all positive institutions must give way to it, and nothing of that kind can cancel the obligation of it, nor justify the violation of this great and natural law. Our blessed SAVIOUR in his religion hath declared nothing to the prejudice of it; but on the contrary hath heightened our obligation to it, as much as is possible, by telling us that “the SON of man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them.”

So that “they know not what manner of spirit they are of, who will kill men to do GOD service;” and to advance his cause and religion in the world, will break through all obligations of nature, and civil society, and disturb the peace and happiness of mankind.

Nor did our SAVIOUR by any thing in his religion design to release men from the obligation of natural and civil duties. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the pope; but yet he deposed none of the princes of this world, nor did

absolve

absolve their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion; he assumed no such power to himself (no not *in ordine ad spiritualia*) nor, that ever we read of, did he give it to any other. Whence then comes his pretended vicar to have this authority? And yet the horrid attempt of this day was first designed, and afterwards carried on, in prosecution of the pope's bull of excommunication, and was not so much the effect of the despair and discontent of that party here in England, as the natural consequence of their doctrines of "extirpating hereticks, and deposing kings, and absolving subjects from their allegiance to them."

No zeal for any positive institution in religion, can justify the violation of the natural law, the precepts whereof are of primary and indispensable obligation. The pope's supremacy is not so clear, as the duty of "obedience to civil government;" nor is transubstantiation so plainly revealed in scripture, as it is both in nature and scripture, that we should "do no murder." And yet how many thousands have been put to death, because they could not understand this hard word, and believe this impossible thing! and yet if the supremacy of the pope were clearly of divine right, and the doctrine of transubstantiation as plain as the institution of the sacrament; yet these being but positive matters in religion, there would be no reason to kill men for not understanding and believing these things; nay it would be contrary to religion to do it; because the law of mercy and humanity, which is the law of nature, ought not to be violated for the promoting

of any positive institution; and GOD^c hath plainly said, “that he will have mercy rather than sacrifice;” yea rather than the sacrifice of the mass, if it were what they pretend it is, the offering of the natural body and blood of CHRIST; because it would be needless: for propitiation of sin being once made by “CHRIST’S offering himself once for “all” upon the cross; “there needs no more sacrifice for sin.” Nay, I will go further yet; I had rather never administer the sacrament, nor ever receive it, than take away any man’s life about it; because the sacrament is but a positive rite and institution of the christian religion, and GOD prefers mercy, which is a duty of natural religion, before any rite or institution whatsoever. Besides, that all acts of malice and cruelty are directly contrary to the particular nature and design of this blessed sacrament, which is to commemorate the sufferings of the SON of GOD for our sakes, and to give us an example of the greatest love that ever was, and thereby to excite us to the imitation of it.

2. What hath been said gives us a right notion and character of that church and religion, which prefers the positive rites and institutions of religion, and the observance of them, to those duties which are of natural and eternal obligation, mercy and goodness, fidelity and justice; and which for the sake of a pretended article of religion, or rite of worship, (which if it were certain that they were revealed, and instituted by GOD are yet merely positive) will break the greatest of God’s commandments, and teach men so.

It is too plain to be denied, that the principles and precepts of natural religion were never so effectually undermined, and the morality of the christian religion never so intolerably corrupted and debauched, by any thing that ever had the face of religion in the world, as by the allowed doctrines and practices of the church of Rome, and this out of a blind and furious zeal for some imaginary doctrines and rites of the christian religion, which at the best are of meer positive institution, and of the same rank among christians, that sacrifices were in the jewish religion. For which we need go no further for an instance, than in the occasion of this day's solemnity; upon which day, (about fourscore years ago) there was designed a mighty sacrifice indeed, the greatest and richest burnt-offering that ever was pretended to be offered up to almighty God, by those of any religion whatsoever; not "the blood of bulls and goats," but of king, and princes, and nobles more in value, than "thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil; than all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills,"

Here was a prodigious sacrifice indeed; but where was mercy? the thing God chiefly desires, and which above all other things is acceptable to him; no mercy, not even to those of their own religion, whom these nice and tender casuists, after a solemn debate of the case, had resolved to involve in the same common destruction with the rest; rather no mercy, than that this sacrifice which their mad zeal had prompted them to, should be omitted.

To conclude, they that can do such inhumane things, and think them to be religion, do not understand the nature of it, but had need to be taught the first rudiments of natural religion; that natural duties are not to be violated upon pretence, no, not for the sake of positive institutions; because natural religion is the foundation of that which is instituted; and therefore to violate any natural duty for the sake of that which is instituted, is for religion to undermine and blow up itself. Let those who do such things, and teach men so, “go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.”

S E R M O N CIV.

Christianity doth not destroy, but perfect the law of Moses.

M A T T H E W v. 17.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

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The first
sermon on
this text.

THERE is no saying in the whole gospel, which the Jews did so frequently object to the christians as this of our blessed SAVIOUR, as if his words and actions were plainly repugnant, and contrary to one another: for when it is evident, say they, that he took away so many ceremonies, purifications, distinctions of meats, sacrifices, judicial laws, and many other things; yet he says, “he came not to destroy the law or the prophets;”

so

so that it is plain, that he did throw down the law of Moses, and in so doing contradicted his own saying, that he did not intend “to destroy the law.”

S E R M.
C I V.

To clear our SAVIOUR's words of this objection, it will be requisite to consider the scope and design of his discourse in this chapter; by which we shall fully understand the sense and meaning of these words in the text.

Our SAVIOUR in this sermon, (which contains the sum and substance of his religion) doth earnestly recommend to his disciples and followers, and strictly enjoins the perfect practice of all goodness and virtue, declaring to them, that he came to bring in and establish that righteousness, which the jewish religion indeed aimed at, but through the weakness and imperfection of that dispensation, was not able to effect and accomplish. And to take away all suspicion of a design, to contradict the former revelations of GOD, made to the Jews by Moses and the prophets, or to destroy their divine authority, by carrying on a design contrary to them, I say, to prevent any imagination of this kind, he does here in the text expressly declare the contrary; “Think not, &c.” intimating that some either did, or at least might be apt to suspect, that his design was to destroy the obligation of the law, and to undermine the authority of Moses and the prophets; to free them from this jealousy, he declares plainly, that he had no such thought and intention, it was far from him.

“I come not to destroy, *καταλῦσαι*, to abrogate or dissolve the law,” to encourage men to the breach and violation of it; for the word is of the

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the same sense with *λύειν*, at the 19th verse, “who-
 soever shall break one of these least command-
 ments;” and with *καταργήσαι*, Rom. iii. 31.
νόμον ἔν καταργῆμεν, “do we then make void the
 law by faith?” which is the same question with
 that of the same apostle, Gal. iii. 21. “Is the law then
 against the promises of God?” that is, “are the
 law and the gospel contrary? do they contradict
 one another;” so that the meaning of our SAVI-
 OUR’S declaration is this, that he was not come to
 dissolve, and abrogate, and make void the law, or
 to encourage men to the breach of it; that the pre-
 cepts of his religion were in no wise contrary to those
 of the law and the prophets, did not thwart and
 oppose them, or any ways contradict the main de-
 sign and intention of the law and the prophets; that
 is, of the jewish religion; for so the law and the
 prophets do frequently signify, Matth. vii. 12. “There-
 fore all things whatsoever ye would that men
 should do to you, do ye even so to them; for
 this is the law and the prophets;” that is, this is
 the main scope and intention of what your religion,
 contained “in the law and the prophets,” teacheth,
 concerning your duty to one another. So likewise,
 Matth. xxii. 40. “On these two commandments
 hang all the law and the prophets;” that is, this
 is the sum of all the duties of religion; to these two
 laws, all that the jewish religion teacheth, may be re-
 fer’d. “I am not come to destroy but to fulfil;”
 to carry on the same design which was intended by
 the jewish religion, and to perfect and accomplish
 it; to supply all the defects and weaknesses and im-
 perfections of that dispensation; this is the plain mean-
 ing

ing of this caution and declaration of our SAVIOUR'S; "think not, &c."

For the clearing of this matter, viz. that the design of our SAVIOUR'S doctrine and religion, is not contrary to those former revelations, which GOD made to the Jews by Moses and the prophets; this will evidently appear, whether we consider the prophecies and predictions of the old testament, or the laws and precepts therein contained.

First, the prophecies and predictions of the old testament; our SAVIOUR came not to contradict and overthrow these; but to fulfil them. The chief predictions of the law and the prophets were concerning the MESSIAS, and his spiritual kingdom. In the law it was foretold, "that GOD would raise to them a prophet like unto Moses, whom they ought to hear and obey; and to him all the prophets of the old testament gave witness," foretelling the time of his coming, his extraction, the manner and circumstances of his birth, the purity and efficacy of his doctrine, the actions and miracles of his life, his passion, death, and burial, with the particular circumstances of them, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of GOD; so that this part of the law and prophets he did accomplish and fulfil in a most eminent and remarkable manner; all things that the prophets had foretold concerning the MESSIAS, were punctually made good in the person, and actions, and sufferings of our SAVIOUR.

Secondly, as to the laws and precepts of the jewish religion, the doctrine and the laws of christianity did not clash with them; nor properly abro-

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gate them, and make them void, especially as to the moral precepts, which were the very life and spirit, the ultimate scope and design of that religion; nay, so far was it from doing so, that the main and proper intention of christianity, was to clear, and establish that, which was the main design of the law and prophets, to perfect the law in this part, and to raise and advance morality to its highest pitch, to supply all the defects and imperfections of the jewish religion, and to make men much better than that weak and imperfect institution was able to do. This was the great design of christianity, and it is very probable that our SAVIOUR had a principal, if not a sole respect to the precepts of the moral law, when he here says, that “ he came not to destroy the law and the prophets, “ but to perfect and fulfil them; ” as I shall have occasion by and by to shew more at large.

But that we may give a full answer to the objection of the Jews against this saying of our SAVIOUR’S, I shall shew that he did not come to thwart and contradict, and properly to abrogate and make void the jewish law, in any part of it, neither the civil and judicial, nor the ritual and ceremonial, much less the moral and natural precepts of it. This is more than I think to be absolutely necessary, to reconcile this saying of our SAVIOUR with the rest of his doctrine and actions, for tho’ he had properly abrogated the ceremonial law, and in no sense fulfill’d it; yet, notwithstanding this, it may be true, that “ he came not to destroy the law and the prophets; ” that is, to destroy the obligation of moral duties, which he speaks of in this chapter, and

else-

elsewhere declares to be the ultimate scope, the sum ^{SERM.} and substance of the law and the prophets; for if ^{CIV.} the ceremonial law was not designed by GOD to be perpetual, but to give way to a more perfect dispensation; then our SAVIOUR did no way thwart and contradict the law and the prophets; by abrogating the ceremonial law, at that time, when GOD designed that a period should be put to it. But yet for the fuller satisfaction to this objection, I shall shew that our SAVIOUR did not properly abrogate any part of the jewish law, no not the ritual and ceremonial part of it; but did fulfil it.

First, not their civil and judicial laws. These in the original intention of them, were not laws designed for mankind, but suited and fitted to the disposition and temper, the condition and circumstances of a particular people and nation; to these our SAVIOUR taught obedience, and paid it himself, and never did any thing contrary to them, nor in the least weaken the obligation of them; but they continued in full force, 'till that nation and commonwealth was dissolved. So that these laws were no way impeached or abrogated by the christian religion; but they fell for want of a subject to exercise their power upon, and because the people that were to be governed by them were destroyed or dissipated; and tho' they neither are, nor ever were obligatory to other nations, as given by Moses, and as they were the peculiar laws of a particular nation; yet the natural reason and equity of them, so far as it concerned mankind, is duly considered and regarded by us, and many of these laws are adopted into the laws of most christian nations. It is plain then, that this part of

the jewish law received no prejudice by christianity, but continued in full force, so long as that nation and commonwealth lasted, which was to be governed by it.

Secondly, as to the ritual and ceremonial part of the jewish law, which consisted in circumcision, and purifications, and sacrifices, in distinction of meats, and times, and innumerable other rites and observances; this was not properly abrogated and made void by the coming of CHRIST, but fulfill'd and made good by him. The rites and ceremonies of the law, were the types and shadows of those future good things which were promised under the gospel, a kind of rude draught of a better and more perfect institution, which was designed, and at last finished and perfected by the christian religion. This account the apostle gives of the legal rites and observances, Col. ii. 16, 17. " Let no man judge you in
 " meat or in drink, or in respect of a holy-day, or
 " of the new-moon, or of the sabbath-days, which
 " are a shadow of things to come, but the body is
 " of CHRIST ;" that is, he is the substance and reality of all those things, which were shadowed and figured by those legal observances. And so the apostle to the Hebrews calls the priests and sacrifices of the law, the " examples and shadows of heavenly
 " things," chap. viii. 5. and so chap. x. 1. " the
 " law having a shadow of good things to come,
 " and not the very image of the things," that is, being but an obscure type, and not a perfect representation of the blessings and benefits of the gospel, which we now have in truth and reality. Now reason will tell us, that the laws concerning these types
 and

and shadows, were only to continue till the substance of the things signified by them should come, and that they would be of no longer use, when that more perfect institution, which was figured by them, should take place, and then they would expire, and become void of themselves, because the reason and use of them ceasing, they must necessarily fall.

But they did not expire immediately upon the coming of CHRIST, and therefore he himself submitted to these laws, so long as they continued in force; he was circumcised and presented in the temple, and performed all other rites required by the law, that first covenant to which these laws and ordinances belonged, continuing in force 'till the ratification of the second covenant by the death of CHRIST, and then these laws expired, or rather were fulfill'd, and had their accomplishment in the sacrifice of CHRIST, which made all the sacrifices and other rites of the jewish religion needless, and of no use for the future; CHRIST having by this "one sacrifice of himself, perfected for ever them that are sanctified," as the same apostle speaks, Heb. x. 14. So that CHRIST did not properly abrogate and repeal those rites and ceremonial laws; but they having continued as long as they were designed to do, and there was any use of them, they abated and ceased of themselves.

And that the death of CHRIST was the time of their expiration, because then the new covenant took place, St. Paul expressly tells us, Eph. ii. 15. "having abolished or voided in his flesh the law of commandments, contained in ordinances," and this, verse 16th, he is said to have done by his cross; and

SERM. and more plainly, Col. ii. 14. " blotting out the
 CIV. " hand-writing of ordinances, which was against us,
 " and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

So that ye see that even the ceremonial law was not so properly abrogated by the sacrifice and death of CHRIST, but rather had its accomplishment, and attained its end in the sacrifice of CHRIST, which by the eternal efficacy of it to the expiation of sin, and the purifying of our consciences, hath made all the sacrifices and washings, and other rites of the ceremonial law, for ever needless and superfluous.

Thirdly, but especially as to the moral law, and those precepts which are of natural and perpetual obligation, our SAVIOUR did not come either to dissolve, or to lessen and slacken the obligation of them.

And of this I told you our SAVIOUR doth principally, if not solely speak here in the text, as will appear to any one that shall attentively consider the scope of his discourse. In the beginning of his sermon, he promiseth blessing to those, and those only who were endowed with those virtues which are required by the precepts of the moral law, or comprehended in them; and then he tells them, that christians must be very eminent and conspicuous for the practice of them, ver. 16th, " Let your light
 " so shine before men, that they may see your good
 " works, and glorify our FATHER which is in hea-
 " ven;" and then he cautions them not to entertain any such imagination, as if he intended to dissolve the obligation of the law, and to free Men from the practice of moral duties, which probably some might have suggested against him; " think
 " not

“ not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets ;” as if he had said, you cannot entertain any such conceit, if you consider that the precepts which I inculcate upon you, and those virtues, the practice whereof I recommend to you, are the same which are contained in the law and the prophets. So that I am so far from crossing the main design of the law and the prophets, and taking away the obligation of moral duties enjoined by the Jewish religion, that I come purposely to carry on the same design to further perfection, to give a more perfect and clear law, and to give a greater enforcement and encouragement to the practice of moral duties ; these were always the sum and substance of religion, the ultimate design of the law and the prophets, and therefore I am so far from discharging men from the obligation of the moral precepts of the law, that I come to bind them more strongly upon you. And “ verily I say unto you,” that is, I solemnly declare, “ that whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of heaven ; that is, he shall in no wise enter therein. You think the scribes and pharisees very pious and excellent men, and to have attained to a high pitch of righteousness ; “ but I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And then he instanceth in several precepts of the moral law, which in the letter of them, especially as they were interpreted by the teachers of the law among the Jews, were very much short of that righteousness and perfection which he now requires of his disciples

disciples and followers. So that his whole discourse is about precepts and obligations of the moral law, and not a word concerning the ritual and ceremonial law; which makes me very prone to think, that our SAVIOUR's meaning in the text is this, that his religion was so far from thwarting and opposing that which was the main design of the law and the prophets, that is, of the jewish religion, that the principal intention of christianity was to advance the practice of goodness and virtue, by strengthening the obligation of moral duties, and giving us a more perfect law and rule of life, and offering better arguments, and greater encouragements to the obedience of this law. Therefore for the fuller explication and illustration of this matter, I shall endeavour to clear these three points.

First, that the main and ultimate design of the law and the prophets, was to engage men to the practice of moral duties, that is, of real and substantial goodness.

Secondly, that the law of Moses, or the dispensation of the jewish religion, was comparatively very weak and insufficient to this purpose.

Thirdly, that the christian religion hath supplied all the defects, and weaknesses and imperfections of that dispensation; these three particulars will fully clear our SAVIOUR's meaning in this text.

First, that the main and ultimate design of the law and the prophets, was to engage men to the practice of moral duties; that is, of real and substantial goodness, consisting in those virtues which our SAVIOUR mentions at the beginning of this sermon; humility, and meekness, and mercy, and righteousness,

and

and purity, and peaceableness. This our SAVIOUR more than once tells us was the sum and substance, the main scope and design of the whole doctrine of the law and the prophets, Matth. vii. 12. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets." And Matth. xxii. 40. That the love of GOD and our neighbour, those two great commands, to which all moral duties are reduced, are the two great hinges of the jewish religion; "on these two hang all the law and the prophets." St. Paul calls love, "the fulfilling of the whole law," Rom. xiii. 10. St. James, "the perfect and the royal law," as that which hath a sovereign influence upon all parts of religion. And therefore the apostle Rom. iii. 21. tells us, that this more perfect righteousness which was brought in by the gospel, or the christian religion, is "witnessed by the law and the prophets." And indeed the prophets every where do slight and undervalue the ritual and ceremonial part of religion, in comparison of the practice of moral duties, Isa. i. 11. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? bring no more vain oblations; your new-moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth." But what then are the things that are acceptable to GOD? he tells us at the 16th ver. "wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." And by the prophet Jeremiah GOD tells that people, that the business of sacrifices was not

the thing primarily designed by GOD, but obedience to the moral law; the ritual law came in upon occasion, for the prevention of idolatry, and by way of condescension to the temper of that people; and thus Maimonides and the learned Jews understand these words, Jer. vii. 22, 23. "I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded, and I will be your GOD and ye shall be my people." So likewise in the prophet Hosea, GOD plainly prefers the moral before the ritual part of religion, as that which was principally designed and intended by him, Hos. vi. 6. "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of GOD more than burnt-offerings;" but most plainly and expressly, Mic. vi. 6. "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil? he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD?" these it seems were the great things which GOD stood upon and required of men even under that imperfect dispensation; and these are the very things which the christian religion doth so strictly enjoin and command; so that this righteousness which the gospel requires, "was witnessed to by the law and the prophets." I proceed to the

Second point, that the law of Moses, or the dispensation of the jewish religion, was comparatively very

very weak, and insufficient to make men truly good, and for the promoting of real and inward righteousness; it gave laws indeed to this purpose, but those not so clear and perfect, or at least not so clearly understood, as they are now under the gospel; and it made no express promises of inward grace, and assistance, to quicken and strengthen us in the doing of our duty; it made no explicit promises of any blessing and reward to the doing of our duty beyond this life; so that the best and most powerful arguments and encouragements to obedience, were either wholly wanting, or very obscurely revealed under this dispensation.

And this insufficiency of the jewish dispensation, both to our justification and sanctification, to the reconciling of us to God, and the making of us really good, the apostle frequently inculcates in the new testament; St. Paul, Acts xiii. 38, 39. "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 those things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses;" and Rom. viii. 3. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh;" that is, by reason of the carnality of that dispensation, consisting in the purification of the body. Gal. iii. 21. he calls it a law unfit to give life; "if there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law." And the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. viii. 6, 7, 8, &c, finds fault with the dispensation of the law, for the lowness and meanness of its promises, being only of

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CIV.

temporal good things ; and for want of conferring an inward and a powerful principle to enable men to obedience ; “ but now hath he obtained (speaking “ of CHRIST) a more excellent ministry, by how “ much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, “ which was established upon better promises ; for “ if that first covenant had been faultless, then should “ no place have been sought for a second ;” and this second and better covenant, he tells us, was foretold by the prophets of the old testament ; “ for “ finding fault with them, he saith, behold the days “ come, saith the LORD, when I will make a new “ covenant with the house of Israel, and the house “ of Judah ; not according to the covenant which “ I made with their fathers. For this is the cove- “ nant which I will make with the house of Israel “ after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my “ laws into their minds, and write them in their “ hearts.” And chap. x. 1, 4. he shews the inefficacy of their sacrifices for the real expiation of sin, “ the law having but a shadow of good things “ to come, and not the lively representation of the “ things themselves, can never with those sacrifices “ which they offer’d year by year continually, make “ the comers thereunto perfect ; for it is not possi- “ ble that the blood of bulls and goats should “ take away sins.”

I should now have proceeded to the third particular ; namely, that the christian religion hath supplied all the defects and weakness and imperfection of the jewish dispensation ; but that I shall not now enter upon, but make one plain inference from the substance of what I have already discoursed upon this argument.

If

If our SAVIOUR came not to dissolve and loosen the obligation of moral duties, but to confirm and establish it, and to enforce and bind the practice of these duties more strongly upon us, then they do widely and wilfully mistake the design of christianity, who teach “that it dischargeth men from the obligation of the moral law,” which is the fundamental and avowed principle of the antinomian doctrine, but directly contrary to this declaration of our SAVIOUR in the text, “that he came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to perfect and fulfil them;” (for to take away the obligation of a law, is plainly to destroy and make it void;) and contrary to the apostle’s solemn resolution of this matter, Rom. iii. 31. “Do we then make void the law through faith?” that is, does the gospel destroy and take away the obligation of the law? “God forbid, yea we establish the law;” the christian religion is so far from designing or doing any such thing, that it gives new strength and force to it.

But surely they that teach this doctrine, did never duly consider that terrible threatening of our SAVIOUR after the text, which seems to be so directly levell’d at them; “whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven;” for how can men more effectually teach the violation, not only of the least, but of the greatest of God’s commandments, than by declaring “that the gospel hath set men free from the obligation of the moral law?” which is in effect to say, that christians may act contrary to all the duties of morality, that is, do the most impious things
in

in the world, without any offence against GOD, and notwithstanding this, continue to be his children, and highly in the favour of GOD.

And all the security they have against this impious consequence, is that weak and slender pretence, “that
“ gratitude and love to GOD will preserve them
“ from making this ill use of the grace of the gos-
“ pel, and oblige them to abstain from sin, and to
“ endeavour to please GOD as much as any law could
“ do.” But then they do not consider the nonsense of this; for there can be no such thing as sin, if the obligation of the law be taken away; for “where
“ there is no law, there can be no transgression,” as the apostle, and common reason likewise tells us; so that the law being removed and taken away, all actions become indifferent, and one thing is not more a sin or offence against GOD than another. And what then is it they mean that gratitude will oblige men to, or preserve them from? when there can be no such thing as sin or duty, as pleasing or offending GOD, if there be no law to oblige us to the one, or restrain us from the other.

And what is, if this be not, “to turn the grace
“ of GOD into wantonness,” and to make christian liberty a cloke for all sorts of sins? a man cannot do a greater despite to the christian religion, nor take a more effectual course to bring it into contempt, and to make it to be hiss’d out of the world, than to represent it as a lewd and licentious doctrine, which gives men a perfect discharge from all the duties of morality, and obligeth them only to believe confidently,
“ that CHRIST hath purchased for them a liberty to
“ do what they will, and that upon those terms,
“ and

“ and no other, they are secured of the favour of
“ GOD in this world, and eternal salvation in the
“ other.” This is the sum and plain result of the an-
tinomian doctrine, the most pernicious herefy, and
most directly destructive of the great end and de-
sign of christianity, that ever yet was broached in
the world. “ But ye have not so learned CHRIST,
“ if so be ye have heard him, and have been taught
“ by him, as the truth is in JESUS, that ye put off
“ concerning your former conversation, the old
“ man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful
“ lusts, and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your
“ mind, and put on the new man, which after
“ GOD is created in righteousness, and true holi-
“ nefs.”

S E R M O N CV.

Christianity doth not destroy, but
perfect the law of Moses.

M A T T H E W v. 17.

*Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the
prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*

I Have consider'd this saying of our SAVIOUR'S
with respect to the moral law, and those pre-
cepts which are of natural and perpetual force,
and that our SAVIOUR did not come either to dis-
solve or loosen the obligation of them; for the illu-
stration of which, I propounded to clear these three
points.

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The se-
cond ser-
mon on
this text.

First,

First, that the main and ultimate design of the law and the prophets, was to engage men to the practice of moral duties, that is, of real and substantial goodness.

Secondly, that the law of Moses, or the dispensation of the jewish religion, was comparatively very weak, and insufficient to make men truly good, and ineffectual to promote inward and real righteousness. These two points I have spoken to. I shall now proceed to the

Third, namely, that the christian religion doth supply all the defects and weaknesses and imperfections of the jewish dispensation.

The jewish religion had very considerable advantages above the meer light of nature, which was all that the heathen world had to conduct them towards eternal happiness; the Jews had the knowledge of the one true God, and very signal and particular testimonies of the divine providence, which did naturally tend to beget in them good hopes of a future life, and the rewards of another world; they had the natural law revealed, and the main precepts of it written with God's own hand, and by Moses delivered to them; by which means they had a more certain and distinct knowledge of their duty; they had prophets frequently sent to them, to admonish them of their duty, and to exhort them to repentance, and to warn them of approaching judgments. They had good encouragement given to hope for the pardon of sin, by God's appointment of several ways of expiation; which, how unlikely soever they were to be available to the effectual expiation of sin, yet they did signify that the divine nature was placable,

cable, and did seem to figure some more effectual way, designed by GOD for that purpose, that should be exhibited in due time. And finally they had most express promises and threatnings of temporal blessings and judgments, to encourage them in their obedience, and to deter them from the transgression of GOD's laws. These advantages the Jews plainly had above the rest of the world, GOD did not deal so with other nations, neither had the heathen such a knowledge of GOD's laws. SERM.
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But notwithstanding this, the jewish religion was very short and defective, very weak and ineffectual to the great end of righteousness and true holiness, and to raise men to that perfection of goodness, of which humane nature through the grace of GOD is capable; and therefore there wanted a more perfect institution, to supply the defects and weakness and imperfection even of that divine revelation which GOD had made to the Jews, and really to effect and accomplish that which the jewish religion attempted and aimed at, and was but, as I may say, rudely begun under that imperfect institution. And this the gospel, or the christian religion revealed by our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, hath fully effected, as will evidently appear by a particular survey and consideration of the main defects of the jewish religion, which I shall shew to be all perfectly made up by the revelation of the gospel, and the doctrine of christianity, in these following particulars.

First, it was a great defect of the jewish religion, that a considerable part of it was meerly external, concerning the purification of the body and the flesh, and only figurative of that inward purity and real

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righteousness, which renders men truly good, and like to GOD; for which reason the jewish institution is by the apostle to the Hebrews called “the law of a carnal commandment,” Heb. vii. 16, and chap. ix. 10; is said “to consist only (that is chiefly) in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation;” that is, ’till the MESSIAS should come, and give such laws as should really tend to reform the hearts and lives of men; and therefore these laws and ordinances are call’d “poor pitiful elements,” and “the rudiments of the world,” fitted rather for children in understanding and goodness, than to bring men to any maturity and perfection in goodness. All their rites of purification did “only sanctify to the purifying of the flesh;” but “did not purge the conscience from dead works,” as the apostle to the Hebrews speaks, chap. ix. 13, 14. “they could not make those that performed and observed them perfect, as pertaining to the conscience,” ver. 9. that is, these laws had no effect upon the minds of men, to make them really better, to cure them of their moral defects and impurities, their sins and vices.

But the christian institution doth perfectly supply this defect, by taking us off from those carnal and external observances, and principally requiring that we “worship GOD in spirit and in truth;” by giving us such laws as wholly tend to advance real and substantial goodness, purity and holiness of heart and life, such as mainly tend to reform the minds and manners of men, and to make us like to that holy and perfect being whom we worship:

worship : and besides an external humble and reverent demeanour of our selves in the worship of God, (to which natural religion doth likewise direct :) christianity hath only instituted two solemn external rites, viz. " baptism, and the LORD's supper ; " whereby we solemnly oblige our selves to the practice of all virtue and goodness, I say only these two, that by the multitude of external observances, christians might not be taken off from the minding of the real and substantial duties of religion.

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And therefore the church of Rome have extremely abated and weakned the force of christianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amusing them with external rites, which they have multiplied to that excessive degree, as to make the yoke of CHRIST really heavier than that of Moses, and the christian religion, a more external and carnal commandment than that of the law, and by this means have diverted and taken off the minds of men from the main design of christianity, insomuch that they are so employed and taken up with matters of external ceremony, that they have no leisure to think of being good men, and to mind the great and substantial duties and virtues of the christian life ; so that they have spoil'd the christian religion of one of its chief excellencies and perfections, I mean the simplicity of its worship, which they have now encumbered with so many foolish and frivolous rites and observances, as do not only render it more burdensom, but less apt to make men inwardly and substantially good, that even judaism it self. This is so true and so visible, than the wiser and better sort of them have complain'd of it for several ages, and

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still do, as much as they dare for fear of the inquisition, or some other censure.

Secondly, another defect of the law of Moses was, that it did not give encouragement enough to repentance, by declaring and assuring to us any certain way and method for the expiation and forgiveness of sin. This the rites of all religions aimed at, and pretended to; but were very ineffectual to that end. The heathen sacrifices, and all the cruel and barbarous rites belonging to them, did all pretend to be so many ways of appeasing the offended deity, and of making atonement and expiation for sin; and the sacrifices of the Jews were instituted by God himself, to make an external and legal expiation, and to be types and shadows of a better and more perfect sacrifice, which should really expiate sin; but even this was very darkly and imperfectly discovered to them; besides, that the expiations of the law did only extend to the least sorts of sins, those of ignorance and inadvertency, but not at all to presumptuous sins, and such as were committed with a high hand, nor to wilful and deliberate sins, except in some very few and rare cases particularly mentioned in the law; so that tho' a great part of the religious rites both of the pagan and jewish religion, aimed at the expiation of sin, yet were they really ineffectual to that end; and upon the whole matter, mankind, tho' they conceived good hope of God's mercy and forgiveness in case of repentance, " (who
" can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn
" away from his anger?") yet they were unacquainted with any certain and effectual means to that purpose.

It remains then, that this great blessing of the forgiveness of sins, was never sufficiently declared and assured to mankind, but through JESUS CHRIST in the gospel. So St. Paul expressly asserts, Acts xiii. 38, 39. "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." The gospel hath provided an expiation for all sins in general, and that by a sacrifice of inestimable value, "the blood of the son of God." And this is a mighty encouragement to repentance, and one most effectual means to reclaim men from their sins, to be assured that they are indemnified for what is past. And this the apostle means, when he says, Gal. iii. 13. "that CHRIST hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" that is, whereas the law left sinners, as to those sins which stood most in need of pardon, under a curse, having provided no expiation for them. CHRIST hath redeemed them from that curse, by making a general expiation for sin; and in this sense it is that the author to the Hebrews says, chap. ix. 15. that CHRIST died "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant"; that is, for those sins for which the covenant of the law had provided no way of forgiveness; and therefore St. John says emphatically, 1 John i. 7. "that the blood of JESUS CHRIST cleanseth us from all sin."

Thirdly, the law did not afford sufficiently plain and certain rules and directions for a good life. As the corruption and degeneracy of mankind grew worse,

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worse, so the light of nature waxed dimmer and dimmer, and the rule of good and evil was more doubtful and uncertain, and that in very considerable instances of our duty. The law of Moses was peculiar to the Jews; and even to them, who only had the benefit and advantage of it, it did not give clear and perfect light and direction as to moral duties, and those things which are of an eternal and immutable reason and goodness. And therefore our SAVIOUR in this sermon explains it to a greater perfection than it was understood to have among the Jews, or the letter of it seemed to intend, and hath not only forbidden several things permitted by the law, as divorce, and retaliation of injuries; but hath heightened our duty in several instances of it, requiring us “to love our enemies,” and “to forgive the greatest injuries and provocations, tho’ never so often repeated,” and not only “not to revenge them, but to requite them with good turns,” which were not understood by mankind to be laws before, but yet when duly consider’d, are very agreeable to right reason, and the sense of the wisest and best men. So that the christian religion hath not only fixt and determined our duty, and brought it to a greater certainty, but hath raised it to a greater perfection, and rendered it every way fit to bring the minds of men to a more divine temper, and a more reasonable and perfect way of serving GOD, than ever the world was instructed in before.

Fourthly, the promises and threatnings of the law were only of temporal good and evil things, which are, in comparison of the endless rewards and punishments of another world, but very languid and faint motives

motives to obedience. Not but that the Jews under the law had such apprehensions of their own immortality, and of a future state of happiness and misery after this life, as natural light suggested to them; which was in most but a wavering and uncertain persuasion, and consequently of small efficacy to engage men to their duty; but the law of Moses added little or nothing to the clearness of those natural notions concerning a future state, and the strengthening of this persuasion in the minds of men; it did rather suppose it, than give any new force and life to it. And for this reason more particularly the apostle tells us that the law was but weak to make men good; because it did not work strongly enough upon the hopes and fears of men by the weight of its promises, and the terror of its threatenings; and that for this weakness and imperfection of it, it was removed, and a more powerful and awakning dispensation brought in the place of it; Heb. vii. 18, 19. “For there is
“ verily a disannulling of the commandment that
“ was before (that is of the jewish law) for the weak-
“ nefs and unprofitableness thereof; for the law
“ made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a
“ better hope did;” that is, the covenant of the gospel, which promiseth eternal life. And chap. viii. 6. for this reason more especially the apostle says, that CHRIST had “obtained a more excellent ministry, being the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” And Rom. i. 16, 18. St. Paul tell us, that for this reason “the gospel is the power of GOD unto salvation,” because “therein the wrath of GOD is revealed from
“ heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteous-
“ nefs

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“ness of men.” the clear revelation of a future judgment, was that which made the gospel so proper and so powerful an instrument for the salvation of men. The great impiety of mankind, and their impenitency in it, was not so much to be wondred at before, while the world was in a great measure ignorant of the infinite danger of a wicked life; and therefore GOD is said in some sort to overlook it; “but now he commands all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead,” Acts xvii. 30, 31. The clear discovery and perfect assurance of a future judgment, calls loudly upon all men to leave their sins, and turn to GOD.

Fifthly, the covenant of the law had no spiritual promises contained in it, of the grace and assistance of GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT, for the mortifying of sin, and enabling men to their duty, and supporting them under sufferings: but the gospel is full of clear and express promises to this purpose. Our SAVIOUR hath assured us, “that GOD will give his HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask him,” Luke xi. 13. and this the apostle tells us is actually conferr’d upon all true christians, those who do sincerely embrace and believe the gospel, Rom. viii. 9. “If any man have not the SPIRIT of CHRIST, he is none of his.” Hence the gospel is called by the same apostle, “the law of the SPIRIT of life in CHRIST JESUS,” ver. 2d of that chap. “The law of the SPIRIT of life in CHRIST JESUS, hath made me free from the law of sin and death;” and in the next words he tells us, that
 herein

herein manifestly appeared the weakness of the law, that it left men destitute of this mighty help and advantage (at least as to any special promise of it)

“ What the law could not do; in that it was weak
“ through the flesh, GOD sent his own SON in the
“ likeness of sinful flesh, and by making him a
“ sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that
“ the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in
“ us, who walk not after the flesh but after the
“ spirit ;” that is, that that righteousness which
the law aimed at and signified, but was too weak to effect, might be really accomplish’d in us, “ who
“ walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit ;” that is, who are acted and assisted by a higher and better principle than men either have in nature, or the carnal dispensation of the law did endow men withal. And because of this great defect the law is said to be a state of bondage and servitude ; and on the contrary, the gospel, by reason of this mighty advantage, is called a state of adoption and liberty, ver. 15. “ for ye have not received the spirit of
“ bondage, but the spirit of adoption, whereby
“ we cry Abba FATHER ;” and 2 Cor. iii. 17.
“ where the SPIRIT of the LORD is, there is liberty.” And to this very thing St. Paul appeals, as that whereby men might judge whether the law of the gospel were the more excellent and powerful dispensation, Gal. iii. 2. “ This only would I learn of you,
“ received ye the SPIRIT by the works of the law,
“ or by the hearing of faith ?” As if he had said, let this one thing determine that whole matter ; were ye made partakers of this great privilege and blessing of the SPIRIT, while ye were of the jewish religion,

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or since ye became christians? And ver. 14. he calls it “the blessing of Abraham;” that is, the blessing promised to all nations by Abraham’s seed, namely, the Messias; “that the blessing of Abraham might “come on the gentiles through JESUS CHRIST, “that we might receive the promise of the SPIRIT “through faith.”

And then for the supporting us under afflictions, the gospel promiseth an extraordinary assistance of GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT to us, 1 Pet. iv. 14. “if ye “be reproached for the name of CHRIST, happy “are ye, for the SPIRIT of glory and of GOD rest- “eth upon you.”

But were there no good men under the dispensation of the law? Yes certainly there were, and they were so by the grace and assistance of GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT: but then this was an effect of the divine goodness; but not of any special promise, contained in that covenant, of divine grace and assistance to be conferred on all those that were admitted into it. But thus it is in the new covenant of the gospel; and therefore the law is called “a dead letter, “the oldness of the letter, and the ministration of “the letter,” in opposition to the gospel, which is called the “ministration of the SPIRIT.” And this the apostle lays special weight upon, as a main difference between these two covenants, that the first gave an external law, but the new covenant offers inward grace and assistance to enable men to obedience, and hath an inward and powerful efficacy upon the minds of men, accompanying the ministration of it, Heb. viii. 7, 8, 9, 10. “For if that first “covenant had been faultless, then should no place “have

“ have been sought for the second. For finding
“ fault with them, he saith, behold the days come,
“ saith the LORD, when I will make a new cove-
“ nant with the house of Israel, and with the house
“ of Judah, not according to the covenant which
“ I made with their fathers, &c. For this is the co-
“ venant which I will make with the house of Israel
“ after those days, saith the LORD; I will put my
“ laws into their minds, and write them in their
“ hearts.”

And of this inward grace and assistance we are further secured, by the powerful and prevalent and perpetual intercession of our high-priest for sinners, at the right hand of GOD; not like the intercession of the priests under the law, who being sinners themselves, were less fit to intercede for others; but “ we have an high-priest that is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, who by the eternal SPIRIT offer’d himself without spot to GOD,” to purchase for us those blessings which he intercedes for. The priests under the law were intercessors upon earth; but “ CHRIST is entred into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of GOD for us,” Heb. ix. 24. The priests under the law were removed from this office by death; but “ CHRIST, because he continues for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood,” and is an everlasting advocate and intercessor for us, in the virtue of his most meritorious sacrifice continually presented to his FATHER, where he is “ always at the right hand of GOD,” to present our prayers to him, and to obtain pardon of our sins, and “ grace to help in time of need,” and by his intercession in heaven to procure all those blessings

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blessings to be actually conferred upon us, which he purchased for us by his blood upon earth; “ wherefore he is able to save to the utmost all those that come to GOD by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them,” as the same apostle speaks, Heb. vii. 25.

And thus I have, as briefly as well I could, shewed how the christian religion doth supply all the weaknesses and imperfections of the jewish religion, and consequently does in no ways contradict or interfere with the great design of the law and the prophets, but hath perfected and made up whatever was weak or wanting in that institution to make men truly good, or, as the expression is in the prophet Daniel, “ to bring in everlasting righteousness;” that is, to clear and confirm those laws of holiness and righteousness, which are of indispenfible and eternal obligation.

And if this be the great design of our SAVIOUR’S coming, and the christian doctrine be every way fitted to advance righteousness and true holiness, and to make us as excellently good as this imperfect state of mortality will admit, since it hath many advantages incomparably beyond any religion or institution that ever was in the world, both in respect of the perfection of its laws, and the force of its Motives and arguments to repentance, and a holy life, and in respect of the encouragements which it gives, and the examples which it sets before us, and the powerful assistance which it offers to us, to enable us “ to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of GOD;” what a shame is this to us, who are under the

the power of this excellent institution, if the temper of our minds, and the tenor of our conversation be not in some measure answerable to the gospel of CHRIST! the greater helps and advantages we have of being good, the greater things may justly be expected from us; for “to whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.”

Christianity is “the fulfilling of the righteousness of the law, by walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit, by mortifying the deeds of the flesh, and by bringing forth the fruits of the SPIRIT,” which are “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance.” The righteousness of faith doth not consist in a barren and ineffectual belief of the gospel, in a mere embracing of the promises of it, and relying upon CHRIST for salvation, in “a faith without works, which is dead;” but in “a faith which worketh by love,” in becoming “new creatures,” and in “keeping the commandments of GOD.” “The righteousness of faith speaketh on this wise. This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son JESUS CHRIST, and love one another, as he gave us commandment,” 1 John iii. 23. and “this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth GOD, love his brother also,” 1 John iv. 21. “That we approve the things that are excellent, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by JESUS CHRIST to the glory and praise of GOD,” Philip. i. 10, 11. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, what-
“foever

“soever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, mind these things,” chap. iv. 8.

And then considering what abundant provision the gospel hath made for our attainment of everlasting salvation, we are altogether without excuse if we perish. Since GOD “hath raised up so mighty a salvation for us; how shall we escape?” If we “die in our sins;” it is not because GOD would not forgive them, but because we would not repent and be saved; the fault is all our own, and we owe it wholly to ourselves, if we be lost and undone for ever. If when life and death, heaven and hell, are so plainly set before us, eternal misery and perdition fall to our lot and portion, it is not because we were not warned of our danger, or because happiness and “the things of our peace were hid from our eyes,” but because we have made death and destruction our obstinate and final choice.

“But, beloved, I hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, tho’ I thus speak.” “Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of CHRIST;” and if we be careful to perform the conditions which the gospel requires on our part, we shall not fail to be made partakers of that “eternal life, which GOD, that cannot lye, hath promised to us, for his mercy’s sake in JESUS CHRIST.”

S E R M O N , C V I .

Of the nature of regeneration, and its necessity, in order to justification and salvation.

G A L A T . vi, 15.

For in CHRIST JESUS, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.

THERE are two epistles of St. Paul, namely, SERM.
CVI. that to the Romans, and this to the Galatians, which are principally and particularly design'd to confute a false persuasion, which had prevailed amongst many christians, especially those who were converted from judaism; “ that it was not enough for men to embrace and confess the christian religion, unless they kept the law of Moses, or at least submitted to that great precept, of circumcision; the neglect whereof among all the affirmative precepts of the law, was only threatned with excision, or being cut off from among the people.” And of the prevalency of this error, and the great disturbance which it made in the christian church, we have a particular account, Acts xv. where a general council of the apostles is call'd, and a letter written in their names to all the christian churches, to rectify their apprehensions in this matter, ver. 24. of that chap. “ For as much as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying,

The first sermon on this text.

SERM. saying, ye must be circumcis'd, and keep the law,

CVI. "to whom we gave no such commandment, &c.

And upon this occasion likewise it was, that St. Paul wrote this epistle to the Galatians, as likewise that to the Romans; in the former of which, after he had at large confuted this error, (which he calls "the preaching of another gospel, than what the apostles had preached, and the christians first received") In the beginning of the vth chap. he exhorts them to assert the liberty, which CHRIST had purchas'd for them, from the obligation of the law of Moses, ver. 1, 2. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith CHRIST hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, CHRIST shall profit you nothing;" not that hereby he condemneth circumcision, as a thing evil in it self; for GOD never instituted or commanded any thing that was so; but he opposeth the opinion of the necessity of it to our justification and salvation, when the gospel had so plainly taken away the obligation and use of it; and consequently to affirm still the necessity of it, was really to renounce christianity. For if judaism was still the way to salvation, christianity was to no purpose; and if christianity be now the way, then the obligation to the jewish religion was ceased. To avoid the force of this reasoning, it was not enough for the false apostles to say (as it seems they did) that christians were not obliged universally to the whole law of Moses, but principally to the law of circumcision; because circumcision being the sign and badge of that covenant, whoever took that upon him, did thereby own his

his obligation to the whole law, ver. 3, 4. "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law; CHRIST is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace;" that is, whoever of you expect and profess to be justified by the law of Moses, ye take away the necessity and use of the christian religion; and "are fallen from grace;" that is, do in effect renounce the gospel; "for we, through the SPIRIT, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith," ver 5. we by the SPIRIT, in opposition to circumcision, which was in the flesh, do expect to be justified by the belief of the gospel. "For in JESUS CHRIST, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision," ver. 6. that is, now under the dispensation of the gospel by CHRIST JESUS, it signifies nothing to a man's justification or salvation, whether he be circumcised, or not circumcised, whether he be a jew or a gentile. All that the gospel requires as necessary to these purposes, is, that we perform the conditions of the gospel, that so we may be capable of being made partakers of the blessings of it.

Now as the great blessing and benefit of the gospel is variously exprest, as by "the forgiveness of our sins," by "our acceptance with GOD," or (which comprehends both,) by "our justification," sometimes "by adoption," and "our being made the sons and children of GOD," sometimes "by redemption," and (which is the consummation of all) "by salvation and eternal life;" I say, as the blessing and benefit of the gospel, is in scripture exprest to us by these several terms, which do in effect all

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signify the same thing; so our duty, and the condition the gospel requires on our part, is likewise as variously express'd, sometimes, and that very frequently, by the word faith, as being the great source and principle of all religious acts and performances; but then this faith must not be a bare assent and persuasion of the truth of the gospel, but such an effectual belief, as expresseth it self in suitable acts of obedience and holiness, such as the apostle here calls *πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη*, “a faith which worketh by love”, a faith that is inspir'd and acted, or rather consummate and made perfect by charity, (for so the word doth often signify,) and then this phrase will be just of the same importance with that of St. James, chap. ii. 22. “by works is faith made perfect.” Sometimes, and that also very frequently, the condition of the gospel is express'd by words which signify the change of our state, as by “repentance, conversion, regeneration, renovation, sanctification, the new creature, and the new man,” which expressions are all so well known, that I need not refer to particular texts; sometimes the condition of the gospel is express'd by the visible and sensible effects of this inward change in our outward life and actions; as namely by “obedience and keeping the commandments of GOD.” So Heb. v. 9. CHRIST is said to be “the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;” where obedience is plainly put for the whole condition of the gospel, the performance whereof entitles us to eternal life and happiness.

Now that by these various expressions, one and the same thing is certainly intended and meant, viz. the condition of the gospel; that which is requir'd

on our part, in order to our full and perfect justification and acceptance with GOD, is evident beyond all denial; by comparing the three different ways whereby St. Paul doth express the same proposition for sense and substance; in which he tells us, what it is that will avail to our justification under the gospel, that is, according to the terms of the christian religion; that is neither here nor there, that it signifies nothing whether a man be circumcised or not, but that we be so qualified as the gospel requires, that the conditions upon which the blessings of the gospel are promised be found in us. And there are three texts wherein the same thing is plainly intended in three very different expressions. Gal. v. 6. "In
" JESUS CHRIST neither circumcision availeth any
" thing, nor uncircumcision: but faith, which is
" consummate, or made perfect by charity." Gal.
vi. 15. "For in CHRIST JESUS neither circumci-
" sion availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but
" a new creature." I Cor. vii. 19. "Circumci-
" sion is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing:
" but the keeping of the commandments of GOD." It is evident, that in these three texts the apostle designs to say the same thing, and consequently that
" faith which is made perfect by charity, and the
" new creature, and keeping of the commandments
" of GOD," are the same in sense and substance, viz. the condition of our justification and acceptance with GOD under the covenant of the gospel, or in the christian religion.

I shall at present, by GOD's assistance, handle the second of these texts. "In CHRIST JESUS neither
" circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumci-
" sion:

“ sion: but a new creature.” And here the condition of the gospel is express to us, by the change of our state, which in scripture is call’d our “ regeneration, or becoming new creatures, and new “ men.” Circumcision was but an outward sign and mark upon the body and the flesh, though it did indeed prefigure and typify the inward circumcision of the heart, the giving of men new hearts, and new spirits, under the more perfect dispensation of the gospel: but now in **JESUS CHRIST**, that is, in the christian religion, the presence or the want of this outward mark will avail nothing to our justification; but that which was signified by it, the renovation of our hearts and spirits, our becoming new creatures, is now the condition of our justification and acceptance with **GOD**.

The false apostles indeed did lay great stress upon the business of circumcision, not so much out of zeal to the law of Moses, as to avoid persecution, ver. 12. “ They constrain you to be circumcised, only lest “ they should suffer persecution for the cross of “ **CHRIST**.” For at that time, though the christians were persecuted, yet the Jews by the Roman edicts had the free exercise of their religion, and therefore they gloried in this external mark of circumcision, because it exempted them from suffering; but St. Paul gloried in his sufferings for **CHRIST**, and the marks of that upon his body, ver. 14. “ **GOD** forbid that I should glory save in the cross “ of our **LORD JESUS CHRIST** ;” and ver. 17. “ I “ bear in my body the marks of the **LORD JESUS**.” He tells them, what necessities soever they might pretend of circumcision, either for their justification,

Or salvation, the true ground of all was to save themselves from temporal sufferings; and that in the christian religion it signifieth nothing to recommend them to the favour of GOD, whether they were circumcised or not; nothing would be available to this purpose, but the renovation and change of their hearts and lives. “ For in CHRIST JESUS neither
“ circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumci-
“ sion; but a new creature, *καινή κτίσις*, a new
“ creation,” to intimate the greatness of the change, which christianity, throughly entertained, made in men.

Having thus cleared the occasion and meaning of these words, I come now to consider the particulars contained in them, namely, these two things.

First, that the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law of Moses; “ in CHRIST JESUS
“ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncir-
“ cumcision.”

Secondly, that according to the terms of the christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with GOD, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; “ neither circumcision, nor
“ uncircumcision: but a new creature.”

1. That the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law of Moses. “ In CHRIST JESUS,” that is, now under the dispensation of the gospel, “ nei-
“ ther circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncir-
“ cumcision.” There never was any general obligation upon mankind to this rite of circumcision, but only upon the seed of Abraham; but yet upon the preaching of the gospel, many of the jewish christians would have brought the Gentiles under this
yoke;

yoke; pretending that christianity was but a superstructure upon the law of Moses, which together with the gospel, was to be the religion of the whole world; and there was some colour for this, because our SAVIOUR himself submitted to this rite, and was circumcised; which the apostle takes notice of in the ivth chap. of this epist. ver. 4. "When the fulness of time was come, GOD sent forth his SON made of a woman, made under the law," that is, "circumcised." And 'tis true indeed, that our blessed SAVIOUR was circumcised, but not to signify to us the perpetuity of circumcision, and the continuance of it under the christian religion, but for a quite different end; as a testimony of his obedience to that law, which tho' afterwards it was to expire, yet was to be obeyed whilst it was in force, by all that were born under it; he was "made under the law," and "it became him," who came to teach mankind obedience to the laws of God, "to fulfil all righteousness" himself. And therefore the apostle in this epistle, where he takes notice of this, that CHRIST was "made under the law," gives this reason of it, that he might be the fitter to free those who were under it, from the servitude of it; he was "made under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law;" and that those who were in the condition of servants before, might be set at liberty, and "receive the adoption of sons."

But how did his being "made under the law," qualify him "to redeem those who were under the law?" thus, by submitting to it himself, he shewed that he owned the authority of it, and that he

he had no malice or enmity against it; as he himself expresses it, that “he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.” And being fulfill’d, and having serv’d the time and end for which God intended it, it expir’d of it self; like a law which is not made for perpetuity, but limited to a certain period. And our blessed SAVIOUR, who came with greater authority than Moses, and gave greater testimony of his divine authority, had sufficient power to declare the expiration of it; and by commissioning his disciples before and after his death to preach the gospel to the whole world, he put an end to that particular law and dispensation, which only concern’d the jewish nation, by giving a general law to all mankind.

So that from the death of our SAVIOUR, and his ascension into heaven, upon which followed the general publication of the gospel, the law of Moses ceased, and according to our SAVIOUR’S express appointment, profelytes were to be admitted into the christian church only by baptism, and not by circumcision. And if circumcision, which was the sign of that covenant, was laid aside, then the whole obligation of that law and covenant which God had made with the Jews, was also ceased. It was once indeed the mark of God’s chosen and peculiar people; but now that God hath revealed himself to the whole world by his SON, and offers salvation to all mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews, “the wall of separation is broken down,” and circumcision, which was the mark of distinction between Jews and Gentiles, is taken away; and therefore he is said “to have made peace by his
“ cross,

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“ cross, and to have blotted out, and taken away
“ the hand-writing of ordinances, nailing it to his
“ cross;” that is, from the time of his death
to have taken away the obligation of the law of
Moses, tho’ it was a good while after, before the
Jews were wholly weaned from the veneration and
use of it.

Nay, it was some time before the apostles were
clearly convinc’d, that the gospel was to be preached
to the gentiles; this being one of those truths, which
our SAVIOUR promised after his departure, his SPI-
RIT should lead them into the perfect knowledge of;
and then they were fully instructed, that the law of
Moses was expired, and that it was no longer neces-
sary to the salvation of men, that they should be cir-
cumcised, and keep that law. And though it was
once enjoined by GOD himself to the Jews, and
their obedience to it was necessary to their acceptance
with GOD, yet now by CHRIST JESUS, GOD had
offered salvation to men upon other terms; and whe-
ther they were circumcised, or not, was of no moment
to their justification or salvation one way or other;
but provided they perform’d the condition of this
new covenant of the gospel, they were all alike ca-
pable of the divine favour and acceptance.

But I proceed to that, which I mainly intended to
prosecute from these words; and that is the

Second particular in the text, namely that according
to the terms of the gospel, and the christian religion,
nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance
with GOD, but the real renovation of our hearts and
lives; “ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision: but
“ a new creature.” For the full explication of this,
I shall do these three things. First,

First, shew what is imply'd in this phrase of "a ^SERM. CVI. " new creature."

Secondly, that this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with GOD, and that it is the same in substance with "faith perfected by "charity," and with "keeping the commmand- "ments of GOD."

Thirdly, that it is very reasonable it should be so.

I. What is imply'd in this phrase of "a new crea- "ture." It is plain at first sight, that it is a meta- phorical expression of that great and thorough change which is made in men by the gospel, or the christian religion. The scripture sets forth to us this change by great variety of expressions, "by conversion, and "turning from our iniquities unto GOD;" "by re- "pentance," (which signifies a change of our mind and resolution, and is in scripture call'd "repentance "from dead works," and "repentance unto life;") "by regeneration, or being born again;" "by re- "surrection from the dead, and rising to newness of "life;" "by sanctification," and being "washed "and cleans'd" from all filthiness and impurity, (which three last metaphors are imply'd in baptism, which is called regeneration, Tit. iii. 5. "According "to his mercy he saved us by the washing of rege- "neration, and renewing of the HOLY GHOST;" and our being "born again of water and the HOLY "GHOST," John iii. 3. "Except a man be born again, " &c." and ver 5. "Except a man be born of water "and of the SPIRIT, he cannot enter into the king- "dom of GOD;" and "the purifying of our con- "sciences," Heb. x. 22. "having our hearts sprink-

“ led from an evil conscience, and our bodies wash’d
 “ with pure water;” and “ the answer of a good
 “ conscience towards GOD;” 1 Pet. iii. 21. “ bap-
 “ tism doth now save us, not the putting away of
 “ the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good con-
 “ science towards GOD;” and finally our being
 “ baptiz’d into the death and resurrection of
 “ CHRIST,” Rom. vi. 3, 4. “ Know ye not that
 “ so many of us as were baptized into JESUS
 “ CHRIST, were baptized into his death; therefore
 “ we are buried with him by baptism into death,
 “ that like as CHRIST was raised up from the dead
 “ by the glory of the FATHER, even so we also
 “ should walk in newness of life.”) And lastly,
 this change is set forth to us by renovation, and our
 being made “ new creatures, and new men,” 2 Cor.
 v. 17. “ Therefore if any man be in CHRIST,” that
 is, professeth himself a christian, “ he is a new
 “ creature; old things are past away, behold all
 “ things are become new.” And so likewise, Eph.
 iv. 22, 23, 24. this great change is exprest by
 “ putting off concerning the former conversation,
 “ the old man, which is corrupt according to the
 “ lusts of deceit, and being renewed in the spirit of
 “ our minds, and putting on the new man, which
 “ after GOD is created in righteousness and true ho-
 “ linefs.” The expression is very emphatical, “ re-
 “ newed in the spirit of our minds,” that is, in our
 very minds and spirits, to signify to us that it is a
 most inward and thorough change, reaching to the
 very center of our souls and spirits. And, Coloff. iii.
 9, 10, 11. it is represented much after the same
 manner, “ seeing ye have put off the old man with
 “ his

“ his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him, where there is neither greek nor jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, scythian, bond nor free; but CHRIST is all and in all.” Which is the same with what the apostle says here in the text, “ that in CHRIST JESUS neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but a new creature;” that is, these external marks and differences signify nothing: but this inward change, “ the new creature, CHRIST formed in us,” this in the christian religion is “ all in all.”

But that we may the more clearly understand the just importance of this metaphor of “ a new creature, or a new creation,” I shall,

First, consider what it doth certainly signify, by comparing this metaphorical phrase with other plain texts of scripture.

And secondly, that it doth not import what some would extend it to, so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this, and the like metaphors in scripture, without any manner of countenance from plain texts.

First, I shall consider what this metaphor doth certainly import, so as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of scripture, namely, these two things.

1. The greatness of this change.

2. That it is effected and wrought by a divine power.

1. The greatness of this change; it is called *καινή κτίσις*, “ a new creation;” as if the christian doctrine

were mould and fashion men over again, transforming them into a quite other sort of persons than what they were before, and made such a change in them, as the creating power of GOD did, in bringing this beautiful and orderly things out of their dark and rude chaos. Thus the apostle represents it, 2 Cor. iv. 6. "GOD who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," (alluding to the first creation) "hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD in the face of JESUS CHRIST." We are translated from one extreme to another, Acts xxvi. 18. When our LORD sends Paul to preach the gospel to the gentiles, he tells him what a change it would make in them, by "opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto GOD." And St. Peter expresses the change which christianity makes in men, by their being "call'd out of darkness into a marvellous light," 1 Pet. ii. 9. And so St. Paul, Eph. v. 8. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the LORD."

And indeed, wherever the doctrine of CHRIST hath its full effect, and perfect work, it makes a mighty change both in their inward principles, and outward practice; it darts a new light into their minds, so that they see things otherwise than they did before, and form a different judgment of things from what they did before; it endows them with a new principle, and new resolutions, gives them another spirit, and another temper, a quite different sense and gust of things from what they formerly had.

had. And this inward change of their minds necessarily produceth a proportionable change in their lives and conversations, so that the man steers quite another course, acts after another rate, and drives on quite other designs from what he did before.

And this is remarkably seen in those who are reclaimed from impiety and prophaneness to religion, and from a vicious to a virtuous course of life. The change is great and real in all; but not so sensible and visible in some, as others; in those who are made good by the insensible steps of a pious and virtuous education; as in those who are translated out of a quite contrary state, and “turn’d from the power of Satan unto God,” and “translated out of the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom CHRIST;” which was the case of the heathen world, in their first conversion to christianity.

Secondly, this change is effected and wrought by a divine power, of the same kind with that, which created the world, and raised up CHRIST JESUS from the dead; two great and glorious instances of the divine power, and to these the scripture frequently alludes, when it speaks of this new creation. “GOD, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts.” “Like as CHRIST was raised from the dead by the glory of the FATHER, so we also are raised to newness of life,” saith St. Paul, Rom. vi. 4. And to the same purpose the apostle speaks, Ephes. i. 19, 20. “And that ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the operation of his mighty power, which he wrought in
“CHRIST,

“CHRIST, when he raised him from the dead.” So that our renovation, and being made new creatures, is an instance of the same glorious power, which exerted it self in the first creation of things, and in the resurrection of our LORD JESUS CHRIST from the dead; but not altogether after the same manner, as I shall shew under the next head.

I should now in the second place proceed to shew, that this metaphor of a new creation doth not import what some men would extend it to, so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this and other like metaphors of scripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts. But this I reserve to another discourse.

S E R M O N C V I I .

Of the nature of regeneration, and its necessity, in order to justification and salvation.

G A L A T. vi. 15.

For in CHRIST JESUS, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.

SERM.
CVII.

The second sermon on this text.

IN these words are contained these two things. First, that the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law, having taken away the sign of that covenant, which was circumcision.

Secondly,

Secondly, that according to the terms of the gospel, and the christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with GOD, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives. For the full explication of this, I propounded to do these three things.

I. To shew what is imply'd in this phrase of " a new creature.

II. That this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with GOD, and that it is the same in sense and substance with those other expressions, in the two parallel texts of " faith perfected by charity," and " keeping the commandments of God."

III. That it is very reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification, and acceptance to the favour of GOD.

I began with the first of these, viz. to shew what is imply'd in this phrase of " a new creature;" as to which I shew'd,

First, What this metaphor doth certainly import, so as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of scripture; namely, the greatness of this change; and that it is effected by a divine power. I now proceed,

Secondly, to shew that it doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the meer and single strength of this and other like metaphors of scripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts: such doctrines as these three.

1. That as the creation was by an irresistible act of the divine power, so is this new creation, or conversion of a sinner.

2. That as creatures were meerly passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it; no more do we to our conversion and regeneration.

3. That as the creation of the several ranks and kinds of creatures was in an instant, and effected by the powerful word of GOD, only saying, “let such and such things be,” and immediately they were; so this new creation, or the work of regeneration is in an instant, and admits of no degrees.

Concerning these three doctrines of great moment and consequence in divinity, I shall shew, with all the clearness and brevity I can, that they are built solely upon metaphors of scripture, tortur’d and strain’d too far without any real ground or foundation from scripture or reason; nay, contrary to the tenor of the one and the dictates of the other; nay indeed contrary to the general experience of the operation of GOD’s grace upon the minds of men in their conversion.

First, it is pretended, that as the creation was by an irresistible act of the divine power, so is the new creation, or the conversion of a sinner; and this is solely argued from the metaphorical expressions of scripture concerning conversion; such as being “cal-
“led out of darkness into light,” alluding to that powerful word of GOD, which in the first creation
“commanded the light to shine out of darkness; be-
“ing quicken’d and rais’d to a new life;” and from this metaphor here in the text, of “a new
“creation.”

But

But surely it is a dangerous thing in divinity, to build doctrines upon metaphors, especially if we strain them to all the similitudes which a quick and lively imagination can find out; whereas some one obvious thing is commonly intended in the metaphor, and the meaning is absolv'd and acquitted in that, and it is folly to pursue it into all those similitudes, which a good fancy may suggest. When our SAVIOUR says, "that he will come as a thief in the night," it is plain what he means; that the day of judgment will surprize the careless world, when they least look for it, that "he will come at an hour when they are not aware;" and tho' he resemble his coming to that of "a thief in the night," yet here is nothing of robbery in the case. So here when the change which christianity makes in men, is called "a new creation," this only imports the greatness of the change, which by the power of God's grace is made upon the hearts and lives of men; and the metaphor is sufficiently absolv'd in this plain sense and meaning of it, agreeable to the literal expressions of scripture concerning this thing, and there is no need that this change should in all other respects answer the work of creation; and consequently there is no necessity that it should be effected in an irresistible manner, or that we should be altogether passive in this change, and that we should no ways concur to it by any act of our own, or that this work should be done in an instant, and admit of no steps and degrees.

It is not necessary that this change should be effected in an irresistible manner. God may do so, when he pleaseth, without any injury to his creatures; for

it is certainly no wrong to any man to be made good and happy against his will; and I do not deny, but that GOD sometimes does so. The call of the disciples to follow CHRIST seems to have been a very sudden and forcible impression upon their minds, without any appearing reason for it; for it is not reasonable for any man to leave his calling, and follow every one that bids him do so. The conversion of Saul from a persecutor of christianity, to a zealous preacher of it, was certainly effected, if not in an irresistible, yet in a very forcible and violent manner. The conversion of three thousand at one sermon, when the HOLY GHOST descended in a visible manner upon the apostles, was certainly the effect of a mighty and over-powering degree of GOD's grace. And the like may be said of the sudden conversion of so many persons from heathenism, and great wickedness and impiety of life, to the sincere profession of christianity, by the preaching of the apostles afterwards.

But that this is not of absolute necessity, nor the ordinary method of GOD's grace, to work upon the minds of men in so over-powering, much less in an irresistible manner, is as plain as any thing of that nature can be, both from experience, and the reason of the thing, and the constant tenor of the scripture. We find that many (perhaps the greatest part) of those that are good are made so by the insensible steps and degrees of a religious education, and having been never vicious, can give no great account of any sensible change, only that when they came to years of understanding, they consider'd things more, and the principles that were instill'd into them in their younger years, did put forth themselves more vigorously

roushly at that time, as seeds sprout out of the ground, ^S E R M. after they have a good while been buried, and lain CVII. hid in the earth.

And it is contrary to reason, to make an irresistible act of divine power necessary to our repentance, and conversion; because this necessarily involves in it two things which seem very unreasonable.

First, that no man repents upon consideration and choice, but upon meer force and violent necessity, which quite takes away the virtue of repentance, whatever virtue there may be in the consequent acts of a regenerate state.

Secondly, it implies that the conversion and repentance of those, upon whom God doth not work irresistibly is impossible, which is the utmost can be said to excuse the impenitency of men, by taking it off from their own choice, and laying it upon the impossibility of the thing, and an utter disability in them to choose and do otherwise.

And it is likewise contrary to the constant tenor of the bible, which supposeth that men do very frequently resist the grace and HOLY SPIRIT of GOD. It is said of the pharisees by our SAVIOUR, Luke vii. 30. "that they rejected the counsel of GOD against themselves;" that is, the merciful design of GOD for their salvation. And of the Jews, Acts vii. 51. "that they always resisted the HOLY GHOST." So that some operations of GOD's grace and HOLY SPIRIT are resistible, and such, as if men did not resist them, would be effectual to bring them to faith and repentance, else why are the pharisees said "to reject the counsel of GOD against themselves," that is, to their own ruin; imply-

ing, that if they had not rejected it, they might have been saved; and if they had, it had been without irresistible grace; for that which was offered to them, was actually resisted by them. Other texts plainly shew, that the reason of mens impenitency and unbelief is not any thing wanting on God's part, but on theirs; as those known texts, wherein our SAVIOUR laments the case of Jerusalem, because they obstinately brought destruction upon themselves, Luke xix. 42. "If thou hadst known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace:" intimating that they might have known them, so as to have prevented that desolation which was coming upon them, and was a forerunner of their eternal ruin; "but now they are hid from thine eyes;" intimating, that then GOD gave them up to their own blindness and obstinacy; but the time was, when they might have "known the things of their peace;" which cannot be upon the supposition of the necessity of an irresistible act of GOD's grace to their conversion, and repentance; because then without that they could not have repented, and if that had been afforded to them, they had infallibly repented. So likewise in that other text, Matth. xxiii. 37. "Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and you would not." And in John v. 40. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." "He would have gathered them, and they would not;" he would have given them life, but "they would not come to him." Are these serious and compassionate exhortations and declarations of our SAVIOUR's gracious intention

tion towards them, any ways consistent with an impossibility of their repentance? which yet must be said, if irresistible grace be necessary thereto; for then repentance is impossible without it, and that it was not afforded to them is plain, because they did not repent. The same may be said of that solemn declaration of GOD, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "As I live, "saith the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the "death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn "from his way and live." Can it be said that GOD hath "no pleasure in the death of sinners," and yet be true, that he denies to the greatest part of them, that grace which is necessary to their repentance? upon this supposition, how can it be true, "that if the mighty works that were done in Chora- "zin, and Bethsaida, had been done in Tyre and "Sidon, they would have repented," Matth. xi. 21. since irresistible grace did not accompany those miracles? for if it had, Chorazin and Bethsaida had repented, and without it Tyre and Sidon could not repent.

The same difficulty is in those texts, wherein GOD is represented as expecting the repentance and conversion of sinners; and our SAVIOUR wondering at their unbelief and hardness of heart, and upbraiding them with it, Isa. v. 4. "What could I have "done more to my vineyard, that I have not done "in it? wherefore when I looked that it should "bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Mark vi. 6. 'tis said "our SAVIOUR marvell'd at "the unbelief of the Jews." And chap. xvi. 14. "that he upbraided his disciples with their unbelief "and hardness of heart." But why should the re-
pentance

penitance of sinners be expected, or their unbelief marvell'd at, or indeed be upbraided to them, by him who knew it impossible to them, without an irresistible power and grace, which he knew likewise was not afforded to them? neither GOD nor man have reason to wonder that any man does not do that, which at the same time they certainly know he cannot do.

The bottom of all that is said to avoid this pressing difficulty, is this; “ that this impotence and
 “ disability of sinners is their sin, and therefore
 “ cannot be pleaded in their excuse, for their impene-
 “ nitency ; but GOD may still justly require that of
 “ them, which they had once a natural power to
 “ do, but wilfully forfeited and lost it; they had
 “ this power in Adam, and forfeited it by his dis-
 “ obedience.” To shew how slight this evasion is, I need not run into that argument, how far we are guilty of the sin of our first parents. That by that first transgression and disobedience all mankind suffers, and our natures are extremely corrupted and depraved, cannot be denied; but the corruption of our natures is a thing very different from personal guilt, strictly and properly so call'd. I will take the business much shorter, and granting that mankind had in Adam a natural power to have continued obedient to the laws of GOD, yet since “ by
 “ one man sin enter'd into the world, and all are
 “ now sinners,” here is an obligation to repentance, as well as to obedience, and men shall be condemned for their impenitency. I ask now, whether in Adam we had a power to repent? 'tis certain Adam had not this power, and therefore I cannot see how

we could lose it, and forfeit it in him. Adam indeed had a natural power not to have sinned, and so not to have needed repentance; but no power to repent in the state of innocency, because in that state repentance was impossible, because there could be no occasion for it. He had it not after his fall, because by that he forfeited all his power to that which is spiritually good. 'Tis said indeed he had it in innocency, but forfeited it by his fall; so that he had it, when there was no occasion or possibility of the exercise of it, and lost it when there was occasion for it: or if he did not lose it by his fall, we have it still, and then there is no need of any supernatural, much less irresistible grace to repentance; so that our impotency as to the particular duty of repentance, cannot be charged upon us as our fault, not so much as upon the account of original sin.

But the want of this power is the consequent and just punishment of our first transgression. Be it so; but if this impotency still remain in all those to whom God doth not afford his irresistible grace, how comes the grace offer'd in the gospel to aggravate the impenitency of men, and increase their condemnation? For if it be no remedy against this impotency, how comes it to inflame the guilt of impenitency? Or how is it grace to offer mercy to those upon their repentance, who were out of a possibility of repenting; and yet to punish them more severely for their impenitency after this offer made to them, which they cannot accept without that grace which God is resolved not to afford them? If this be the case, the greatest favour had been to have had no such offer

offer made to them, and it had been happier for mankind, that “the grace of GOD had not appeared to all men,” but only to those who shall irresistibly be made partakers of the benefit of it.

Secondly, another doctrine grounded upon this metaphor of “a new creation,” is, that we are merely passive in the work of conversion, and regeneration, and contribute nothing to it; that GOD does all, and we do nothing at all; and this follows from the former, especially if we allow that metaphor as far as it will carry us. For as the first creation of things was by an irresistible act of divine power, so the things that were made, were only passive in their creation; and as they could make no resistance, so neither could they contribute any thing to their being what they are. And this doctrine is not only argued from the metaphor of “a new creation,” but from several other metaphors used in scripture to describe our natural state; as namely, “darkness, blindness,” and our being “dead in trespasses and sins;” from whence it is inferr’d, that we contribute no more to our renovation, than darkness doth to the introduction of light, than a blind man can do to the recovery of his sight, or a dead man to his own resurrection; but are wholly passive in this work. And to countenance this notion, they make great advantage of the character which is given in scripture of the most degenerate heathen, taking it for granted, that their condition is the true standard of a natural and unregenerate state; and to this purpose they insist particularly upon that description of the gentile idolaters, Eph. iv. 18, 19.

“ Having

“ 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; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lasciviousness; to work all uncleanness with greediness.” Which is indeed a description of men in their natural state, but not of all, but of such as by the worst sort of vicious practices of the grossest idolatry, and most abominable lewdness, were degenerated to the utmost, so that their condition seemed desperate, without a miraculous and an extraordinary grace of God, which was probably afforded to many of these. In like manner they argue the common condition of mankind, from the description which is given of the wickedness of men, before God brought the flood upon them, Gen. vi. 5. “ God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” This they make the character of all men in their natural state, whereas this is a description of an extraordinary degeneracy of men, signifying that the world was then extremely bad, and depraved to the highest degree; for God gives this as a reason why he was resolved to drown the world, and “ to destroy man from the face of the earth,” because “ their wickedness was grown to so great an height.” But if this were a description of the natural state of mankind, this could be no particular reason for bringing a flood upon the world at that time, there being the same reason for it, for fifteen hundred years before, and ever will be the same reason to the end of

the world, that is, that men are naturally corrupted and depraved. Surely they consider the scripture very superficially, that interpret it at this rate.

'Tis too true, that the nature of man is sadly corrupted and depraved; but not so bad as by vicious practices and habits it may be made; all men are not equally at the same distance from the grace of GOD; some are nearer to the kingdom of GOD than others, and less force and violence will serve "to rescue them from the power of Satan," and "to transplant them into the kingdom of CHRIST." The prevalency and dominion of sin makes an unregenerate state, as the prevalency of grace puts a man into a regenerate state. An unregenerate man is not necessarily as bad as is possible, no more than it is necessary to a regenerate state, that a man be perfectly good; so that it is a great mistake to argue the common condition of all mankind, from the descriptions that are given in the scripture of the worst of men; and therefore if it were granted that irresistible grace were necessary for the conversion of such, it will not follow that the same is necessary to all.

All unregenerate men are not equally devoid of a sense of GOD, and spiritual things; they have many convictions of what they ought to be and do, and under those convictions are very capable of persuasion, which dead men are not. The grace of GOD is necessary to the conversion of a sinner, but it is not necessary that he should be only passive in this work. Experience tells us the contrary, that we can do something, that we can co-operate with the grace of GOD; and the scripture tells us the same, and makes it an argument and encouragement to

us “ to work out our own salvation, ” because “ GOD works in us both to will and to do of his own goodness, ” Philip. ii. 12, 13. Besides that, it is the greatest and justest discouragement in the world to all endeavours of repentance and reformation, to tell men that they can do nothing in it. He that is sure of this, that he can do nothing in this work, is a fool if he make any attempt to become better, because he struggles with an impossibility; and if the work will be done at all, it will be done without him, and he neither can, nor ought to have any hand in it. But will any metaphor bear men out against so palpable an absurdity as this?

And yet after all, there is no force in these metaphors, to prove what they aim at by them. For if to be dead in sins signifies an utter impotency to goodness, then to be dead to sin must on the contrary signify an impossibility of sinning; for just as the unregenerate man is “ dead in sin, ” so he that is regenerate is said in scripture to be “ dead to sin : ” but yet the best of regenerate men, notwithstanding they are “ dead to sin, and alive to God, do offend in many “ things, ” and too frequently fall into sin. Why then should the metaphor be so strong on the one side, that a man who is said “ to be dead in sin, ” should not be able so much as to co-operate with the grace of GOD in the work of repentance and conversion?

In short, if this be true, that men in an unregenerate and unconverted state are perfectly dead, and have no more sense of spiritual things, than a dead man hath of natural objects, then all precepts and exhortations to repentance, and all promises and

threatnings to argue and persuade men thereto are vain, and to no purpose; and it would be every whit as proper and reasonable for us to preach in the church-yard, over the graves of dead men, as in the church to the unregenerate; because they can no more act and move towards their own recovery out of a state of sin and death, than the dead bodies can rise out of their graves.

But it is said, that the end of exhortations and promises is not to declare to men their power, but their duty. But if they be insensible, it is to as little purpose to declare to them their duty, as their power. Besides, it will be a hard thing to convince men that any thing is their duty, which at the same time we declare to them to be out of their power.

But this is pelagianism, to say that of ourselves we can repent and turn to God. And who says we can of ourselves do this besides the pelagians? We affirm the necessity of God's grace hereto, and withal the necessity of our co-operating with the grace of God. We say that without the powerful excitation and aid of God's grace, no man can repent and turn to God; but we say likewise, that God cannot be properly said to aid and assist those, who do nothing themselves.

But men can do no more than they do, and therefore are justly condemned. Not in the work of conversion sure; if they can do nothing at all. But they can do more by way of preparation towards it. Suppose they do all they can towards it, will this save them, or will God upon this irresistibly work their conversion? No, they say, notwithstanding

withstanding any preparatory work that we can do, conversion may not follow; how then does this mend the matter? SERM.
CVII.

But still they say the fault is in mens want of will, and not of power; “you will not come unto me, “that ye might have life.” But can they will to come? No, that they cannot neither. Why then it is still want of power that hinders them. The offer of life is a very gracious offer to them that are guilty, and liable to death, as we all are; but not if the condition be utterly impossible to us, tho’ the impossibility springs from our own fault, as I will plainly shew by a fair instance. A prince offers a pardon to a traitor fast lock’d in chains, if he will come to him and submit himself; but if he be still detained in chains, and the prince do not some way or other help him to his liberty, ’tis so far from being a favour to offer him a pardon upon these terms, that it is a cruel derision of his misery, to say to him “you will not come to me “that you may be pardon’d;” and this notwithstanding that his being cast into chains, was the effect of his own crime and fault; the application is obvious. I should now proceed to answer an objection or two, and then to give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to scripture, and the attributes and perfections of God; but this I shall reserve for another discourse.

S E R M O N C V I I I .

Of the nature of regeneration, and its necessity, in order to justification and salvation.

G A L A T. vi. 15.

For in CHRIST JESUS, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.

S E R M .
C V I I I .

THE point which I am upon from these words is, “ that according to the terms of “ the gospel, nothing will avail to our justification, but the real renovation of our hearts and “ lives.”

The third
sermon on
this text.

For the full explication of this, I propounded to shew,

First, what is implied in this expression of the “ new creature.”

Secondly, that this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God.

Thirdly, that it is highly reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification.

In speaking to the first of these, I have shewed, 1st, what this metaphor doth certainly import; and 2^{dly}, that it doth not import what some would extend it to, whereon to found such doctrines as these.

First, That as the creation was an irresistible act of the divine power, so is this new creation, or the conversion of a sinner.

Secondly,

Secondly, as creatures are merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we in our conversion, and regeneration.

Thirdly, that as the creation of the several kinds and ranks of creatures was effected in an instant, by the powerful word of God, saying, "let such and such things be," and immediately they were; so this new creation is in an instant, and admits of no degrees.

The first of these I have consider'd, and enter'd upon the second; namely, that as the creatures were merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we in our conversion and regeneration.

This I told you does plainly make void all the precepts and exhortations, and all the promises and threatnings of scripture, to argue and persuade men to repentance.

That which remains to be done upon this argument, is,

First, to answer an objection or two, which are commonly urged by the assertors of this doctrine, that we are merely passive in the work of conversion.

Secondly, to give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to scripture, and the attributes and perfections of God. For the

First, the objections are these three.

1. That if we be not merely passive in the work of regeneration and conversion, we ascribe the whole glory of this work to our selves, and not to God.

Or 2dly, we do however extenuate or lessen the grace of GOD, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours of our own towards this change.

3dly, they ask St. Paul's question, " who maketh thee to differ?" and think it impossible to be answer'd, if the efficacy of GOD's grace do depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. These are all the material objections I know; to every one of which I hope to give a very clear and sufficient answer.

1. Objection, if we be not merely passive in the work of regeneration and conversion, we ascribe the whole glory of this work to our selves, and not to GOD. But that I certainly know this objection is commonly made, and have seen it in very considerable authors, I could not believe that men of so good sense could make it. For this is to say, that if we do any thing in this work, tho' we acknowledge that what we do in it, we do by the assistance of GOD's grace, we ascribe it wholly to our selves, and rob GOD altogether of the glory of his grace; or in plainer terms, it is to say, that tho' we say GOD does never so much, and we but very little in this work, yet if we do not say that GOD does all, and we nothing at all, we take the whole work to our selves, and say GOD does nothing at all; which let any one that considers what we say judge, whether we say so or no.

The scripture which never robs GOD of the glory of his grace, does I'm sure ascribe our conversion and repentance, our regeneration and sanctification to several causes; to the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, to his ministers, to his word, and to our selves. To
the

in order to justification and salvation.

1765

SERM
CVIII.

the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, as the principal author, and efficient. Hence we are said “to be born
“of the SPIRIT, to be sanctified by the renew-
“ing of the HOLY GHOST.” To the ministers of
GOD, as the instruments of our conversion. Hence
they are said “to turn men to righteousness, to
“convert a sinner from the evil of his ways, to
“save souls from death, to save themselves, and
“them that hear them; to be our spiritual fathers,
“and to beget us in CHRIST.” To the word of
GOD, as the subordinate means and instruments of
our conversion. Hence we are said “to be be-
“gotten by the word of truth, to be sanctified by
“the truth.” And lastly, to our selves, as con-
curring some way or other to this work. Hence
we are said “to believe and repent, to turn from
“our evil ways, and to turn to the LORD, to
“cleanse and purify our selves.” Hence likewise are
those frequent commands in scripture, “to amend our
“ways and doings, to wash our hearts from wicked-
“ness, to repent and turn ourselves, and to make our-
“selves new hearts, and new spirits.” So that all these
causes, the SPIRIT of GOD, his ministers, his word,
and we our selves, do all some way or other concur
and contribute to this effect. GOD indeed is the princi-
pal, and hath so great an hand in this work from
beginning to end, that all the rest are nothing in
comparison, and we do well to ascribe to him the
glory of it, “that no flesh may glory in his
“right:” but nevertheless in strictness of speech suffi-
ciently warranted by scripture, the ministers of GOD,
and the word of GOD, and we our selves, do all
co-operate some way or other to our conversion, and

regeneration; and by ascribing to any of these such parts as they truly have in this work, GOD is not robbed of any part of the glory of his grace, much less of the whole. Much less is it the ascribing it all to our selves, whom we affirm to have the least part in it, nor worthy to be mentioned, in comparison of the riches of GOD's grace towards us. And yet unless we do something, what can be the meaning of "making our selves new hearts and new spirits." Is it only that we should be passive to the irresistible operations of GOD's grace? that is, that we should not hinder, what we can neither hinder nor promote; that we should so demean our selves, as of necessity we must whether we will or no. So then "to make our selves new hearts and new "spirits," is to do nothing at all towards the hindrance or furtherance of this work; and if this be the meaning of it, it is a precept and exhortation just as fit for stones, as for men; that is, very improper for either.

2. Objection. But however, we do extenuate and lessen the grace of GOD, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours on our part towards this change. For answer to this, three things deserve to be consider'd.

First, it is very well worthy our consideration, that they who make this objection, have the confidence to pretend that they do not diminish the grace of GOD, by confining it to a very small part of mankind in comparison; nay, they will needs face us down, that by this very thing they do very much exalt and magnify it, and that the grace of GOD is so much the greater, by how much the fewer they

they are that are partakers of it. But I hope they only mean that the grace is greater to themselves; (in which conceit there is commonly as much of envy as gratitude) but surely they cannot mean that the grace which is limited to a few, is greater in it self, and upon the whole matter, than that which is extended to a great many; it being a downright contradiction, to say that the grace of GOD is magnified by being confined. For at this rate of reasoning, the lesser it is, the greater it must be, and by undeniable consequence would be greatest of all, if it were none at all. So that it seems the grace of GOD may be extenuated in favour of our selves, but when we do so we must say we magnify it.

Secondly, but to come close to the objection; tho' it be true, that if GOD's grace in our conversion do not do all; it does not do so much as if it did all; yet this is really no injury or dishonour to the grace of GOD; and tho' in some sense it doth extenuate it, it doth not in truth and reality take off from the glory of it. In my opinion, the grace and favour of a prince is not the less in offering a pardon to a traitor, who puts forth his hand and gladly receives it, than if he forc'd it upon him whether he would or no. I am sure it is in the first case much fitter to give it, and he on whom it is conferr'd much better qualified to receive it. 'Tis no disparagement to a prince's favour, that it is bestow'd on one who is in some measure qualified to receive it. But be it more or less in one case than the other, this is certain, that in both cases the man owes his life to the great grace and goodness of his prince; and I cannot see how it lessens the grace, that the miserable

object of it, the guilty and condemned person, was either by his humble submission, or thankful acceptance of it, in some degree better qualified to receive such a favour, than an obstinate refuser of it.

Thirdly, which is the principal consideration of all, we must take great heed, that while we endeavour to make GOD to do all in the conversion of sinners, we do not by this means charge upon him the ruin and destruction of impenitent sinners, which I doubt we should do, if we make the reason of their impenitency and ruin their utter impotency and disability to repent; and we certainly make this the reason of their impenitency and ruin if there be no other difference but this between penitent and impenitent sinners, namely, that in the one GOD works repentance by an irresistible act of his power, so that he cannot but repent, and denies this grace to the other, without which he cannot possibly repent. But the scripture chargeth the destruction of men upon themselves, and lays their impenitency at their own door. “O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help,” Hosea xiii. 9. But where is the help, when the grace absolutely necessary to repentance is denied? and how is their destruction of themselves, if it is unavoidable, let them do what they can? Isa. v. 3, 4. GOD appeals to his people Israel, that nothing was wanting on his part, that was fit and necessary to be done, that they might bring forth the fruits of repentance, and better obedience. “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not
“ done

“ done in it? wherefore when I looked that it
“ should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild
“ grapes?” Is it true that GOD hath done all that
was necessary to have brought them to repentance?
then if irresistibile grace be necessary, he afforded
them that; but that was not afforded them, because
then they must unavoidably have repented, and there
had been no cause for this complaint: if he did
not afford it, but only the outward means of repen-
tance without the inward grace (as some say;) then
it is easy to judge why they did not repent; because
they could not; and there seems to be no cause ei-
ther of wonder, or complaint. Besides that it will
be hard to justify that saying, “ what could I have
“ done more to my vineyard, that I have not done
“ in it?” when it is acknowledg’d by the assertors
of this doctrine, that the main thing was not done,
and that without which all the rest signify’d nothing,
leaving them under the same impossibility of repen-
tance, as if nothing at all had been done to them.

But now upon our supposition, that sufficient grace
was afforded to them, which they wilfully neglected
to make use of, the reason and equity of this com-
plaint is evident, and GOD is acquitted, as having
done what was needful on his part, and the sinner
justly condemned, for not concurring with the grace
of GOD as he might have done; which shews that
we are not meerly passive in this work, but some-
thing is expected from us, after GOD hath done his
part, which if we neglect to do, “ our destruction
“ is of our selves.” Whereas the contrary supposi-
tion, upon pretence of glorifying GOD’s grace, by
making him to do all in the conversion of sinners,
indangers

indangers the honour of his justice, by laying the impenitency of sinners, and their ruin consequent upon it, at his door; which is to advance one attribute of GOD upon the ruin of another; whereas it is a fundamental principle of religion, to take care to reconcile the attributes and perfections of GOD to one another; for that is not a divine perfection, which contradicts any other perfection.

The 3d objection is grounded upon that question of St. Paul, 1 Cor. iv. 7. “Who maketh thee to differ,” which they think impossible to be answer’d, if the efficacy of God’s grace depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. For, say they, when GOD offers his grace to two persons for their repentance, if the true reason why the one repents, and the other remains impenitent, be this, that the one complieth with this grace of GOD, and yieldeth to it, the other resists and stands out against it; then it is not the grace of GOD which makes the difference, for that is equal to both, but something in themselves, and so it is not GOD that makes them to differ, but they themselves.

But this question is impertinent to this case. The apostle speaks it concerning spiritual gifts, upon account of which, they factiously admir’d some of the apostles above others, and concerning them the question is very proper, “who maketh thee to differ?” Miraculous gifts were so order’d by GOD, that men were meerly passive in the receiving of them, and contributed nothing to the obtaining of them; and therefore if one had greater gifts than another, it was meerly the pleasure of GOD that made the difference. But the case is not the same

in the graces of GOD'S SPIRIT, towards the obtaining and improving whereof, we our selves may contribute something; our SAVIOUR having assur'd us, that "to him that hath, shall be given." And here the question is not proper, nor is it true "that the grace of GOD makes all the difference." It is indeed the foundation of all the good that is in us: but our different improvement makes different attainments in grace and goodness. Among those to whom the talents were intrusted, what made the difference between the man "who wrapt his talent in the napkin, and buried it," and those "who gained double by theirs," but that the one improv'd the grace conferr'd on him, the other neglected it, and this without any manner of reflexion upon, or diminution of the grace of GOD, or any danger from St. Paul's question; "who maketh thee to differ?" Put the case a pardon is offered to two malefactors, the one accepts, the other refuses it; "their own choice makes the difference between them;" but he that is saved is nevertheless beholden to the king's pardon for his life, and it were a senseless ingratitude in him, because he accepts the pardon, when the other refuseth it, to say that he did not owe his life to the grace and favour of his prince, but might thank himself for it; whereas that he was in a capacity to accept a pardon, was wholly due to the clemency of his prince, who offer'd it to him when he no wise deserved it. In this case the thing plainly appears as it is, by which every man may see, that it is against common sense to pretend that the grace of GOD is destroyed, if there be any compliance on our part with it; that it is no
grace,

grace, if it be not forc'd upon us, and we be not merely passive in the reception of it. I proceed in the

Second place, to give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to the doctrine of the holy scriptures, and the essential attributes and perfections of God. In order to which, I will give you a short view of the several opinions concerning this matter. And there are two extreme, and two middle opinions, concerning the operation of God's grace in the conversion of a sinner.

The first of the extreme opinions is that which all this while I have been arguing against, namely, that all that are converted and regenerated, are wrought upon in an irresistible manner, and are merely passive in it; and that those who are not thus wrought upon, their repentance and conversion is impossible. What the inconveniencies of this opinion are, I have shewed at large.

The other extreme opinion is, that none are thus wrought upon, because it would be a violence and injury to man's natural liberty; but that sufficient grace is offered to all, one time or other, who live under the gospel, which they may comply with or resist, and consequently if they be not brought to repentance, their impenitency and ruin is the effect of their own choice, and God is "free from the blood of all men." But this opinion, tho' infinitely more reasonable than the other, seems not to have any necessary foundation either in scripture or reason. There are some instances in scripture of the conversion of men after a very violent, if not an irresistible manner, which seems to be attributed to

a particular predestination of GOD ; as that of St. Paul, SERM. CVIII. who says of himself, Gal. i. 15. “ that he was separated from his mother’s womb to that work to which he was called ;” and the manner of his conversion was answerable to such a predestination ; and there is nothing in reason against this, since it is no injury to any man to be made good and happy against his will.

The two middle opinions are these.

First, that irresistible grace is afforded to all the elect, and sufficient grace to all others who live under the gospel (for of those only we speak, the case of others being peculiar, and belonging to the extraordinary mercy of GOD) but then they say, that none of those to whom this sufficient grace is afforded shall effectually comply with it and be saved. This opinion seems more moderate, and hath this advantage in it, that it acquits the justice of GOD in the condemnation of those, who having sufficient grace afforded to them, did yet notwithstanding continue impenitent ; but yet it hath two great inconveniencies in it.

First, that this supposition is to no purpose, as to any real effect for the salvation of men, because not one person more is saved, notwithstanding this universal sufficient grace, which they say is afforded to all ; for they take it for granted it is never effectual, and then it seems very unreasonable to suppose, that a means sufficient to its end should universally prove ineffectual ; nay, on the contrary, it is next to a demonstration against the sufficiency of a means if perpetually and in all instances it fails of its end. This would tempt any man to think,

that surely there is some defect in it, or something that hinders the efficacy of it; if being perpetually and generally afforded, it doth perpetually and universally miscarry, without so much as one instance among so many millions to the contrary. So that this opinion seems rather to be contrived for a colour and shelter against some absurdity, which men know not how to avoid otherwise, than to serve any good purpose, or to be embraced for the truth and probability of it.

The other middle opinion is, that some are converted in an irresistible manner, when God pleaseth, and whom he designs to be extraordinary examples, and instruments for the good of others, and that sufficient grace is afforded to others, which is effectual to the salvation of many, and rejected by a great many. And this avoids all the inconveniency of the other opinion, and is evidently most agreeable both to the tenor of scripture and to the best notions which men have concerning the attributes and perfections of God, and gives greatest encouragement to the endeavours of men. It agrees very well with the solemn declarations of scripture, that God is not wanting on his part to afford men sufficient means to bring them to repentance; that he “desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;” that “he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;” that “he would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;” that “men’s destruction is of themselves.” And this makes all the exhortations and motives of scripture to re-
pentance

penitance to be of some force and significancy, and gives encouragement to the resolutions and endeavours of men to become better. This clearly acquits the justice of God in the condemnation of impenitent sinners, and fixeth the reason of their ruin upon their own choice. This perfectly reconciles the operation and assistance of God's grace in our conversion and regeneration, in our sanctification and perseverance in a good course, with the concurrence of our own endeavours, and makes those plain texts of scripture have some sense and significancy in them; "work out your own salvation; repent and turn yourselves from all your evil ways; make ye new hearts and new spirits." These are more than a thousand metaphors to convince a man that we may and ought to do something towards our repentance and conversion. And if any man be sure that we neither do nor can do any thing in this work, then I am sure that these texts signify nothing. Finally, those texts which speak most clearly of the necessity of the divine grace and assistance, to our doing of any thing that is spiritually good, do suppose something to be done on our part. That of our SAVIOUR, "without me ye can do nothing," implies that with his grace and assistance we can. That of St. Paul, "I am able to do all things through CHRIST strengthening me," implies, that what we do by the strength of CHRIST is truly our own act; "I am able to do all things." And this does not in the least prejudice nor obscure the glory of God's grace. St. Paul it seems knew very well how to reconcile these two, and to give the grace of God

its due, without rejecting all concurrence of our own industry and endeavour, 1 Cor. xv. 10. "But
 " by the grace of GOD I am what I am; and his
 " grace which was bestowed upon me was not
 " in vain;" not because it was irresistible, and he merely passive in the reception of it; but because he did concur and co-operate with it. So he tells us, "his grace that was bestowed upon me was
 " not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly
 " than they all; yet not I, but the grace of GOD
 " which was with me." So that our concurrence and endeavour in the doing of any thing that is good, does not derogate from the grace of GOD, provided that we ascribe the good which we do to the assistance of divine grace, to which it is incomparably more due, than to our own activity and endeavour. And so St. Paul does, "I labour'd
 " abundantly; yet not I, but the grace of GOD,
 " which was with me."

So that the glory of GOD's grace may be advanced to its due pitch, without asserting that we are merely passive to the operations of it. GOD's grace may be abundantly bestowed upon us, and yet we may "labour abundantly;" "GOD may work in
 " us to will and to do," and yet "we may work
 " out our own salvation." I have done with the second doctrine grounded upon this metaphor of
 "a new creature."

[1777]

S E R M O N C I X.

Of the nature of regeneration, and its necessity, in order to justification and salvation.

G A L A T. vi. 15.

For in CHRIST JESUS, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.

IN discoursing on these words, that which I was S E R M. CIX. last upon was to shew, that this metaphor of The fourth sermon on this text. “ a new creature ” doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this, and other like metaphors, viz. such doctrines as these three,

First, that as the creation was by an irresistible act of the divine power, so is this new creation, or the conversion of a sinner.

Secondly, that as creatures were merely passive in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we to our conversion and regeneration.

Thirdly, that as the creation was in an instant, only by the powerful word of GOD, so this new creation is in an instant, and admits of no degrees. The two first of these I have spoken to, and shewed, that as they had no necessary foundation in this and the like metaphors of scripture, so they are contrary to
reason

reason and experience, and the plain and constant tenor of scripture, which is the rule and measure of CHRIST'S doctrine. I proceed now to consider the

Third doctrine, which is grounded upon this metaphor, namely, that as the creation of the several ranks and orders of creatures was in an instant, and effected by the powerful word of GOD, saying, "let such and such things be," and immediately they were; so this new creation is in an instant, and admits of no steps and degrees. And this doctrine is nothing else but a farther pursuit of the metaphor; and admitting the two former doctrines to be true, and well-grounded upon this metaphor, this third doctrine follows well enough from them; for it is agreeable enough, that that which is effected by an irresistible act of omnipotence, without any concurrence or operation on our part, should be done in an instant and all at once. Not that this is necessary, but that it is reasonable; for why should omnipotence use delays, and take time and proceed by degrees in the doing of that, which with the same ease it can do at once, and in an instant; especially considering how well this suits with the other metaphors of scripture, as well as with this of "a new creation," viz. the metaphor of "regeneration, and resurrection." A child is born at once, and the dead shall be raised "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

But notwithstanding all this plausible appearance and conspiracy of metaphors, I shall shew that this doctrine of the conversion and regeneration of a sinner being effected in an instant, and all at once, is

not

not well grounded either upon scripture, or experience. Not but that GOD can do so if he pleaseth, and work this change in some much sooner and quicker than in others; but there is nothing either in scripture or experience to persuade us that this is the usual, much less the constant and unalterable method of GOD's grace in the conversion of a sinner, to bring it about in an instant, without any sensible steps and degrees.

But for the full clearing of this matter, I shall proceed by these steps.

First, I shall shew upon what mistaken grounds and principles this doctrine relies; besides the metaphors already mention'd, which I have shewn to be of no force to prove the thing.

Secondly, I shall plainly shew what regeneration is; by which it will appear, that it is not necessarily effected in an instant, and at once, but admits of degrees.

Thirdly, that it is evidently so in experience of the ordinary method of GOD's grace, both in those who are regenerated by a pious and religious education, and in those who are reclaimed from a vicious course of life.

Fourthly, that all this is very consonant and agreeable to what the scripture plainly and constantly declares concerning it.

First, I shall discover several mistakes upon which this doctrine is grounded, besides the metaphors already mention'd, and which I have shewn to be of no force to prove the thing, viz. that regeneration is in an instant, and admits of no degrees. As

1. That regeneration and sanctification are not only different expressions, but do signify two things really different. But this is a gross mistake; for regeneration and sanctification are but different expressions of the self same thing; for regeneration is a metaphor which the scripture useth to express our translation and change from one state to another, from a state of sin and wickedness, to a state of grace and holiness, as if we were born over again, and were the children of another father, and from being the children of the devil, did become the children of GOD; and sanctification is our being made holy, our being purified and cleansed from sin and impurity. And hence it is that regeneration and sanctification are attributed to the same causes, principal, and instrumental, to the SPIRIT of GOD, and to the word of GOD; we are said “to be born of the “SPIRIT,” and to be “sanctified by the HOLY “GHOST; to be begotten of the word of truth, and “to be sanctified by the truth,” which is the word of GOD. So that the scripture speaks of them as the same thing; and they must needs be so; for if sanctification be the making of us holy, and regeneration maketh us holy; then regeneration is sanctification.

2. It is said, that regeneration only signifies our first entrance into this state, and sanctification our progress and continuance in it. But this likewise is a great mistake. For tho’ it be true, that regeneration doth signify our first entrance into this state, yet it is not true, that it only signifies that; for it is used likewise in scripture to signify our continuance in that state; for christians are said to be the children of GOD, and consequently in a regenerate

in order to justification and salvation.

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rate state, not only in the instant of this change, S
but during their continuance in it. Besides that our
first change is as well call'd our sanctification, as our
progress and continuance in a state of holiness. So
that neither in this is there any difference between
regeneration and sanctification. They do both of
them signify both our first entrance into an holy
state, and our continuance and progress in it; tho'
regeneration do more frequently denote the making
of this change, and our first entrance into it.

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3. It is said that one of the main differences between regeneration and sanctification is this, that regeneration is incapable of degrees, and all that are regenerate are equally so, and one regenerate person is not more or less regenerate than another; whereas sanctification is a gradual progress from one degree of holiness to another, and of them that are truly sanctified and holy, one may be more sanctified and more holy than another. But this likewise is a meer fancy and imagination, without any real ground. For as an unregenerate state does plainly admit of degrees, so likewise doth the regenerate, and for the same reason. That an unregenerate state admits of degrees, is evident, in that some unregenerate persons are more wicked than others, and thereby more "the children of wrath, and the devil," than others, which are the scripture expressions concerning the degrees of mens wickedness and impiety. In like manner, they that are more holy, and more like GOD, are more the children of GOD; and to be more a child of GOD, is surely to be more regenerate, that is, more renewed after the image of GOD, which

confists “in righteousness, and true holiness.” So that it is a meer precarious assertion, and evidently false to affirm, that regeneration doth not admit of degrees, and that one is not more regenerate than another.

4thly, and lastly, they ground this conceit upon the doctrine of the schools, which teach, that in regeneration and conversion all the habits of grace are infused, *simul & semel*, “together, and at once.” I confess I have no regard, much less a veneration for the doctrine of the schools, where it differs from that of the holy scriptures, which say not one word of infused habits, which yet are much talk’d of in divinity; and to speak the truth, these words serve only to obscure the thing. For to say that in conversion the habits of all graces and virtues are infused together and at once, is to say, that in an instant men that were vicious before in several kinds, are by an omnipotent act of God’s grace, and by a new principle infused into them, endued with the habits of the contrary graces and virtues, and are as chaste, and temperate, and just, and meek, and humble, as if by the frequent practice of these virtues they had become so. That this may be, and sometimes is, I am so far from denying, that I believe it to be so. Some men, by an extraordinary power of God’s grace upon their hearts, are suddenly changed, and strangely reclaimed from a very wicked and vicious, to a very religious and virtuous course of life, and that which others attain to by slower degrees, and great conflicts with themselves, before they can gain the up-
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per hand of their lusts, these arrive at all on a sudden, by a mighty resolution wrought in them by the power of GOD's grace, and as it were a new bias and inclination put upon their souls, equal to an habit gain'd by long use and custom. This GOD sometimes does, and when he does this, it may in some sense be call'd "the infusion of the habits of grace and virtue together, and at once;" because the man is hereby endowed with a principle of equal force and power with habits that are acquir'd by long use and practice. A strong and vigorous faith is the principle and root of all graces and virtues, and may have such a powerful influence upon the resolutions of our minds, and the government of our actions, that from this principle all graces and virtues may spring and grow up by degrees into habits; but then this principle is not formally but virtually, in the power and efficacy of it; "the infusion of the habits of grace and virtue;" and even in those persons in whom this change is so suddenly, and as it were at once, I doubt not but that the habits of several graces and virtues are afterwards attained by the frequent practice of them, in the virtue of this powerful principle of the faith of the gospel, as I shall shew in the progress of this discourse. And this I doubt not was very frequent and visible in many of the first converts to christianity; especially of those, who from the abominable idolatry and impiety of heathenism were gained to the christian religion. The SPIRIT of GOD did then work very miraculously, as well in the cures of spiritual as

of bodily diseases. But then to make this the rule and standard of GOD's ordinary proceedings in the conversion and regeneration of men, is equally unreasonable, as still to expect miracles for the cure of diseases; and 'tis certain in experience, that this is not GOD's ordinary method in the conversion of sinners, as I shall fully shew by and by.

Secondly, I shall shew what regeneration is, by which it will plainly appear, that there is no necessity that it should be effected in an instant, and at once, but that it will admit of degrees. I do not deny that it may be in an instant, and at once. The power of GOD is able to do this, and sometimes does it very thoroughly, and very suddenly. But the question is, whether there be a necessity it should be so, and always be so. Now regeneration is the change of a man's state, from a state of sin to a state of holiness; which because it is an entrance upon a new kind or course of life, it is fully resembled to regeneration, or a new birth; to a new creation, the man being as it were quite chang'd or made over again, so as not to be, as to the main purpose and design of his life, the same man he was before. This is a plain sensible account of the thing, which every one may easily understand. Now there is nothing in reason, why a man may not gradually be changed and arrive at this state by degrees; as well as after this change is made, and he arrived at this state of a regenerate man, he may by degrees grow and improve in it. But the latter no man doubts of, but that a man that is in a state of grace, may grow and improve

in grace; and there is as little reason to question why a man may not come to this state by degrees, as well as leap into it at once.

All the difficulty I know of in this matter, is a meer nicety, that there is an instant; in which every thing begins, and therefore regeneration is in an instant; so that the instant before the man arrived at this state, it could not be said that he was regenerate; and the instant after he is in this state, it cannot be denied that he is so. But this is idle subtilty, just as if a man should prove that an house was built in an instant, because it could not be said to be built, 'till the instant it was finish'd; tho' for all this nothing is more certain than that it was built by degrees. Or, suppose the time of arriving at man's estate be at one and twenty, does it from hence follow, that a man does not grow to be a man by degrees, but is made a man in an instant; because just before one and twenty he was not at man's estate, and just then he was? not but that GOD, if he please, can make a man in an instant, as he did Adam; but it is not necessary from this example, that all men should be made so, much less does it follow from this vain subtilty. This is just the case. All the while the man is tending towards a regenerate state, and is struggling with his lusts, 'till by the power of GOD's grace, and his own resolution, he get the victory; all the while he is under the sense and conviction of his sinful and miserable state, and sorrowing for the folly of his past life, and coming to an effectual purpose and resolution of changing his course; and it may be several times thrown back by the temptations of the devil, and
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the power of evil habits, and the weakness and instability of his own purpose; 'till at last, by the grace of God following and assisting him, he comes to a firm resolution of a better life, which resolution governs him for the future; I say all this while, which in some persons is longer, in other shorter, according to the power of evil habits, and the different degrees of God's grace afforded to men; all this time the work of regeneration is going on; and tho' a man cannot be said to be in a regenerate state, 'till that very instant that the principle of grace and his good resolution have got the upper hand of his lusts, yet it is certain for all this, that the work of regeneration was not effected in an instant. This is plainly and truly the case, as I shall shew in the

Third particular I propounded, namely, that it is evident from experience of the ordinary methods of God's grace, both in those who are regenerated by a pious and religious education, and those who are reclaimed from a vicious course of life.

The first sort, namely those who are brought to goodness by a religious and virtuous education; these (at least, so far as my observation reacheth) make up a very considerable part of the number of the regenerate, that is, of good men. And tho' it be certain, considering the universal corruption and degeneracy of humane nature, that there is a real change made in them, by the operation of God's grace upon their minds, yet it is as certain in experience, that this change is made in very many, by very silent and insensible degrees, 'till at length
the

the feeds of religion, which were planted in them by a good education, do visibly prevail over all the evil inclinations of corrupt nature, so as to sway and govern the actions of their lives; and when the principles of grace and goodness do apparently prevail, we may conclude them to be in a regenerate state, tho' perhaps very few of these can give any account of the particular time and occasion of this change. For things may be seen in their effect, which were never very sensible in their cause. And it is very reasonable, that such persons who never lived in any evil course, should escape those pangs and terrors which unavoidably happen unto others, from a course of actual sin, and the guilt of a wicked life; and if there be any such persons as I have described, who are in this gradual and insensible manner regenerated, and made good, this is a demonstration, that there is no necessity that this change should be in an instant, it being so frequently found to be otherwise in experience.

And as for others, who are visibly reclaimed from a notorious wicked course, in these we likewise frequently see this change gradually made, by strong impressions made upon their minds, most frequently by the word of God; sometimes by his providence, whereby they are convinc'd of the evil and danger of their course, and awakened to consideration, and melted into sorrow and repentance, and perhaps exercis'd with great terrors of conscience, till at length by the grace of God, they come to a fixt purpose and resolution of forsaking their sins, and turning to God; and after

after many strugglings and conflicts with their lusts, and the strong bias of evil habits, this resolution assisted by the grace of GOD, doth effectually prevail, and make a real change both in the temper of their minds, and the course of their lives; and when this is done, and not before, they are said to be regenerate. But all the while this was a doing, the new man was forming, and the work of regeneration was going on; and it was perhaps a very considerable time from the first beginning of it, till it came to a fixt and settled state. And this I doubt not in experience of most persons who are reclaim'd from a vicious course of life, is found to be the usual and ordinary method of GOD's grace in their conversion. And if so, it is in vain to pretend that a thing is done in an instant, which by so manifold experience is found to take up a great deal of time, and to be effected by degrees.

And whereas some men are pleased to call all this the preparatory work to regeneration, but not the regeneration it self, this is an idle contention about words. For if these preparations be a degree of goodness, and a gradual tendency towards it, then the work is begun by them, and during the continuance of them, is all the while a doing; and tho' it be hard to fix the point or instant when a man just arrives at this state, and not before, yet it is very sensible when a man is in it, and this change when it is really made, will soon discover itself by plain and sensible effects.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, and lastly, all this is very agreeable to the plain and constant tenor of scripture, Isa. i. 16. where the prophet exhorts to this change, he speaks of it as a gradual thing, “wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well;” that is, break off evil and vicious habits, and gain the contrary habits of virtue and goodness by the exercise of it. The scripture speaks of some, as farther from a state of grace than others, Jer. xiii. 23. “Can the ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil;” plainly declaring the great difficulty, equal almost to a natural impossibility, of reclaiming those to goodness, who have been long habituated to an evil course. And the scripture speaks of some as nearer to a state of grace than others. Our SAVIOUR tells the young man in the gospel, who said “he had kept the commands of GOD from his youth;” that “he was not far from the kingdom of GOD.” But now if by an irresistible act of GOD’S power, this change be made in an instant, and cannot otherwise be made, how is one man nearer to a state of grace, or farther from it than another? if all that are made good, must be made so in an instant or not at all, then no man is nearer being made good than another; for if he were nearer to it, he might sooner be made so; but that cannot be, if all must be made good in an instant; for sooner than that no man can be made so. If the similitude of our “being dead in sins and trespasses” be strictly taken, no man is

nearer a resurrection to a new life than another; as he that died but a week ago, is as far from being raised to life again, as he that died a thousand years ago; the resurrection of both requires an omnipotent act, and to that both are equally easy.

The two parables of our SAVIOUR, Matth. xiii. 31, 33. are by many interpreters understood of the gradual operation of grace upon the hearts of men. "That wherein the kingdom of heaven is likened to a grain of mustard-seed, which being sown was the least of all seeds," but by degrees "grew up to be the greatest of herbs;" and "to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened:" intimating the progress of GOD's grace, which by degrees diffuseth it self over the whole temper of a man's mind, into all the actions of his life. To be sure the parable of "the seed which fell upon good ground," does represent the efficacy of the word of GOD, accompanied by his grace upon the minds of men, and that is said "to spring up and increase, and to bring forth fruit with patience;" which surely does express to us the gradual operation of GOD's word and grace in the renovation and change of a man's heart and life.

The new testament indeed speaks of the sudden change of many upon the first preaching of the gospel, which I have told you before it is not a standard of the ordinary method of GOD's grace, the not considering of which, hath been a great cause of all the mistakes in this matter. 'Tis true, those which were thus converted to the belief of the gospel, their
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faith was a virtual principle of all grace and virtue, tho' not formally the habit of every particular grace. St. Paul himself, who was a prime instance of this kind, speaks as if he acquir'd the grace of contentment by great consideration, and diligent care of himself in several conditions; not as if the habit of this grace had been infused into him at once, Philip. iv. 11, 12. " I have learn'd in whatsoever state I am, " therewith to be content. I know both how to be " abased, and I know how to abound; every where " and in all things I am instructed, both to be full, " and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer " need." And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to consider, namely, the true and just importance of this metaphor of " the new " creation." The two particulars which remain, I shall by GOD's assistance finish in my next discourse.

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S E R M O N CX.

Of the nature of regeneration, and its necessity, in order to justification and salvation.

G A L A T. vi. 15.

For in CHRIST JESUS, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.

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THE observation I am still upon from these words is this, viz. that in the christian religion nothing will avail to our justification, but the renovation of our hearts and lives, expressed here by “a new creature.” In treating of which, I propos’d the doing of three things.

First, to shew the true import of this metaphor of “a new creature.”

Secondly, to shew that this is the great condition of our justification; and,

Thirdly, that it is highly reasonable that it should be so.

In treating of the first of these particulars, I have considered some doctrines as founded upon this metaphor, which I have shewn at large not only to have no foundation in scripture, or reason, or experience; but also to be very unreasonable in themselves, and contrary to the plain and constant tenor of scripture, and to the ordinary method of God’s grace in

The fifth
sermon on
this text.

in the regeneration of men, whether by a religious and virtuous education, or in those who are reclaim'd from a notorious wicked course of life. And that I have so long insisted upon this argument, and handled it in a more contentious way than is usual with me, did not proceed from any love to controversy, which I am less fond of every day than other; but from a great desire to put an end to these controversies, and quarrellings in the dark, by bringing them to a clear state and plain issue, and likewise to undeceive good men concerning some current notions and doctrines, which I do really believe to be dishonourable to God, and contrary to the plain declarations of scripture, and a cause of great perplexity and discomfort to the minds of men, and a real discouragement to the resolutions and endeavours of becoming better. Upon which considerations I was strongly urgent to search these doctrines to the bottom, and to contribute what in me lay, to the rescuing of good men from the disquiet and entanglement of them.

I will conclude this matter with a few cautions, not unworthy to be remember'd by us, that we would be careful so to ascribe all good to God; that we be sure we ascribe nothing to him that is evil, or any ways unworthy of him; that we do not make him the sole author of our salvation, in such a way, as will unavoidably charge upon him the final impenitency and ruin of a great part of mankind; that we do not so magnify the grace of God, as to make his precepts and exhortations signify

signify nothing; such as these, “make ye new hearts, and new spirits: strive to enter in at the strait gate;” where, if by the strait gate be meant the difficulty of our first entrance upon a religious course, that is of our conversion and regeneration, I cannot imagine how it is possible to reconcile our being merely passive in this work, and doing nothing at all in it, with our SAVIOUR’S precept of “striving to enter in at the strait gate;” unless to be very active, and to be merely passive about the same thing be all one, and an earnest contention and endeavour be the same thing with doing nothing. Again, that we do not make the utmost degeneracy and depravation which men ever arrived at by the greatest abuse of themselves, and the most vile and wicked practices, the standard of an unregenerate state, and of the common condition of all men by nature. And lastly, that we do not make some particular instances in scripture, of the strange and sudden conversion of some persons (as namely, of St. Paul and the jailor in the Acts) the common rule and measure of every man’s conversion; so that unless a man be as it were struck down by a light and power from heaven, and taken with a fit of trembling, and frightened almost out of his wits, or find in himself something equal to this, he can have no assurance of his conversion; whereas a much surer judgment may be made of the sincerity of a man’s conversion, by the real effects of this change, than by the manner of it. This our SAVIOUR hath taught us, by that apt resemblance of the operation of GOD’S

SPIRIT to “the blowing of the wind,” of the original cause whereof, and of the reason of its ceasing or continuance, and why it blows stronger or gentler, this way or that way, we are altogether ignorant; but that it is, we are sensible from the sound of it, John iii. 8. “The wind bloweth where “it listeth, and thou hearest the sound of it, but “canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it “goeth: so is every one that is born of the SPI- “RIT.” The effects of GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT in the regeneration of men are sensible, tho’ the manner and degrees of his operation upon the souls of men are so various, that we can give no account of them; by which, one would think our SAVIOUR had sufficiently caution’d us, not to reduce the operations of GOD’S grace and HOLY SPIRIT in the regeneration of men, to any certain rule or standard, but chiefly to regard the sensible effects of this secret work upon the hearts and lives of men.

And after all, it is in vain to contend by any arguments against clear and certain experience. If we plainly see that many are insensibly changed, and made good by pious education, “in the nurture “and admonition of the LORD,” and that some who have long lived in a profane neglect and contempt of religion, are by the secret power of GOD’S word and HOLY SPIRIT, upon calm consideration, without any great terrors and amazement, visibly changed and brought to a better mind and course; it is in vain in these cases to pretend that this change is not real, because the manner of it is not answerable to some

some instances which are recorded in scripture, or which we have observ'd in our experience, and because these persons cannot give such an account of the time and manner of their conversion, as is agreeable to these instances; which is just as if I should meet a man beyond sea, whom I had known in England, and would not believe that he had cross'd the seas, because he said he had a smooth and easy passage, and was wafted over by a gentle wind, and could tell no stories of storms and tempests.

And thus I have fully and faithfully endeavour'd to open to you the just importance of this phrase or expression in the text, of "the new creature," or "the new creation." I proceed to the

Second particular I propounded, namely, that the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is according to the terms of the gospel, and the christian religion, the great condition of our justification and acceptance with GOD, and that this is the same in sense and substance with those phrases in the parallel texts to this, of "faith perfected by charity," and of "keeping the commandments of GOD."

That according to the terms of the gospel, the great condition of our justification and acceptance with GOD, is the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is plain, not only from this text, which affirms, that in the christian religion nothing will avail us but "the new creature;" but likewise from many other clear texts of scripture; and this, whether by justification be meant our first justification upon our faith and repentance, or our continuance in this state, or our final justification by our solemn

solemn acquital and absolution at the great day, which in scripture is called "salvation, and eternal life." SERM.
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That this is the condition of our first justification, that is, of the forgiveness of our sins, and our being received into the grace and favour of God, is plain from all those texts, where this change is expressed by our "repentance and conversion," by our "regeneration and renovation," by our purification and sanctification," or by any other terms of the like importance. For under every one of these notions, this change is made the condition of the forgiveness of our sins, and acceptance to the favour of God.

Under the notion of "repentance and conversion," Acts ii. 38. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of JESUS CHRIST, for the remission of sins." Acts iii. 19. "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Upon the same account, the penitent acknowledgment of our sins, which is an essential part of repentance, is made a condition of the forgiveness of them, 1 John i. 9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Under the notion of "regeneration and renovation," 2 Cor. v. 17. "If any man be in CHRIST," that is, become a true christian, which is all one with being in a justified state; "he is a new creature; old things are past away, behold all things are become new." Tit. iii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. where the apostle declares at large, what change is requir'd to

put us into a justified state, and to entitle us to the inheritance of eternal life. “ For we our selves
 “ were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived,
 “ serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in ma-
 “ lice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.
 “ But after that the kindness and love of GOD our
 “ SAVIOUR towards man appeared, not by works of
 “ righteousness which we have done ;” that is, not
 for any precedent righteousness of ours, for we were
 great sinners, “ but according to his mercy he fa-
 “ ved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the
 “ renewing of the HOLY GHOST, which he shed
 “ on us abundantly through JESUS CHRIST our
 “ SAVIOUR, that being justified by his grace, we
 “ should be made heirs according to the hope of
 “ eternal life.” So that the change of our former
 temper, and conversion, and regeneration, and
 “ the renewing of the HOLY GHOST,” is antec-
 edently necessary to our justification, that is, to the
 pardon of our sins, and our restitution to the fa-
 vour of GOD, and the hope of eternal life. So
 likewise under the notion of “ purification and
 “ sanctification,” 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. where the
 apostle enumerates several sins and vices ; which
 will certainly exclude men from the favour and
 kingdom of GOD, from which we must be cleansed,
 before we can be justified or saved. “ Know ye
 “ not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the
 “ kingdom of GOD ? be not deceived ; neither for-
 “ nicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves,
 “ nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor
 “ extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of GOD.

And

“ And such were some of you : but ye are washed, SE R.M.
“ but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the CK.
“ name of the **LORD JESUS**, and by the **SPIRIT** of
“ our **GOD.**” 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. where the apostle
likewise makes our purification a condition of our
being received into the favour of **GOD**, and reckon'd
into the number of his children. “ Touch not
“ the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and
“ will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my
“ sons and daughters, saith the **LORD** almighty.”
And that by “ not touching the unclean thing,”
is here certainly meant our sanctification and puri-
fication from sin, is evident from what immedi-
ately follows in the beginning of the next chapter ;
“ having therefore these promises, dearly beloved !
“ let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the
“ flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of
“ **GOD** ;” that is, having this encouragement, that
upon this condition we shall be received to the fa-
vour of **GOD**, let us purify our selves, that we may
be capable of this great blessing.

And our continuance in this state of grace and
favour with **GOD**, depends upon our perseverance in
holiness ; for “ if any man draw back, my soul shall
“ have no pleasure in him.”

And lastly, this is also the condition of our final
justification, and absolution by the sentence of the
great day, Matth. v. 8. “ Blessed are the pure in
“ heart ; for they shall see **GOD.**” John iii. 3.
“ Except a man be born again he cannot see the
“ kingdom of **GOD.**” Heb. xii. 14. “ Follow
“ holiness, without which, no man shall see the

“ LORD.” I John iii. 3. The apostle there speaking of the blessed sight and enjoyment of GOD, tells us what we must do, if ever we hope to be partakers of it; “ every man that hath this hope “ in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

And this condition here mentioned in the text, of our being “ new creatures,” is the same in sense and substance with those expressions which we find in the two parallel texts to this, where “ faith “ which is perfected by charity, and keeping the “ commandments of GOD,” are made the condition of our justification and acceptance with GOD. Gal. v. 6. “ In CHRIST JESUS neither circumci- “ sion availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; “ but faith, which is consummate, or made perfect “ by charity;” and I Cor. vii. 19. “ Circumci- “ sion is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; “ but the keeping of the commadments of GOD.” It is evident that the design and meaning of these three texts is the same, and therefore these three expressions of “ the new creature,” and of “ faith “ perfected by charity, and of “ keeping the com- “ mandments of GOD,” do certainly signify the same thing. That “ the new creature” signifies the change of our state, from a state of disobedience and sin, to a state of obedience and holiness of life, I have shewn at large; and the apostle explaining this “ new creation;” most expressly tells us, Eph. ii. 10. “ We are his workmanship, “ created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works, “ which GOD hath before ordained, that we should “ walk in them;” and Coloss. iii. 10, 12, 13

14. where the apostle tells them, that they ought to give testimony of their renovation, and having put on “the new man,” by all the fruits of obedience and goodness; “ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. Put on therefore as the elect of GOD, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection.” And the apostle St. Peter tells us, that our regeneration, which he calls “sanctification of the SPIRIT, is unto obedience,” 1 Pet. i. 2. So that our renovation consisteth in the principle and practice of obedience, and a good life; and what is this but “faith perfected by charity?” and charity the apostle tells us “is the fulfilling of the law;” and what is “the fulfilling of the law,” but “keeping the commandments of GOD?” And “keeping the commandments of GOD,” or at least a sincere resolution of obedience, when there is not time and opportunity for the trial of it, is in scripture as expressly made a condition both of our present and final justification and acceptance with GOD, as faith is, and in truth is the same with a living and operative faith, and a faith that is consummate, and “made perfect by charity.” Acts x. 34, 35. “Of a truth I perceive (saith St. Peter) that GOD is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted

SERM. CX. *“cepted with him;”* which speech does as plainly, as words can do any thing, declare to us upon what terms all mankind, of what condition or nation soever, may find acceptance with **GOD**, Rom. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. *“Who will render to every man according to his deeds, to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but to them who are contentious and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; of the Jew first, and also of Gentile: but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”* As to our acceptance with **GOD**, and the rewards of another world, it matters not whether Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised; that which maketh the difference, is *“obeying the truth, or obeying unrighteousness; working good, or doing evil;”* these are the things which will avail to our justification, or condemnation at the great day. To the same purpose is that saying of the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. v. 9. *“That CHRIST is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.”*

I will conclude this matter with two remarkable sayings, the one towards the beginning, the other towards the end of the bible, to satisfy us that this is the tenor of the holy scriptures, and the constant doctrine of it from the beginning to the end. Gen. iv. 7. It is **GOD**'s speech to Cain, *“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?”*

And

“ And Rev. xxii. 14. “ Blessed are they who do
“ his commandments, that they may have right
“ to the tree of life, and may enter in through
“ the gates into the city.”

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And thus I have done with the second thing I propounded, which was to shew that according to the terms of the gospel, and the christian religion, the real renovation of our hearts and lives is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with GOD, and that this in sense and substance is the same with “ faith made perfect by charity, “ and keeping the commandments of GOD.”

The third and last particular remains to be spoken to, namely, that it is highly reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification, and acceptance to the favour of GOD; and that upon these two accounts.

First, for the honour of GOD's holiness.

Secondly, in order to the qualifying of us for the favour of GOD, and the enjoyment of him, for the pardon of our sins, and the reward of eternal life.

First, for the honour of GOD's holiness. For should GOD have received men to his favour, and rewarded them with eternal glory and happiness, for the meer belief of the gospel, or a confident persuasion that CHRIST would save them without any change of their hearts and lives, “ without
“ repentance from dead works, and fruits meet
“ for repentance, and amendment of life;” he had not given sufficient testimony to the world of his love to holiness and righteousness, and of his hatred

SERM. tred of sin and iniquity. The apostle tells us, that
 CX. GOD in the justification of a sinner “ declares his
 “ righteousness;” but should he justify men upon
 other terms, this would not “ declare his righte-
 “ ousness” and love of holiness, but rather an in-
 differency, whether men were good and righteous
 or not. For a bare assent to the truth of the
 gospel, without the fruits of holiness and obedience,
 is not a living, but a dead faith, and so far from
 being acceptable to GOD, that it is an affront to
 him; and a confident reliance upon CHRIST for
 salvation, while we continue in our sins, is not a
 justifying faith, but a bold and impudent pre-
 sumption upon the mercy of GOD, and the me-
 rits of our SAVIOUR; who indeed “ justifies the
 “ ungodly,” that is, those that have been so, but
 not those that continue so. And if GOD should
 pardon sinners, and reward them with eternal
 life, upon any other terms than upon our becoming
 “ new creatures,” than upon such “ a faith as is
 “ made perfect by charity,” that is, “ by keeping
 “ the commands of GOD;” this would be so far
 from declaring his righteousness, and being a testi-
 mony of his hatred and displeasure against sin, that
 it would give the greatest countenance and encourage-
 ment to it imaginable.

Secondly, it is likewise very reasonable, that such
 a faith, that makes us “ new creatures,” and is
 “ perfected by charity, and keeping the command-
 “ ments of GOD,” should be the condition of justi-
 fication, in order to the qualifying of us for the
 pardon of our sins and the reward of eternal life;
 that

in order to justification and salvation.

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that is, for the favour of GOD, and for the enjoyment of him. To forgive men upon other terms, were to give countenance and encouragement to perpetual rebellion and disobedience. That man is not fit to be forgiven, who is so far from being sorry for his fault, that he goes on to offend; he is utterly incapable of mercy, who is not sensible that he hath done amiss, and resolved to amend. No prince ever thought a rebellious subject capable of pardon upon lower terms than these. It is in the nature of the thing unfit that an obstinate offender should have any mercy or favour shewn to him.

And as without repentance and resolution of better obedience, we are unfit for forgiveness, so much more for a reward; as we cannot expect GOD's favour, so we are incapable of the enjoyment of him without holiness. Holiness is the image of GOD, and makes us like to him; and 'till we be like him, we cannot see him, we can have no enjoyment of him. All delightful communion and agreeable society is founded in a similitude of disposition and manners, and therefore so long as we are unlike to GOD in the temper and disposition of our minds, and in the actions and course of our lives, neither can GOD take pleasure in us, nor we in him, but there will be a perpetual jarring and discord between him and us; and tho' we were in heaven, and seated in the place of the blessed, yet we should not, nay we could not be happy; because we should want the necessary materials and ingredients of happiness. For it is with the soul in this respect, as it is with the body; tho' all things be easy without us; and no cruelty be exercis'd upon us, to give

torment and vexation to us, yet if we be inwardly diseased, we may have pain and anguish enough, we may be as it were upon the rack, and feel as great torment from the inward disorder of our humours, as if we were tortur'd from without. So it is with the soul, sin and vice are internal diseases, which do naturally create trouble and discontent, and nothing but diversion, and the variety of objects and pleasures which entertain men in this world, hinders a wicked man from being out of his wits, whenever he reflects upon himself; for all the irregular appetites and passions, lust, and malice, and revenge, are so many furies within us; and tho' there were no devil to torment us, yet the disorder of our own minds, and the horrors of a guilty conscience would be a hell to us, and make us extremely miserable in the very regions of happiness. So that it is necessary that our faith should be "made perfect by charity," and that we should become "new creatures;" not only from the arbitrary constitution and appointment of God, but from the nature and reason of the thing; because nothing but this can dispose us for that blessedness, which God hath promis'd to us, and prepared for us. Faith consider'd abstractedly from the fruits of holiness and obedience, of goodness and charity, will bring no man into the favour with God. All the excellency of faith is, that it is the principle of a good life, and furnisheth us with the best motives and arguments thereto, the promises and threatenings of the gospel; and therefore in heaven, when we come to sight and enjoyment, faith and hope shall cease, but "charity

in order to justification and salvation.

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“fidelity never faileth;” for if it should, heaven would cease to be heaven to us, because it is the very frame and temper of happiness; and if this disposition be not wrought in us in this world, we shall be altogether incapable of the felicity of the other.

You see then what it is that must recommend us to the favour of God; the real renovation of our hearts and lives, after the image of him that created us. This must be repaired in us, before ever we can hope to be restored to the grace and favour of God, or to be capable of the reward of eternal life. And what could God have done more reasonable, than to make these very things the terms of our salvation, which are the necessary causes and means of it? how could he have dealt more mercifully and kindly with us, than to appoint that to be the condition of our happiness, which is the only qualification that can make us capable of it?

I will conclude all with that excellent passage in the wisdom of Solomon, chap. vi. 17, 18. “The very true beginning of wisdom is the desire of discipline, and the care of discipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws, and taking heed to her laws is the assurance of incorruption.” The sum of what I have said upon this argument amounts to this, that upon the terms of the gospel we can have no hope of the forgiveness of our sins, and eternal salvation, unless our nature be renewed, and the image of God, which is defaced by sin, be repaired in us, and we be “created in Christ unto good works;” that no faith will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but that

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which is “made perfect by charity,” that is, by “fulfilling of the law, and keeping the commandments of God;” by sincere obedience and holiness of life, which notwithstanding the unavoidable imperfection of it in this state, will nevertheless be accepted with God, through the merits of our blessed SAVIOUR, “who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” To whom be glory for ever. Amen.

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MICAH vi. 6, 7, 8. *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow my self before the high GOD? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old?*

Will

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Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD.

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The End of the Sixth Volume.

