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The works of Richard Hurd,
Lord Bishop of Worcester

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THE
W O R K S
OF
RICHARD HURD, D. D.
LORD BISHOP OF WORCESTER.

—

VOL. VII. .

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THE
WORKS
OF
RICHARD HURD, D.D.
LORD BISHOP OF WORCESTER.
IN EIGHT VOLUMES.

VOL. VII.



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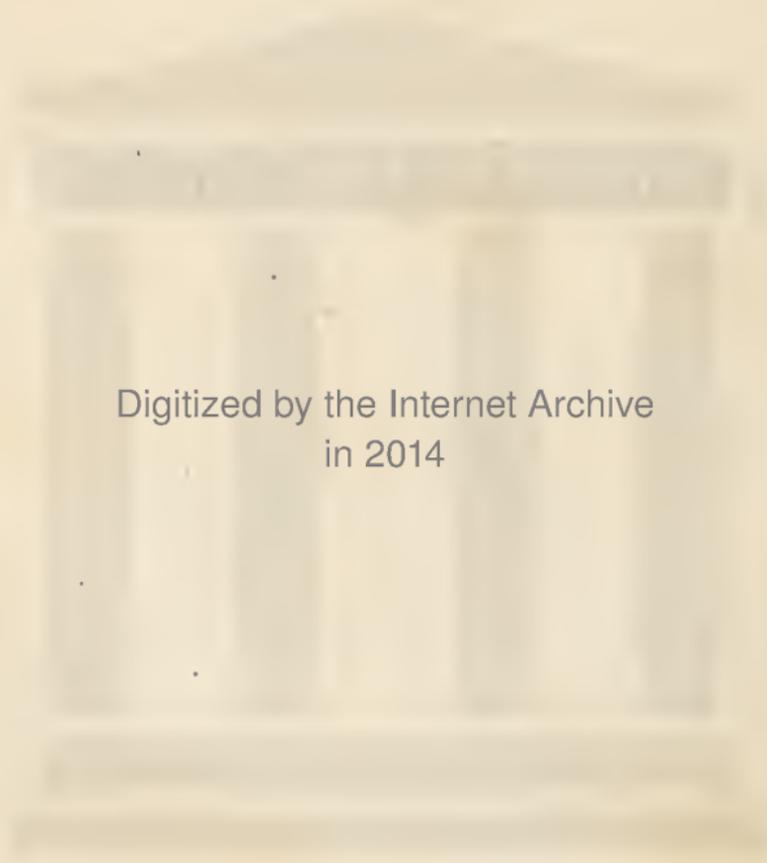
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THEOLOGICAL WORKS.



V O L. III.



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S E R M O N S

PREACHED AT

LINCOLN'S-INN,

BETWEEN THE YEARS 1765 AND 1776 :

WITH

A LARGER DISCOURSE,

ON

CHRIST'S DRIVING THE MERCHANTS

OUT OF THE TEMPLE ;

IN WHICH THE NATURE AND END OF THAT FAMOUS

TRANSACTION IS EXPLAINED.

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A LARGER DISCOURSE, by way of Commentary, on that remarkable Part of the Gospel-history, in which Jesus is represented, as driving the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple *. - - - 383

* The substance of this Discourse was delivered in a Sermon at Lincoln's-Inn, May 15, 1768.

SERMON XXIX.

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ACTS xxiv. 24, 25.

After certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ. And, as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, GO THY WAY FOR THIS TIME; WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON, I WILL CALL FOR THEE.

THIS Felix, whose name is become so memorable in the Christian church, had been made Procurator of Judæa by the Emperor Claudius, and continued in that government

during the six or seven first years of Nero: when he was recalled to answer for his oppressive administration before the emperor; who, we are told, would have punished him, according to his deserts, but for the interposition of Pallas, at that time Nero's chief minister.

He was, indeed, in all respects a very corrupt and profligate man, as appears from the testimony of Tacitus^a and Josephus^b; from whom we learn, that he was more especially addicted to the vices of *lust and cruelty*; both which he exercised in the most audacious manner; vexing the people with all sorts of oppression, and rioting in his excesses, without restraint. Drusilla, too, is represented to us in a light, not much more favourable. For, though a Jewess, and the wife of another man, she had contracted a marriage, or rather lived in adultery with this pagan governor of Judæa; transgressing at once both a moral and positive law of her religion, for the sake of ascending to that honour.

One would wonder how persons of this character should have any curiosity to *hear Paul*

^a Annal. xii. c. 54. Hist. v. c. 9.

^b Antiq. Jud. L. xx. c. 5.

concerning the faith of Christ. And, without doubt, they had no serious desire of information. It is likely they proposed to themselves some entertainment from questioning the prisoner; and the presence of Drusilla makes it credible that the entertainment was chiefly designed for *her*; who might be a bigot to her religion, though she scorned to live up to it; and therefore wanted, we may suppose, to insult Jesus in the person of his disciple.

However, let their purpose be what it would, such were FELIX and DRUSILLA, before whom Paul *reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come.*

Paul was not in the number of those complaisant preachers, who take a text, in which their hearers have no concern. He had to do with persons, who bade defiance to religion in all its forms; and his subject was well suited to the occasion. They expected an amusing tale of Jesus Christ: but the Apostle, who knew how unworthy they were of being instructed in the faith, as not yet possessing the first principles of morals, took up the matter a great deal higher; and, discoursing to them on the natural duties of justice and temperance, which they had grossly violated, and on the

natural doctrine of a judgment to come, which they had never believed or respected, gave them to understand, that they had much to learn, or practise at least, before they were fit hearers of what he had further to say concerning the Christian revelation.

Being taken at this advantage, we may easily conceive their surprise and disappointment: and, as the speaker knew how to give an energy to his discourse on these interesting topics, we cannot wonder, that one or both of them should be much discomposed by it. Of Drusilla the sacred text says nothing: she was, perhaps, the more skilful dissembler of the two; or her rage and indignation might, for the moment, get the better of her fears: but Felix had not the address, or the fortune, to disguise his feelings; he *trembled* before this plain, intrepid speaker.

This event is instructive, indeed, as it sets before us the power of conscience over the worst of men; and, at the same time, the meanness of guilt, which, in such place and dignity, could not help shrinking at the voice of truth, though speaking by the mouth of a poor dependant prisoner. But when we have made the proper use of these reflexions, on the

case of Felix, we shall find a still more instructive lesson in *the subsequent conduct of this affrighted sinner.*

When the fit of trembling came upon him, he said hastily to the preacher: *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

How striking a picture of that fatal disposition which men have to put off repentance, even under the fullest conviction of guilt; and that too, on the most frivolous pretences! What Felix should have done instantly, when his conscience was so much alarmed, he omits to do: *Go thy way for this time:* and yet, to quiet that conscience, he would not be thought to lay aside all purpose of reformation: *When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

With this famous example in my eye, I shall attempt to shew in the following discourse: 1. *That PROCRASTINATION is the usual support of vice:* 2. *That false reasoning, or, what we may call, the SOPHISTRY OF VICE, is the great support of procrastination:* 3. *That a FINAL IMPENITENCE is the too common effect of this pernicious confederacy.* And

I. PROCRASTINATION is the main support of vice; the favourite stratagem, by which the grand deceiver himself ensnares the souls of men, and maintains his empire over them.

There are few persons so desperately wicked but they resolve, secretly at least, and in their own minds, to amend their bad lives, at some time or other. But that time is rarely the present. They have other business in hand: some scheme of interest to manage, some project of ambition to pursue, some intrigue of pleasure to accomplish; in short, some darling sin or other to gratify, before they can be at leisure to execute this intended work of reformation.

Nay, there are seasons of recollection, in which the memory of their past lives afflicts and torments them; there are hours of melancholy, or ill health, in which the necessity of repentance seems pressing and instant; there are certain moments of terror, in which the final resolution is on the point of being taken: yet still, this delusive idea of *to-morrow* steps in: the memory, the necessity, the terror, are over-ruled: the ungrateful task is, for the present, deferred; to-morrow laid aside, and the next day forgotten.

This was the case of Felix in the text. When bad men are clothed with power, it is not easy for truth of any kind, especially for moral truth, to gain access to them. Yet it made its way to this potent governor, and with a force which nothing could resist. It borrowed the thunder of Paul's rhetoric to speak home and loudly to his affrighted conscience. It shook his guilty mind with the sense of his crimes, his incontinence and injustice, his riot and rapine, his lust and cruelty; and still more, with the apprehension of *a judgment to come*, armed with terror, and ready to take vengeance of his multiplied iniquities.

You expect now, that, in this agony, he should take the part, which duty and prudence, his conviction and his fears, equally recommended to him. You expect, that he should apply to his instructor, who had raised this storm, to compose it; and that, leaving his chair of state, he should spring forth and accost his prisoner, as the honest jaylor at Philippi had done, on a similar occasion: *What must I do to be saved*^c? But, no; it was not yet convenient to put that question. His pleasures, his fortune, his ambition, might be

^c Acts xvi. 20.

endangered by it. It was not the moment to take this decisive step. Better to think twice of it, and dismiss the preacher *for this time*.

And is there nothing in this case which we may apply to ourselves? Is there none here, whom the free remonstrance of a friend, an unexpected sentence in a moral writer, the admonition of a preacher, and, above all, the *word of God*, hath, at any time, awakened to a lively sense of his condition? A reproof from one or other of these sometimes falls in so exactly with a man's own case, and goes so directly to the heart, that he is more than commonly disturbed and confounded by it. It flashes such conviction on the mind, and shews the sinner to himself in so just a light, that he stands aghast at the deformity of his conduct, and at the peril of it. In the agitation of this distress, he half resolves to repent: nay, he strives for a moment to enforce this good resolution: when, let but that dæmon, which every sinner carries about with him, whisper the word, *to-morrow*, and his conscience revives, his fears disperse, and this precious opportunity is lost, though at the hazard of never returning any more.

Not that he permits this idle insinuation to banish all thoughts of future repentance, or to prevail with him, for the present, in its true and proper form : No : to be thus far the dupe of his own folly, would disgrace him too much, and expose his prevarication too plainly : if it pass upon him, it shall be under the mask of wisdom. He turns sophister then in his own defence, and is easily convinced, “ That his conduct is not altogether absurd or unreasonable.”

And thus, as I proposed to shew,

II. In the next place, this fatal procrastination, which supports vice, is itself supported by a **READY AND CONVENIENT SOPHISTRY.**

The case of Felix will again illustrate this second observation ; and shew us the whole process of that preverted ingenuity, by which the credulous mind is made easy under its delusion.

He thought it not sufficient to say to Paul ; *Go thy way for this time.* This abrupt dismissal of the preacher was to be justified, in some sort, to himself, and to those who were witnesses of his consternation. He covers it,

then, with this pretence; *When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

The **TIME**, it seems, was not proper for his immediate conversion. To become a penitent just then; on the instant; to be surprised into a good life, had the appearance of too much facility and inconsideration. He must take a space to reflect on the grounds and reasons of what had been offered to him. He had, besides, other affairs, which pressed upon him at this moment: or, if not, to deliberate on the matter, would render his conversion more solemn and effectual.

The **PLACE**, too, we may believe, was as little suited, as the time, to this business. "What! in a public apartment of his palace! in the presence of Drusilla, whose tenderest interests were concerned in the case, and whose delicacy required managing! before his pagan courtiers, and many, we may suppose, of his Jewish subjects, who would be equally scandalized at this precipitate conversion of their master and governor!" These, and other pretences of the like sort, without doubt, occurred to him: and on the strength of these he concludes his procrastination to be fit, and decent, and justifiable, in a good degree, on the principles of virtue and prudence.

“ But why, unhappy man (if one may presume to expostulate the case with thee) why this hasty and unweighed conclusion? Could there be any time more convenient for thy conversion, or any place more suitable, if thou wert in earnest to be converted?

Wast thou ever so prepared for this change as now? Was thy mind ever so convinced, or thy heart so affected? Didst thou ever hear and *tremble* till this day, and wilt thou expect such a miracle a second time? Can thy bad life be reformed too soon, or can it need an after-thought to justify such reformation? Can any other business come in competition with this? and can it deserve the name of weakness and surprise to give way to the powerful workings of thy own conscience? In a doubtful case, it may be well to deliberate: but can it be a secret even to thyself, that nothing is questionable here, but thy sincerity?

For what, let me ask, is that *convenient season*, which flatters thy present irresolution? Wilt thou find such a monitor, as Paul, in thy dependants? Will thy tax-gatherers preach *righteousness* to thee, and thy centurions, *temperance*? or, thy philosophers (if, perhaps, thou hast of these about thee, to grace thy pro-

vincial pomp) will they reason with thee, on a *judgment to come*?

But the PLACE is unfit; and thou wilt send for Paul to confer in private with thee.

Wast thou then afraid to expose thy honour by this step? And did it seem too much to give to God and truth, the glory of thy conversion? True penitence knows nothing of these punctilios. The example had edified thy unbelieving court; and might have had its effect on the insensible Drusilla. Thy injustice and incontinence had been open to all men. Was it not fit thou shouldst atone for this scandal by as public a reformation? Yet still thy pretence is, *a convenient season*! As if the first season, that offers for renouncing a bad life, were not always the most convenient."

But I continue this address to the Roman governor too long, if you consider me as directing it to him only. Let me profess, then, that by Felix I mean every sinner at this day, who procrastinates in the affair of his salvation, and would colour that procrastination by a still more contemptible sophistry. For, let us be ingenuous. This miserable Pagan, after all, had something to say for himself. This was,

probably, the only time that repentance had ever been preached to him. He still, perhaps, was acquainted with little more than the name of Jesus : for his teacher, as we have seen, insisted chiefly on the great truths of natural religion. If he then scrupled to take the benefit of this first and imperfect lecture, there is some allowance to be made for his folly. But what shall we say of those who possess every possible advantage of light and knowledge, who have grown up in the profession of Christianity, and are not now to learn either its duties or terrors? If such as these have sinned themselves into the condition of Felix, and yet resist the calls of grace, the commands of the Gospel, the exhortations of its ministers, the admonitions of their own conscience, all of them concurring to press upon them an immediate repentance ; if there be among us such procrastinators as these, what topics of defence are there by which they can hope to excuse, or so much as palliate, their prodigious infatuation?

“ Shall we say for them, or will they say for themselves, that they are young and healthy? that they have time enough before them, in which to grow wise at their leisure? that they wait till the boisterous passions have been calmed by reason and experience? that they

expect a *convenient season* for repentance, in declining life, and the languor of old age? or that they shall find it, as others have done, on the bed of sickness, or on the bed of death?"

I have never heard that Christians have any better reasons than these for delaying repentance: and, if they have not, though the sophistry of Felix deserved to be laid open, the respect I owe to those who now hear me, will not permit me to imagine that such sophistry as this, can want to be exposed.

It will be to better purpose to set before you,

III. In the last place, the issue of this too natural alliance between procrastination and vice, in a FINAL IMPENITENCE; of which the case of Felix, again, affords us a striking example.

When I have a convenient season, says he to Paul, *I will call for thee*. This season came, and Paul attended; to what effect, we shall now understand.

When Felix dismissed him from his presence, he insinuated, nay perhaps thought,

that he should have a disposition hereafter to profit by his religious instructions. But time and bad company quieted his fears: and a favourite vice inspired other motives for the interview, than those of religion. *For he hoped, says the historian, that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.*

The case, we see, is well altered. He trembled before at Paul's charge against him of rapine and extortion: he would now exercise these very vices on Paul himself. Such was the fruit of that *convenient season*, which was to have teemed with better things!

But this is not all: *For, after two years Portius Festus came into Felix's room; and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

Felix then had his preacher within call for *two whole years*: time sufficient, one would think, to afford the opportunity of many a lecture *concerning the faith of Christ*. Yet, though he communed with Paul oft, it does not appear that his conferences with him turned on this subject. What he wanted to

draw from him was, not truth, but money; and, when this hope failed, he was little concerned about the rest. Nay, the impression which Paul had made upon him was so entirely effaced, that he left an innocent man *in bonds*, for the sake of *doing a pleasure to the Jews*. But he had his reason still for this unwonted courtesy. For their complaints were ready to follow him (as indeed they did) to the throne of Cæsar; whither he went, at last, unrepentant and unreformed, to encounter, as he could, the rigors of imperial justice; just as so many others, by the like misuse of time and opportunity, expose themselves to all the terrors of divine.

Not but there is yet this advantage in the parallel on the side of *Felix*. He neglected to use the space of *two years*, which was mercifully allowed him for the season of reformation: but how many Christians omit this work, not for *two* only, but for twenty, forty years; nay, for the whole extent of a long life; and never find a *convenient season* for doing the only thing, which it greatly concerns them to do, although with the astonishing delusion of always intending it.

To conclude: We have seen that procrastination serves the ends of vice; and that vice,

in return, is but too successful in pleading the cause of procrastination : leaving between them this salutary lesson to mankind, “ That he who seriously intends to repent to-morrow, should in all reason begin to-day; *to-day*, as the Apostle admonishes, *while it is called to-day, lest the heart, in the mean time, be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin* ^d.”

^d Heb. iii 13.

SERMON XXX.

PREACHED DECEMBER 19, 1773.

1 JOHN v. 11.

And this is the record that God hath given to us, eternal life; and THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON.

WE are indebted to the Gospel for the knowledge and hope we have of eternal life; this important doctrine having, *first*, been delivered by Jesus Christ, and *only* by him, on any proper grounds of authority. This then is the *record*, or the substance of what the Gospel *testifies* and affirms, *That God hath given to us eternal life: and this life*, adds the Apostle, *IS IN HIS SON*: that is, he *procured* this blessing for us; he is not only the teacher, but the *author* of eternal life.

This last is a distinct and very momentous consideration. Reason might seem to have some part in discovering, or at least in confirming, the doctrine itself: but the *manner* of conveying the inestimable gift of eternal life, whether *immediately* from the giver of it, or by the *mediation* of some other, this is a matter of pure revelation; and reason hath nothing more to do in the case, than to see that the revelation is, indeed, made, and then with all humility to acquiesce in it.

Being, then, to treat this sublime subject, *the redemption of mankind through Christ*, I shall do it simply in the *terms* of scripture, or at least with a scrupulous regard to the plain and obvious *sense* of them. The text says, *eternal life is in the Son of God*; and my discourse must be merely a *scriptural comment* on this declaration.

Now, the scripture teaches, that immortality was originally, and from the beginning, the free gift of God to man, on the condition of his obeying a certain law, or command, prescribed to him: whether that command be interpreted *literally*, of not eating the fruit of the forbidden tree in paradise, as we read in the second and third chapters of Genesis; or

allegorically, of some other prohibition, expressed agreeably to the oriental genius, in these terms. This diversity of interpretation makes no difference in the case: whatever the test of man's disobedience was, the will of the law-giver is clearly announced: If thou art guilty of disobedience, *thou shalt surely die*^a.

Obedience, then, had the promise of *continued* life; the penalty threatened to disobedience, was *death*: which was only saying, that the gift freely bestowed on a certain condition (and surely what man had no right to demand, might be offered on what terms the giver pleased) should be withdrawn on the breach of it. The loss, indeed, was immense; but to the loser no wrong was done: and of him who recalled the free gift, conditionally bestowed, and justly forfeited, no complaint, in reason, can be made.

But to what purpose, some will ask, to give that with one hand, which was presently to be withdrawn by the other? for the best reason, no doubt, whether conceivable by us, or not. However, the sad event was certainly foreseen: and, what is more, such provision was made

^a Gen. ii. 17.

against it, as to infinite wisdom and goodness seemed meet.

By contemplating the gradual steps of Providence, as we are able to trace them in the revelation itself, we understand, that it was in the eternal purpose of the divine Governour to restore life to fallen and mortal man, as *freely* as it had been at first bestowed, and on *terms* still more advantageous to him. But *the ways of heaven are not as our ways*, nor to be regulated by our impatient wishes, or expectations. What man, in a moment, had wantonly thrown away, he was to recover once more; but in God's good time; not instantly, but after a long succession of ages, and such a state of intermediate discipline and preparation, as might best serve to introduce the intended blessing with effect.

Man, then, was to be reinstated in his forfeited inheritance: and the *promise* was made, though purposely in obscure terms, from the moment the forfeiture was incurred. In process of time, it was less, and still less obscurely signified; yet so as that the full discovery of what was intended, and, still more, the execution of it, was long deferred.

At length, Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfill and to declare the whole will of God on this interesting subject: and from him, and from those commissioned by him, we learn what the wisest men, and even *angels*, had desired to look into, and could at most discern but imperfectly through the types and shadows of the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations.

The great mystery, now unveiled, was briefly this: that God of his infinite goodness had, indeed, from the foundation of the world, purposed the restoration of eternal life to his unworthy creature, man; but that in his wisdom he saw fit to confer this unmerited blessing in a way, that should at once secure the honour of his government; and, if any thing could secure it, the future obedience and happiness of his creature: that he would only confer this mighty privilege at the instance, as it were, and for the sake of a transcendantly divine person, his only begotten Son, the second person in the glorious Trinity, as we now style him: that this divine person, of his own free will co-operating with the *eternal purpose*^b of the all-gracious Father, should descend from Heaven; should become incarnate; should as

^b Ephes. iii. 11.

man, converse with men, and instruct them by his heavenly doctrine ; should taste deeply of all their sorrows and infirmities (*sin only excepted*) ; should even pour out his blood unto death, and by that blood should wash away the stain of guilt ; and, on the condition of *faith* in his name, operating, as of course it must do, by a sincere obedience to his authority, should admit us, once more, to the possession of eternal happiness ; of which, finally, we have a *lively* and certain hope, in that he who had laid down his life, had power to take it again, as was declared to all the world by his resurrection from the dead ^a.

In this awfully stupendous manner (at which reason stands aghast, and faith herself is half confounded) was the Grace of God to man, at length, manifested : and thus it is, when we come a little to unfold the *record*, or testimony of the Gospel, that *God hath given to us eternal life* ; and that *this life is in his Son*.

Curious men have perplexed themselves and others by inquiring into the nature of this astonishing scheme, and have seemed half inclined not to accept so *great salvation*, till they could reconcile it to their ideas of philo-

^a 1 Pet. i. 3.

sophy. Hence those endless altercations concerning *merit, satisfaction, imputed sin, and vicarious punishment*; in which it is hard to say, whether more subtlety has been shewn, or more perverseness; more ingenuity, or presumption. If most of these questions were well examined, it would appear, perhaps, that they are mere verbal disputes, and as frivolous as they are contentious. But, be the difference between the parties nominal or real, this we are sure of, without taking part in the controversy, that the scriptures speak of the *death of Christ, as a ransom for many^b; the price of our redemption^c; a sacrifice for us^d; a propitiation for the sins of the whole world^e: that they speak of Christ himself, as dying for us^f, as bearing our sins in his own body on the tree^g; as suffering for sins, the just for the unjust^h; as tasting death for every manⁱ; as giving himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God^k; as justifying us by his blood^l; and redeeming us by the price of it^m: with a multitude of other passages to the same pur-*

^b Matth. xx. 28.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^d Heb. ix. 26.

^e 1 John ii. 2.

^f 1 Thess. v. 10.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 18.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 9.

^k Eph. v. 2.

^l Rom. v. 9.

^m 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. 1 Cor. vi. 20.

pose. Now let men use what art they will in torturing such expressions as these, they will hardly prevent our seeing what the plain doctrine of scripture is, “ That it pleased God to give us eternal life only *in his Son* ; and in his Son *only* as suffering and dying for us.”

But in this consideration the whole mystery consists ; how to be fully cleared up to our reason, men may dispute if they will, and they will dispute the rather, because the subject is out of their sphere, and beyond their comprehension. Whether God *could* accept such a sacrifice for sin as the death of his own Son, many have presumptuously asked. Whether he *could not* have given life to man, in another way, some have more modestly doubted : but the issue of all this arrogant or needless curiosity, is but the discovery of their own weakness, on the one hand, and the confession of this stupendous truth, on the other ; That God did not see fit to bestow eternal salvation on mankind, but in his own appointed way, through Christ Jesus.

In this momentous truth, then, enough for us to know, let us humbly acquiesce, and leave to others the vanity of disputing the grounds of it.

But, though the reasons of this dispensation be inscrutable to us, the measure of its *influence*, some think, they have the means to discover. For it seems to follow from St. Paul's assertion, that, *as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive*ⁿ; and from the idea given us of the Redeemer, as of *the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*^o; that the benefits of Christ's death extend to all men, of all times, and are, in the proper sense of the word, *universal*. Only it is to be remembered, that, if all men have an interest in Christ, whether they know it or not, *we* who do know what our interest in him is, have infinitely the advantage of them, and are inexcusable, if we reject it.

Thus far then we go upon safe grounds, and affirm without hesitation, that *God*, through his mercies in Christ Jesus, *is the Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe*.

Another consideration, and of the utmost moment, is yet behind. Though eternal life be now again bestowed on mankind, this gift is not one and the same thing to all, but is

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^o Rev. xiii. 8.

^p 1 Tim. iv. 10.

differently modified according to the different conduct of those to whom it is given. All shall *live*; but whether to happiness, or misery, and to what degree of *either*, will depend on the use of those advantages, whether of nature or grace, which every one enjoys. Not, that any degree of eternal happiness is, or can be strictly due to any man, but that the several degrees of it will be *proportioned* to our respective moral and religious qualifications. To have done otherwise, would have been to confound the order of things, and to appoint a scheme of salvation, which must utterly extinguish all virtuous industry among men. Hence, we are told, that the righteous shall shine out in different degrees of happiness, *as one star differeth from another star in glory* ¶.

In like manner, they who shall be found worthy, not of happiness, but misery, will be sentenced to several allotments of it, by the same equal rule.

It may seem, perhaps, that, as our best works could not *merit* eternal life in happiness, so our worst cannot *deserve* eternal life in misery. But let us take care how we push our

¶ 1 Cor. xv. 41.

inquiries into this awful subject. In rewarding obedience, the *divine goodness* is chiefly displayed; and who shall presume to set bounds to it? But, in punishing disobedience, the *divine wisdom*, of which we conceive much more imperfectly, is mainly concerned: and what examples of severity in the punishment of incorrigibly impenitent offenders, after such means as have been devised to reclaim them, and for the support of his moral government over more worlds than we have any idea of, this attribute may demand, we shall do well, with all submission and modesty, to leave unexplored.

Still, what is just, that is, what is right and fit, on the whole, will undoubtedly take place: but we *are* not, we *cannot*, be competent judges of what is fit and right in this instance. It will be safest to rely, without further inquiry, on the general declaration of him, who was not only our Redeemer, but shall one day be our merciful judge: *These*, says he, [that is, the wicked] *shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal*^r.

What remains on this subject, is only to admonish you of those *relations*, in which we

^r Matth. xxv. 46.

stand towards the Author of our salvation, and the correspondent *duties* they impose upon us. I can but just point out these *relations* and *duties* : though they deserve to be inculcated (as, in fact, they have been, by the sacred writers) with all the force of eloquent persuasion, that words can give.

With regard to the supreme cause of all things, who is of himself only the source and principle of deity, and the original author of our salvation, God, thus understood, is graciously pleased to present himself to us in the Gospel, under the idea of THE FATHER, and to consider us in the tender relation of *sons*. We owe him, therefore, all possible filial love and reverence, and must so conceive of his part in the mystery of our redemption, as to refer all the fruits of it, ultimately, *to the glory of God the Father*^s.

In subordination to the *Father*, HE in whom we have eternal life, is our *friend*^t, and therefore entitled to our warmest love : he is our greatest *benefactor*^u, and therefore claims our utmost gratitude : he is our only *master*^x, and of course, must be followed with all observance:

^s Phil. ii. 11.

^t John xv. 15.

^u John xv. 13.

^x Matth. xxiii. 8.

he is our *redeemer*, and *sole mediator between God and man*^y; therefore he challenges an implicit, an exclusive trust and confidence from us: he is the appointed *judge* of the world^z; therefore to be regarded with the humblest fear and veneration: lastly, he is *the only begotten Son of God*^a, nay *our Lord and our God*^b; to whom therefore we are to pay transcendant honour, so as *to honour the Son even as we honour the Father*^c.

These are some, the chief of those duties, which, as Christians, we are bound to perform towards the Author of our salvation. The *relations* from which they spring, could not be discovered by the light of nature; but, when made known to us by revelation, they require as certainly, and as reasonably, the several *duties* which correspond to them, as the *relations* in which we stand to God and man, as discoverable by nature only, require their respective *duties*.

You see, then, the sphere of a Christian's duty is much enlarged beyond that of the natural man: and not in these instances only, for

y Rev. v. 9. 1 Tim. ii. 5.

a John iii. 18.

c John v. 23.

z Acts x. 42.

b John xx. 28.

the gospel has made known another divine person, (so we are obliged to speak) *the holy Spirit of God*, who stands in a distinct relation to us; and to whom, therefore, his proper and peculiar honour is due. But of this divine person in the glorious Trinity, I shall find another occasion to lay before you, at large, what the scriptures have brought to light.

For the present, it may suffice to have put you in mind of what we are taught concerning *the grace of God in his Son Jesus Christ*; to the end that, religiously observing all the duties which this revealed doctrine requires of us, we may fully correspond to the gracious intentions of the revealer, by having *our fruit unto holiness*; and *the end, everlasting life*. For *the wages of sin* (be it ever remembered) *is death*: but *eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord*^d: *To whom be all praise, thanksgiving, and honour, now and for evermore. Amen.*

^d Rom. vi. 22, 23.

S E R M O N XXXI.

PREACHED JUNE 12, 1774.

GAL. vi. 8.

*He that soweth to the spirit, shall OF THE
SPIRIT REAP LIFE EVERLASTING.*

WITHOUT staying to point out the immediate occasion of these words, or to enumerate and define the several senses of the word *spirit*, in sacred scripture, it is sufficient to my present purpose to observe, that the text affirms a *general and fundamental truth of the Gospel*, more clearly and particularly explained elsewhere. It is this: That he who in this life conducts himself according to the rules and admonitions of God's holy spirit, which the Apostle calls, *sowing to the spirit*,

shall, through the influence of the same spirit, obtain, that is, in the Apostle's figurative style, *shall reap, life everlasting.*

But, what! you will say, everlasting life is the *gift of God through Christ*: how is it then that we receive this gift at the hands of another, of *God's holy spirit*?

To resolve this difficulty, and to open to you at the same time the Christian doctrine of grace, together with the concern which we have in it, I shall consider,

I. In what *sense* we are to understand the assertion, *That everlasting life is of the spirit.*

II. In what *way* this blessing is conferred upon us; under which head I shall have occasion to set forth the several *offices and operations* of the holy Spirit.

III. Lastly, what *returns of duty*, as corresponding to these *offices* of the Spirit, and as resulting from the *relations* in which we stand towards him, are, in consequence of this revelation, reasonably required of us.

I. To understand in what *sense* the scriptures assert *everlasting life to be of the spirit*, it will

be necessary to form to ourselves a distinct idea of the divine œconomy in the whole work of our redemption ; which (to sum up briefly what is revealed to us) appears to have been conducted in the following manner.

God the Father, of his mere grace, purposed and *willed*^a, from all eternity, the restoration of *life* to man, after his forfeiture of it by disobedience: but he saw fit to make our *title* to this free gift depend on the death and sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ: and, lastly, to give the *actual possession* of it only through the ministration of his holy Spirit.

The whole of this process is full of wonder ; but there is no contradiction, or inconsistency in its several parts.

However, to open the œconomy of this dispensation a little more distinctly, it is to be observed, that eternal life may be taken in two senses. It may either imply *a mere state of ENDLESS EXISTENCE*; and, in this sense, it is solely and properly the gift of God through Christ; *for as in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*^b: Or, it may mean, what it always does mean in those pas-

^a 2 Tim. i. 9.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 22.

sages of scripture, where it is magnified so much, *a state of* HAPPINESS, in that existence; and then only a capacity of being put into this state is procured for us by the Redeemer. But this capacity, this *grace of God*, may be *frustrated by us*^c, may even turn against us, if we be not duly prepared to enjoy that *happiness* of which we are made capable; and such *preparation*, is the proper distinctive work of God's holy spirit.

Further, to see the necessity, the importance at least, of such preparation, we are to reflect, that, by the fall of man, not only life was forfeited, but the powers of his mind were weakened. Transgression had clouded his understanding, and perverted his will. He neither saw his duty so clearly as before, nor was disposed to perform it so vigorously. And this depravation of his faculties, we easily conceive, *might*, as an original taint, be transmitted to his posterity; nay, we certainly feel that it *is* so: yet, without any imputation on the author of our being, who might have placed us in this disadvantageous state, if he had pleased, from the beginning; and to whom we are accountable for the right use of the advantages we have, not of those we have not. Still, the purity of

^c Gal. ii. 21.

God's nature might require what his wisdom has decreed, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*^d, and that Jesus should be *the author of eternal salvation to those only*, who, in a higher degree than our fallen nature of itself permits, *obey him*^e. And this change in our moral condition from bad to good, from a propensity to evil to a love of righteousness, is called in scripture, *a renewing of our minds, a new creation, a new man*; in opposition to the former so different state of our minds, which is called *the old man corrupted according to the deceitful lusts*^f.

For the *change* itself, it is represented in scripture as proceeding, not from the virtue of our own minds, but from the influence of the Holy Ghost upon them^g: and when it has taken place in us, then, and not till then, is *our election sure*, and we are *made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*^h.

This extraordinary provision for restoring man to the image of God, to *the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*ⁱ, is what reason could not

^d Heb. xii. 14.

^f Eph. iv. 22.

^h Tit. iii. 7.

^e Heb. v. 9.

^g Tit. iii. 5:

ⁱ Eph. iv. 24.

have hoped for, but, when made known by revelation, seems to have been expedient, may be conceived to have been even necessary, and is clearly an expression of the divine goodness, which, though it fill our minds very justly with wonder, as well as gratitude, none of our natural notions contradict.

We see, then, in general, *how* the new man receives the gift of eternal life from the spirit. Let us now consider more particularly,

II. In the second place, in what *way* this new creation is carried on and perfected in us. And here we shall find all the marks of that wisdom and fitness, which are discernable in the thing itself.

For we are renewed in the spirit of our minds^k, by the teaching of the spirit of truth^l, through sanctification of the spirit^m, and comfort of the Holy Ghostⁿ: that is, we have a new and better turn given to our minds, by the light derived into them from the spirit; by the good thoughts and purposes which he excites in them; and by the joy and consolation with which he rewards our endeavours to profit

^k John xvi. 13.

^l John xvi. 13.

^m Thess. ii. 13.

ⁿ Acts ix. 31.

by the assistance thus graciously afforded to us.

That we very much want these helps and encouragements, we *all* know: that we are very much indebted to them, we *Christians* believe: and that they are not the less real, because, perhaps, not distinguishable from the workings of our own minds, now that revelation assures us of the fact, we have no scruple to affirm.

To this divine Spirit, then, *the spirit of the Father*°, and *the spirit of the Son* P, as he is equally styled, because proceeding from both; to this spirit, I say, *enlightening* our understandings, *purifying* our wills, and *confirming* our faith, we must impute all that is good in us, all that proficiency in *true holiness* which qualifies us for the enjoyment of heaven: and through this discipline it is, that they *who sow to the spirit*, are, in the end, enabled *of the spirit to reap everlasting life*.

These *three* characters might be further opened and distinctly considered; and then it would appear, that all the revelations of God's will, chiefly with regard to the redemp-

° Matth. x. 20.

P Gal. iv. 6.

tion of man, made to the patriarchs of old, to the prophets under the law, to the Apostles of our Lord, nay to our Lord himself, as *the man Christ Jesus*, and all the secret illuminations of the faithful in all times, are to be regarded as so many emanations from the spirit of God, THE ENLIGHTENER: that all the gradual improvements of our virtue, all the graces which first descend upon our hearts, and then manifest themselves in every good word and work, are the production of the same spirit, in his office of SANCTIFIER: and, lastly, that all the firmness and resolution we possess under every trial in this world, all the foretaste we have of future favour and acceptance, all our joy and peace in believing, are the signs and proofs of the COMFORTER, speaking to us, and, according to our Saviour's promise, *abiding in us*.

It is very conceivable that all this diversity of operations may be justly and reasonably ascribed to the influence of the holy Spirit, without supposing that our own freedom is impeded or infringed. For influence is not compulsion; and we are every day induced by others to do that which we should not have done of ourselves, without feeling or suspecting that the least violence is offered to our free-will. *A*

convincing truth clearly presented to us ; *a virtuous thought* incidentally suggested ; *a gleam of hope or gladness*, suddenly let in upon us ; all this is no more than we frequently experience in the company of wise and good men, who yet would be much surprised, and would have reason to think themselves much injured, if we complained of any undue influence exerted by them. Yet thus it is, and thus only, that the holy spirit *constraineth us* : and the scriptures are so far from representing this constraint under the idea of force, or physical necessity, that they speak of it as the perfection of moral freedom : *Where the spirit of the Lord is, says the Apostle, there is liberty* &c.

Having, therefore, seen in *what sense* it is affirmed that the spirit *giveth* life ; and in *what way*, consistently with the free use of our faculties, he dispenses this gift, and exercises a variety of offices towards us ; it remains,

III. In the last place, to see what *returns of duty*, as corresponding to the several characters of the holy Spirit, and resulting from the relations in which we stand to him, are required on our part ; in other words, what we

are to do, before we can hope to be *transformed by the renewing of our minds*, under the influence of the holy Spirit.

One previous indispensable condition of our obtaining that influence seems to be, that we *ask it*, that is, put up our petitions to God for it: a consideration, which, while it shews the utility, the necessity of prayer, sufficiently accounts, I doubt, to many of us, for the little or no effect which, as we pretend and sometimes lament, this renovating power of the spirit has upon us.

This duty of prayer being supposed; with regard to the holy spirit himself, *in general*, all the reverence, honour, worship, which his divine nature exacts from us, and all the love and gratitude which his gracious concurrence with the Father and the Son, in the great work of our redemption, so eminently deserves, are to be religiously paid to him.

More particularly, we are to consider, that to the several characters or offices, sustained by this divine person, and exercised towards us, several duties respectively correspond; which indeed are obvious enough, but must just be pointed out.

1. If a ray of light break in upon us, if a new degree of knowledge be imparted to us, if we see the truth of the gospel more clearly in any respect than before we had done, we cannot mistake in ascribing this additional information or conviction (which comes very frequently we know not how, and when the general bent of our thoughts, perhaps, lies another way) to the illuminating spirit within us; and we are to see to what further purpose that illumination may serve, and how far it may go towards dissipating the darkness of our minds in other instances.

2. If we feel (as at times we all of us do) a vicious inclination checked, a virtuous purpose encouraged, a moral or a pious sentiment suggested, these secret motions are, nay, must be, from the holy Spirit; and our duty is to entertain and to improve them.

3. Or, again, if we perceive our devotions to be quickened, our hopes enlivened, our faith fortified, though the present state of our temper or constitution may be instrumental in producing these effects, yet, if they go no farther than scripture warrants, and right reason allows, we shall not mistake (having the express promise of our Lord and Master) in

ascribing these consolations of peace and joy to the *Comforter*; we may regard them as *the earnest and pledge of the spirit in our hearts*^q: and then, *our part* is so to cherish and use them, as to *go on from strength to strength*^r, till we arrive at perfection.

You see there is enough for us to do, though *the spirit strive with our spirit*^s, and in such sort that we derive the power *to will and to do*^t what we ought, ultimately from him.

I know that this, and other things, which on the authority of scripture, I have delivered on the present subject, will appear strange to natural reason. But so that scripture has prepared us to expect they would do. *For the natural man, says the Apostle, receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him*^u. And to the same purpose our divine Master himself, speaking of *the spirit of truth; whom, says he, the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye, addressing himself*

q Eph. i. 14.

r Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

s Gen. vi. 3. Rom. viii. 16.

t Phil. ii. 13.

u 1 Cor. ii. 14.

to his disciples [that is, to men, who walk by *faith*, and not by sight] *ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

On this assurance, then, we may reasonably believe what, by reason, we cannot understand. And the substance of what we are to believe on this whole subject, is contained in a single text of St. Peter, where the *three* divine persons, yet ineffably *one* God, “*the Trinity in unity*,” whom we adore, and their respective offices, are accurately distinguished. For in the opening of his first epistle, he pronounces the Christians, to whom he writes, ELECT, that is, entitled to salvation, *according to the foreknowledge, or pre-determination, of God the Father; through the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience; and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*

In these memorable words, we have a brief, yet clear epitome of our whole faith. And

x Athanasian creed.

y So the word *πρόγνωσις* means in this place; as it likewise does in Acts ii. 23. where the sense of it is clearly explained and defined by the words, *τῇ ἁρισμένῃ βουλῇ*, which introduce it. The participle *προεγνωσμένον* has the same sense in 1 Pet. i. 20.

thus at length you see that, though eternal life be *the gift of GOD in his SON*, it is only ensured, and finally conveyed to us, by the ministry of *his HOLY SPIRIT*: to which blessed TRINITY, therefore, be all honour, and praise, and adoration, now and for ever! AMEN.

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

PREACHED JUNE 19, 1774.

2 COR. vii. 1.

Having therefore these promises (dearly beloved) let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

OUR discourses from this place turning very much, as they ought to do, on the great Christian doctrine of salvation, that is, of *eternal life*, considered as the gift of God to mortal and sinful man, through the redemption of his Son, and the sanctification of his holy Spirit, it would be a strange neglect in us, if we did not take care to remind our hearers

of the effect which that doctrine ought to have upon them.

This duty I mean now to discharge towards you: and I cannot do it more properly than by enforcing that advice which St. Paul gave the Corinthians, as the result of a long and eloquent discourse to them on the same subject. *Having* THEREFORE (says he) these promises [i. e. the promise of *eternal life*, and of *acceptance through Christ*, so as to become *the people of God*, nay *the sons of God*, with other assurances of the like sort^a, interspersed in the two preceding chapters, *Having these promises*] *let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

The inference, you see, is direct to our purpose: and common ingenuity, if nothing else, might well engage us, in return for such great and precious promises, to draw the same conclusion for ourselves. But, when we further consider that these promises are conditional, and made only to those who obey the giver of them^b, interest, as well as gratitude, will oblige us to yield that obedience so expressly required of us.

^a Ch. v. 1. v. 18. And vi. 16. 18.

^b Heb. v. 9.

This obedience is briefly summed up in the direction; *to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, that is, to take care, agreeably to the double obligation imposed upon us by the distinct parts of our constitution, that we consult the integrity both of our bodies and minds; and preserve them both from that defilement which each of them, according to its nature, is liable to contract in this state of moral probation.

I. With regard to the FLESH, the gross vices which defile that part of our frame, are so expressly condemned by the law of reason, as well as of the gospel, and are so repugnant to the inbred modesty of every man, especially of such as have had their natural sense of decency quickened by a good education, that but to mention them in this place, I would hope, is quite sufficient. If I go farther, it shall only be to remind you of one thing, which I have explained at large on a former occasion^c, That Christianity hath added unspeakably to the worth and dignity of the human body, by considering it no longer as the store-house of impure lusts, but as the habitation, the *temple* of the living God, to whose sole use it is now dedicated^d.

^c See Sermon XXVI. in the preceding volume, p. 378.

^d 2 Cor. vi. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 16.

The turpitude, the dishonour, the impiety of desecrating this sanctuary of the holy Spirit by sordid, carnal excesses, is then apparent to every Christian.

But the vices of the SPIRIT do not always strike the attention so forcibly; though they be as real as those of the body, and sometimes more fatal. The reason is, that the spiritual part of man does not lie so open to observation as the corporeal. The mind is not easily made an object to itself; and, when it is, we have a strange power of seeing it in a false light, and of overlooking its blemishes, or of even mistaking them for beauties. In short, *the filthiness of the spirit* may be long unobserved, and therefore *uncleansed*, if it be not pointed out to us by some friendly monitor, who is more practised in this mental inspection than ourselves, or has less interest, however, to conceal our depravity from us.

Permit me, then, to assume the charitable office of holding up to your view these *spiritual vices*; not all of every sort (for that would be endless) but the chief of those which tend more immediately to defeat the gracious *promises* made to us in the gospel.

II. I say nothing of that corruption which direct and positive infidelity strikes through the soul, whether it be the infidelity of Atheism, or what is called Deism; because, on men who espouse either of these systems, the promises of the gospel take no hold; and because it ought not, cannot be supposed, that men of no religion, or of no faith, appear in these Christian assemblies. You will think me better employed in pointing out such corruptions, as may not improbably adhere even to believers; though concealed from their own observation, it may be, or disguised, at least, to themselves, under various pretences.

1. The first of these that I shall mention is a sort of HALF-BELIEF, which floats in the mind, and, though it do not altogether renounce the hopes of the Gospel, is far from reposing a firm trust in them. Many professed believers have, I doubt, this infirmity, this taint of infidelity, still cleaving to them. They think Christianity an useful institution; nay, they think it not destitute of all divine authority. But then they reduce this authority to just nothing, by allowing themselves to put it as low as they can—by taking great liberties in explaining both its doctrines and precepts—by admitting such parts of this revelation, as

they believe themselves able to make out to the satisfaction of their own minds, and by rejecting, at least by questioning in some sort, whatever they cannot perfectly understand—by treating some things as incredible, others, as impracticable; one part of their religion as too mysterious, and another as too severe. “They believe, they say, what they can: but, after all, there are many strange things in this religion; and the evidence for the truth of them is not so controuling, but that there is room for some degree of doubt and hesitation.”

All this, perhaps, they do not say to others; nay, not to themselves, except when they are pressed by some conclusion from scripture, which either their prejudices, or their passions, make them very unwilling to admit; and then they take leave to be as sceptical as the occasion requires.

But now from such a faith as this, no wholesome or permanent fruits can be expected. It has no root in them; and the *promises*, that should feed and nourish it, have but a faint and feeble effect; just enough, perhaps, to keep their hopes from dying out-

right, but much too little to push them into any vigorous efforts of obedience.

The way for such to *cleanse themselves* from this pollution of spirit (for to the several defects, the proper remedy in each case shall, as we go along, be subjoined) is, once for all, to examine the foundations of their religion; and, if they find them, on the whole, solid and satisfactory, to rely upon them thenceforth with a confidence entire and unshaken. They should reflect, that every revealed doctrine, of whatever sort, as standing on the same ground of infallible truth, is equally to be admitted. There is no compromising matters with their divine Master: they must either quit his service, or follow him without reserve. And this, upon the whole, they will find to be the manly and the reasonable part for them to take. To halt between two opinions so repugnant to each other, to embrace so interesting a thing as religion by halves, is neither for the credit of their courage, nor of their understanding.

Having then the *promise* of eternal life, let them reckon upon that promise, like men who know its value, and do not mistrust on what ground it stands. If they are Christians at all, they cannot justify it even to themselves not to

be Christians in good earnest. And thus will they happily escape the disgrace of an *irresolved and indolent faith*; which involves them in much of the guilt, and in almost all the mischiefs, of infidelity. But,

2. There are those who have not a doubt about the truth of Christianity, and yet, through a certain LEVITY OF MIND, derive but little benefit from their conviction.

This spiritual vice is, perhaps, the commonest of all others; and, though it seems to have something prodigious in it, is easily accounted for from the intoxication of health, youth, and high spirits; from the restless pursuit of pleasure, which occupies one part of the world, and of business, which distracts another; from a too passionate love of society in many; from feverish habits of dissipation in more; and from a fatal impatience of solitude and recollection in almost all.

But, by whichsoever of these causes the vice of inconsideration, we have now before us, is produced and nourished, it is of the most malignant sort, and being ready to branch out into many others, should be resolutely checked and suppressed. Though there be nothing

directly criminal in the pursuit which takes us from ourselves, it is always dangerous to lose sight of what we are, and whither we are going, and may be fatal. For, not to believe, and not to call to mind what we believe, is nearly the same thing. And when a temptation meets us thus unprepared, it wants no assistance from infidelity, but is secure of prevailing by its own strength, under cover of our inattention.

Such, I doubt not, is the sad experience of thousands, every day; while yet the misjudging world, that part of it, especially, whose interest it is to suppose that all men are equally destitute of religious principles, rashly conclude that there is no faith, where there is so much folly. "These hypocrites, say they, are convicted of the same unbelief, which they perpetually object to us:" Alas, no: they are convicted of inconsequence, only.

Not that this consideration excuses their guilt: it even aggravates and inflames it. For, when *one thing*, only, is *needful*, and they know it to be so, not to retain a practical, an habitual sense of it, but to suffer every trifle to mislead, every sudden gust of passion to

drive them from *the hope* and end of *their calling*, argues an extreme depravity of mind, and deserves a harsher name than we commonly give to this conduct.

However, soften it to ourselves, as we will, under any fashionable denomination, the *spirit* must be cured of this vice, or the *promises* of the Gospel are lost upon us. And the proper remedy is but one. We must resolve, at all events, to acquire the contrary habit of consideration. We must meditate much and often on what we believe: we must force our minds to dwell upon it: we must converse more with ourselves, how bad company soever we take that to be, and less with the world, which so easily dissipates our thoughts, and oversets our best resolutions.

If we would but every day set apart a small portion of our time, were it but a few minutes, to supplicate the grace of God, and to say seriously to ourselves; *I believe the promises, and I acknowledge the authority of the gospel*; (and less than this, who can think excusable in any man, whatever his condition of life may be, that calls himself a Christian?) this short and easy discipline, regularly pursued, and, on no pretence whatever, intermitted,

would presently effect the cure we so much want, and restore the sickly mind to its health and vigour.

3. Still, there may be a general belief in the promises of the Gospel, and a good degree of attention to them, and yet men may be but little impressed by what they thus believe and consider. This affection of the mind is sometimes experienced, but has hardly acquired a distinct name. Let us call it, if you please, a **DEADNESS, OR INSENSIBILITY OF HEART**; which, so far as it proceeds from natural constitution, is a misfortune only; but, when cherished or even neglected by us, it becomes a fault.

The danger of it lies here, lest by seeing with indifference the most important objects of our hopes and fears, we come by degrees to neglect or overlook them; to question, perhaps, the reality of them; or, to lose, however, the benefit which even a calm view of these objects, when frequently set before the mind, must needs convey to us.

The rule in this case plainly is, To prescribe to ourselves such a regimen as is proper to correct this spiritual lethargy: that is, to stimulate the sluggish mind by the most poignant

reflexions; to bring the objects of our faith as near and close to us as we can; to paint them in the liveliest colours of the imagination, which, when touched itself, easily sets fire to the affections; and, above all, to keep our eye intently and steadily upon them.

We may see the utility of this regimen, in a case which is familiar to every body.

When we look forward to the end of life, it appears at a vast distance. The many, or the few years, that lie before us, take up a great deal of room in the mind, and present the idea of a long, and almost interminable duration. Hence the fatal security in which we most of us live, as conceiving that, when so much time is on our hands, we need not be solicitous to make the most of it.

But that all this is a mere delusion, we may see by looking back on the time that is already elapsed. We have lived in this world, twenty, forty, it may be, many more years: yet, in reflecting on this space, we find it just nothing: the several parts of it run together in the mind, and the first moment of our existence seems almost to touch upon the present. Now, by anticipating this experience, and applying it to the remaining period of our lives,

we may satisfy ourselves, that the years to come will pass away as rapidly, and, when gone, will appear as inconsiderable as the past; and the effect of this anticipation must be, to convince us, that no part of this brief term is to be trifled with, or unimproved.

Then, again, we have the power of imaging to ourselves, in a very lively manner, the circumstances in which death surprises very many thoughtless persons every day; and what we should feel in their situation.

Lay then these two things together; make *the shortness of life*, and *the terrors of an unprepared death*, the frequent object of your meditation; and see if the most callous mind will not presently be much affected by them.

4. The fourth and last vice of the spirit, which I have time to mention to you, is rather, perhaps, to be accounted a complication of vices. But what I mean is that unhappy turn of mind which prompts many persons to elude the effects of faith, reflexion, and even a lively sense, in matters of religion, by certain tricks of SOPHISTRY, which they practise on themselves. They believe, and they would gladly obtain, the promises of the gospel, but

repentance, they suppose, will supply the place of uniform obedience: they will repent, but not yet; there is time enough, and fitter for that purpose, when passion cools, and the heat of life is over: or, they fancy to themselves an inexhaustible fund of goodness in their religion; the terms of it may not be rigidly insisted upon; the promises may not be so conditional as they seem to be; and the threats, without doubt, will not be punctually executed. At the worst, there is no need to despair of mercy, considering the frailty of man, and the infinite merits of the Redeemer.

Such reasonings as these argue a depraved mind, and tend, further, to deprave it. But your good sense prevents me in the confutation of them. I would only observe, that this vice is, as I said, a complicated one: for, together with the unfairness and disingenuity (which belongs to all sophistry, as such) we have here united (what is too common in religious sophistry) a great deal of unwarrantable presumption.

The remedy in the case is, To cultivate in ourselves a modest and ingenuous love of truth; an awful reverence of the revealed word,

and that simplicity of heart which excludes all artifice and refinement.

From these so pernicious vices of the spirit, then, that is, from a *fluctuating faith*, an *inconsiderate levity*, an *inapprehensive deadness of heart*, and a *perverse sophistical abuse of the understanding*, let us emancipate ourselves by a firm, attentive, vigorous, and ingenuous dependance on the promises of the gospel; from these defilements, I say, in particular (having shaken off the other more sordid corruptions of the *flesh and spirit*) let us anxiously *cleanse* our minds, with the view of *perfecting holiness*, as the text admonishes, IN THE FEAR OF GOD.

This last clause is by no means an insignificant one; as ye will see by recollecting, that the true temper of a Christian is, hope mixed with fear; *hope*, to animate his courage, and *fear*, to quicken his attention. For, unless this principle of fear, not a servile, but filial fear, inform the soul and invigorate its functions, we shall be far from PERFECTING HOLINESS; we shall at best exhibit in our lives but some broken, detached, incoherent parcels of it. A steady, uniform piety, such as begets that *hope, which maketh not*

ashamed^e, is only kept up by a constant watchfulness and circumspection; which our probationary state plainly demands, and which nothing but *the fear of God* effectually secures.

ε ἡ δὲ ἐλπίς ἂ καταισχύνει. Rom. v. 5.

S E R M O N XXXIII.

PREACHED APRIL 8, 1776.

1. TIM. iii. 16.

*Without controversy great is the mystery of
godliness : God was manifest in the flesh ;
justified in the spirit ; seen of Angels ;
preached to the Gentiles ; believed on in the
world ; received up into glory.*

THE inspired writers, sometimes, dilate on the articles of the Christian religion ; pursue them separately, and at length, for the fuller and more distinct information of the faithful. Sometimes, again, they give them to us, as it were, in clusters : they accumulate their awful doctrines and discoveries, to strike and astonish the mind with their united force.

This *last* is the method of the text, which I shall a little open and explain; but so as to conform myself to the Apostle's purpose in giving a brief collective view of Christianity, that, the whole of it being seen together, we may be the more sensibly affected by it.

1. This *great mystery of godliness* opens with—**GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.**

When the scheme of man's redemption was laid, it was not thought fit that an Apostle, a prophet, a man like ourselves, no nor an Angel or Archangel, should be the instrument of it; but that the *word of God*, the *Son of God*, nay *God* himself (as he is here and elsewhere^f called) should take this momentous office upon him: that heaven should stoop to earth, and that the divine nature should condescend to leave the mansions of glory, inshrine itself in a fleshly tabernacle, should be *made man*, should *dwell among us*, and *die for us*.

If you ask, why may not a man, or angel, have sufficed to execute this purpose of man's

^f For which reason it is not necessary for me to enter into the controversy, that divides the critics, concerning the authentic reading of this part of the text.

salvation; or, if only this divine person was equal to it, why he did not rather assume a glorified, than our mortal body; why it was necessary for him to inherit all our infirmities (sin only excepted,) and yet be conceived, in so extraordinary a manner of the holy Spirit; nay, and why he should be so conceived, and born of a *virgin* (a miracle of that peculiar sort as scarce seems capable of proof, and, in fact, is only proved indirectly by the subsequent life and character and history of this divine person): If you ask these, and a hundred other such questions, I answer readily and frankly, *I know not*: But then consider, that *my* ignorance, that is, any man's ignorance, of the reasons why these things were done, is no argument, not so much as a presumption against there being reasons, nay, and the best reasons, for so mysterious a dispensation. Consider, too, that these mysteries no way contradict any clear principle of your own reason: all that appears is, that you should not have expected, previously to the revelation of it, such a design to be formed; and that, now it is revealed, you do not understand why it was so conducted. But we are just in the same state of ignorance, with regard to almost every part of the divine conduct. This world, so unquestionably the work of infinite wisdom and goodness, is not,

in numberless respects, what we should expect it to have been; of many parts we see not the use and end; in some, there is the appearance of deformity; in others, of mischief; in all, when attentively considered, of something above, or beside, our apprehension.

Such then being the case of the natural world, why may not the moral have its depths and difficulties? You see God in the creation: why not in redemption? In the former, he condescends, according to our best philosophy, to manifest himself in the meanest reptile, all whose instincts he immediately prompts, and whose movements he directs and governs: why then might he not manifest himself in man, though in another manner, and by an union with him still more close and intimate?

But I pursue these questions no farther. It is enough that, admitting the fact, on the faith of the revelation itself, we see a wonderful goodness and condescension in this whole procedure: that we understand the importance of having such a saviour and guide and example of life, as *God manifest in the flesh*; that we are led to conceive, with astonishment, of the dignity of man, for whose sake the Godhead assumed our nature, and, at the same time,

with consternation, of the guilt of man, for the atonement of which this assumption, with all its consequences, became necessary.

God manifest in the flesh, is then the *first* chapter of this mysterious book: and yet, as mysterious as it is, full of the clearest and most momentous instruction.

2. The *second* is, that this wonderfully compounded person was JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT: that is, *by*, or *through* the Spirit: another mystery, which, however, acquaints us with this fact, that a third divine person ministered in the great work of our redemption.

And his ministry was seen in directing the ancient prophets to foretell the Redeemer's coming^a; in accomplishing his miraculous conception^b; in assisting at his baptism^c; in conducting him through his temptation^d; in giving him the power to cast out devils, which is expressly said to be *by the Spirit of God*^e; in raising him from the dead, by which event he was *declared the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness*^f; in descend-

^a 2 Pet. i. 21.

^b Matth. i. 18.

^c Matth. iii. 16.

^d Matth. iv. i.

^e Matth. xii. 28.

^f Rom. i. 4. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

ing on his disciples on the day of Pentecost^g; in bestowing diversities of miraculous gifts^h upon them, for the confirmation of his doctrine, and the propagation of it through the world; and lastly in sanctifying and illuminating the faithful of all times and placesⁱ.

In all these ways (and if there be any other) Jesus was *justified*, that is, his commission was authenticated by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Here, again, many curious questions may be asked: but what we clearly learn is, the awful relation we bear to the Holy Ghost, as co-operating in the scheme of man's redemption; and the infinite dignity of that scheme itself, the execution of which required the agency of that transcendantly divine person.

Hitherto the mystery of godliness has been doubly mysterious, being wrapped up in the incomprehensible essence of the Deity. It now stoops, as it were, through this cloud of glory, and gives itself to be somewhat distinctly apprehended by us.

^g Acts ii. 4.

^h 1 Cor. xii. 11.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 11. John xv. 26.

3. In the *next* view we have of the Redeemer, as being SEEN OF ANGELS.

We have some grounds from analogy to conclude, that, as there is a scale of beings below us, there is also one above us: at least, the conclusion has been pretty generally drawn: and the belief almost universal of such a scale ascending from us to God, though the uppermost round of it still be at an infinite distance from his throne. But the direct, indeed the only solid proof of its existence, is the revealed word, which speaks of *Angels* and *Archangels*, nay *myriads*^k of them, disposed into different ranks, and rising above each other in a wonderful harmony and proportion.

Such is the idea which scripture gives us of the invisible world. Now, to raise our minds to some just apprehension of the great scheme of our redemption, it represents that world, as being put in motion by that scheme, as attentive and *earnest to look into it*^l: and, to exalt our conceptions of the Redeemer himself, it speaks of that world as being in subjection to him; of all its inhabitants, the highest in place and dignity, as serving in his retinue, and paying homage to his person^m.

^k Heb. xii. 22.

^l 1 Pet. i. 10, 11, 12.

^m Heb. i. 6.

They accordingly ministered to him in this capacity, when they celebrated his birth in the fields of Bethlehemⁿ; when they took part with him in his triumphs over the adversary in the desert^o: when they flew to strengthen him in his last agonies^p; when they attended, in their robes of state to grace his resurrection^q: and when they ranked themselves, with all observance, about him, as he went up into heaven^r.

Of the angels, then, he was seen, on all these, and doubtless other, occasions. But how was he seen? With love and wonder unspeakable, when they saw their Lord and Master thus humbling himself for the sake of man; when they contemplated this bright effulgence of the Deity, the express image of his person^s, veiling all his glories in flesh, and,

— *low-rooft beneath the skies,*

as our great poet sublimely represents his humiliation^t.

ⁿ Luke ii. 13.

^o Matth. iv. 11.

^p Luke xxii. 43.

^q Matth. xxviii, 3. Luke xxiv. 4. ἐν ἰσθησίσειν ἀγγελίαις.

^r Acts i. 10.

^s Heb. i. 3.

^t Milton.

Still the *mystery* continues, though it now submits itself to the scrutiny of our senses; for it follows,

4. That he was PREACHED TO THE GENTILES.

To enter into the full meaning of this clause, we are to reflect, That, when the nations of the earth had so prodigiously corrupted themselves as to lose the memory of the true religion, and to give themselves over to the most abominable impieties, it pleased God to select one faithful family from the rest of the degenerate world, and in due time to advance it into a numerous people; which he vouchsafed to take into a near relation to himself, and, by a singular policy, to preserve distinct and separate from the surrounding tribes of Idolaters. Henceforth, the Jews (for of that people I speak) considered themselves as the sole favourites of Heaven (as they were, indeed, the sole worshippers of the true God), and all the heathen as the outcasts of its providence.

This notion, in process of time, became so rooted in them, that when Jesus now appeared in Judea, they were ready to engross all his favours to themselves, and thought it strange and incredible, that any part of them should be

conferred on the reprobate heathen. So that he himself was obliged to proceed with much caution in opening the extent of his commission, and St. Paul everywhere speaks of the design to save the Gentiles as the profoundest mystery, as that *which had been kept secret since the world began*^u.

In the mean time, the mercy of God had much larger views, and sent the Messiah to be *the saviour of ALL men, especially of them*, out of every nation, *that believe*^x.

But this mercy, so *mysterious* to the Jews, could not be much less so to the Gentiles, who must feel how disproportioned the blessing was to any deserts of man; and who saw how enormous and how general that corruption was, which in all likelihood must exclude them from it. Thus it might reasonably be matter of *silent wonder*^y, to both parties, to hear *Christ preached to the Gentiles*: only, this *latter* (of which party we ourselves are) might say with a peculiar exultation, what the Jews, even in *glorifying* the Author of it, were not, without some reluctance, brought to acknowledge;

^u Rom. xvi 25.

^x 1 Tim. iv. 10.

^y Acts xi. 18. ἡσύχασαν.

Then hath God, also, to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

And if the surprize be deservedly great to hear Christ *preached to the Gentiles*, it must in all reason grow upon us to find,

5. In the succeeding link of this *mysterious* chain, that he was even BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD; that is, in the world both of Jews and Gentiles; in the former, to a certain extent; and, in the latter, to one which, though not universal, is truly astonishing.

Of the Jews it is affirmed, that *multitudes*^z of them believed: and what especially redounds to their honour and to our benefit, is, that out of the Jewish believers were taken those favoured servants of God, that opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, and became his instruments in conveying the light of the Gospel to all generations. And, considering the inveterate prejudices of that people, such a measure of faith, and such effects of it, could not well have been expected from that quarter.

But then, for the Gentiles, it is astonishing to observe how quick and how general their

^z Acts v. 14.

conversion to the faith was: so that all men seemed to *press*^a into the kingdom of God, and, as it were, to *take it by violence*^b. For, within forty years from the death of Christ, the sound of the Gospel *had gone out into all lands*^c; and, in less than three centuries from that event, the empire itself, that is, all the civilized part of the earth, became Christian: and this, in spite of every obstruction, which the lusts of men, operating with all their force, and confederated together, could throw in the way of the new religion.

So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed^d! and it still prevails: not every where indeed, nor any where to that degree in which, we trust, it one day will; but to a certain degree over a great part of the globe, and especially in the more enlightened parts of it: an evident proof, that reason is congenial with faith; and that nothing but ignorance, corrupted by vice, can hold out against the cross of Jesus.

Yet this power of the cross must be thought prodigious; since its pretensions are so high, and its doctrine so pure, that, in a world over-

^a Luke xvi. 16.

^b Matth. xi. 12.

^c Ps. xix. 4. Matth. xxiv. 14.

^d Acts xix. 20.

grown with presumption and vice, it could never have made its way to so much consideration, if the hand of God had not been with it.

Such is the mystery of Christ *believed on in the world!*

But now the Apostle, who had digressed a little from his main subject, or rather had anticipated some part of it, returns, from the effects which Christianity was to have on the world, to the person of its divine Author; who, as it follows in the

6. *Sixth*, and last clause of this panegyrick, WAS RECEIVED UP INTO GLORY.

And this circumstance was proper to shut up so stupendous a scene. It opened with a view of *God manifest in the flesh*, degraded, eclipsed, obscured by this material vestment; yet emerging out of its dark shade through the countenance of the *spirit*, and by the ministry of *angels*; then shining out in the face of the *Gentiles*, and gradually ascending to his meridian height in the conversion of the whole *world*. Yet was this prize of glory to be won by a long and painful conflict with dangers, sufferings, and death; in regard to which last

enemy (the most alarming of all) the Apostle affirms, that *it was not possible for so divine a person to be holden of it*^e. It follows, therefore, naturally and properly (to vindicate the Redeemer's honour, and to replace him in that celestial state, from which he had descended), that, in his own person, he triumphed over hell and the grave, and went up visibly into heaven; there to sit down at the right hand of the Father, till, his great mediatorial scheme being accomplished, he himself shall voluntarily quit the distinction of his name and place, and GOD SHALL BE ALL IN ALL^f.

On this brief comment on the text, thus far unfolded to you, I have but one reflexion to make. Ye will not derive from it a clearer insight into the reasons of all the wonders presented to you: for I undertook only to lay before you those wonders themselves; not to account to you for them: but, if ye feel yourselves touched with a view of these things; if ye find your hearts impressed with an awful sense of your divine religion, and *nourished*^g in the faith of it, then will ye be in a way to reap that fruit from this discourse, which is better than all wisdom and all knowledge; the

^e Acts ii. 24.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 28.

fruit of HOLINESS, in this short but unspeakably momentous stage of your existence; and of HAPPINESS without measure, and without end, in the kingdom of glory.

† I Tim. iv. 6. ἐντρέφόμενος τοῖς λόγοις τῆς πίστεως, καὶ τῆς καλῆς διδασκαλίας.

S E R M O N XXXIV.

PREACHED MAY 19, 1776.

ISAIAH I. 11.

Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled: This shall ye have of my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.

THE expression, we see, is figurative. By the *fire kindled*, and the *sparks, with which men compass themselves about*, may, indeed, be understood any of those worldly comforts, such as honours, riches, and pleasures, which the generality of men are studious to procure to themselves; and in the *light* of which they love to walk, as being that, which, in their

opinion, contributes most to warm, to cheer, and illustrate human life.

The effect, however, of these comforts, is, that they who possess the largest share of them, and seek for no other, *lie down in sorrow*: that is, their lives are without joy, and their end is without hope. This is the recompense, which they receive from *the hand of God*; as might easily be shewn, if my purpose, at this time, were to enlarge on that common-place in morals, *the unsatisfactory nature of all earthly enjoyments*.

But my design is to engage your thoughts on a different argument, to which the letter of the text more directly leads us. For *light*, in all languages, is the emblem of knowledge; which is to the mind, what that is to the eye: And, the speaker in the text being God himself, we are naturally led to interpret that light, of *religious knowledge*; that genial fire, which, more than the Sun itself, is necessary to warm our spirits, and guide our steps through the cold and dark passage of this life.

The question is, Whether we are to kindle this *fire*, for ourselves; or, whether we should not derive it, if we have it in our power so to

do, immediately from heaven: Whether we shall do best to walk in the light of those few *sparks*, which our Reason is able to strike out for us, on the subject of religion; or, whether it will not be our interest, and should not be our choice, to take the benefit of that pure and steady flame, which Revelation holds out to us.

The text, in a severe, indignant irony, refers us to the former of these expedients, the better to excite our attention to the latter. *Walk*, says the Almighty, addressing himself to the idolaters of human reason, *Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled.* But to what end is this advice given? To one, they little dreamt of, and would surely avoid — *This ye shall have of my hand, in recompense of all your speculations, Ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

It seems, then, to be the purpose of the text, to inculcate this great truth, *That Revelation is the only sure and comfortable guide in matters of religion.* And, to second this purpose, so energetically expressed by the prophet, I would now shew you, that all the *sparks* of human knowledge, on this important subject, are but smoke; and all the *fire*, which human genius or industry can kindle at the altar of

human reason, ice itself; when compared with the light and heat of divine Revelation.

I SUPPOSE, that we are all convinced of what the voice of nature so loudly proclaims, that there is a God, a moral governor of the world; and that we are intimately related to him, and dependant upon him. The sum of our religious inquiries will then be

I. *What we are to do, in order to obtain the favour of that God: And*

II. *What that favour is, which, when we have done our best, we have reason to expect from him.*

Now, it will be easy to shew, that the issue of our best reason, in the former of these enquiries, is suspense and doubt; and despair, or disappointment, in the latter. It will appear, that we cannot assure ourselves of the means, by which the favour of Heaven is to be obtained; and that the highest degree of favour, we have a right to claim, is not that to which we aspire. So fated are we, when trusting to the faint, delusive light of our own minds, on this great, this only important subject, *to lie down in sorrow.*

I. To begin with the consideration of *what we are to do, in order to obtain the favour of God.*

That we are to *worship* God, will be allowed by all reasonable theists.

But in what way is he to be worshipped? By GIFTS AND OFFERINGS? So a great part of the world has believed. But, by *what* gifts and offerings, *how*, and *when*, and *where*, and *by whom* presented? Are *all* indifferent to him, and is no preference due to some above others? or, may not my offering lose its value, unless made in a certain *manner*? Is it of no moment with what *rites* I tender my gifts to God? Are all *seasons* equally fit; are all *places* equally pure; are all *persons* equally hallowed, for the oblation of them?

Or, again, are gifts and offerings, to the lord of all things, impertinent and vain? And is my reverence of him to be expressed by acts of SELF-DENIAL, PENANCE, and MORTIFICATION? So the pious of all times have very generally conceived. But by *what* penance, to what *end* referred, to what *degree* carried, and how *long* continued?

We may think of these questions, and of ourselves, what we will. But such questions, as these, have been asked by wise men, and, when those wise men had only to take council of their own reason, have rarely been answered to their satisfaction.

Or, let us advance a step further, and say that our dependance on God is to be signified, and his favour obtained, by PRAYER: that gifts are mercenary, and penance servile; both, a manifest affront to the all-sufficient and all-merciful Deity; and that the supplications of a devout mind are the only incense fit for heaven. Be it so: Good and wise men have at all times thought highly of prayer; and are generally agreed in recommending it as the most becoming expression of human piety. But here again, doubts and difficulties meet us. *How* are we to pray, and for *what*?

Are all *forms* of address equally acceptable to him, we adore? The Gentile world thought not: they were solicitous to petition their Gods in a certain style, and to gain their ear by some favourite appellation. Let this, again, pass for a scruple of superstition. Still, is it indifferent with what sentiments we approach the throne of

God, and with what ideas of his nature and attributes we prostrate ourselves before him? If those sentiments or ideas be not suited, in some degree, to the majesty of that great being, is there no danger that we may dishonour, may injure, may insult him by our addresses? May not our very prayers become affronts, and our praises, blasphemies?

And is it so easy to think justly on this mysterious subject, as that reason, every man's own reason, can instruct him? What if two or three divine men of the pagan world guessed right? Was their opinion any rule, was it even any authority, to the bulk of worshippers^a?

But say, that it was their own fault to misconceive of the Deity: still, for *what* shall they pray to him? For every thing, they want or wish? But thus, they would most commonly pray amiss, for what they should pray against, for what would corrupt and hurt them.

^a "What this or that philosopher delivered, was but a saying of his. Mankind might hearken to it, or reject it, as they pleased; or, as it suited their interest, passions, principles, or humours. They were under no obligation; the opinion of this, or that philosopher, was of no authority." LOCKE, V. II. p. 578. fol. Lond. 1759.

These difficulties, with regard both to the mode and matter of this duty, appeared so great to the old masters of wisdom, that some^b of them thought it the highest effort of human wit, to form a reasonable prayer; and others supposed that none but God himself could instruct man how to do it^c.

There is a way, indeed, to cut these difficulties short; which is, by maintaining, as some^d have done, that prayer is no duty at all; but a vain superfluous observance, justly ranked with the fancies of superstition: that God is not honoured by any external, no, nor by any mental, applications to him: that a good conscience^e is true piety, and a spotless life, the only religion.

Admit this exalted idea of divine worship; yet, where shall we find, among the sons of Adam, one such worshipper? Who shall lay claim to that conscience, or this life? Where is the man, that passes a single day, an hour

^b The Stoics. 'Ο σοφὸς — μόνος εἰδὼς ἔυξασθαι. See Casaub. ad Sat. 11. Persii.

^c Plato. Alcib. 11.

^d The Epicureans of old and modern times.

^e — incoctum generoso pectus honesto.

almost, without doing that which he ought not to do, or omitting somewhat he ought to have done? And what multitudes are there, who cover themselves with infamy, and with crimes?

And what shall the trembling mind do, when it looks up, as at times it cannot help doing, to that God, who *is of purer eyes, than to behold iniquity?*

Repent, it will be said: that species of piety is all-powerful with Heaven; it can efface sin, and restore tranquillity.

Here, again, the general sense of mankind runs another way. For, if it be so clear, that repentance alone has this virtue, how came the idea of atonement and expiation into the world? and whence the almost universal practice of *propitiatory sacrifices?*

It is easy, no doubt, to brand this disposition of the human mind, as so many others, with the opprobrious name of superstition. Let us see, then, what the merits and claims are, of *Repentance itself*.

A man offends against God, and the sense of his own mind. On reflexion (what can he do

less?) he repents; and (if it please God) is forgiven. But passion revives; he offends again, and repents again; and so goes on, through his whole life, in a course of alternate transgression, and repentance. And is this all the claim he has to be received, at length, into the favour of God, that he never sinned, though he did it every day, but he was sorry for it?

Yes, you will say, *If my brother trespass against me seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again and repent, I am bound by the law of Christ himself to forgive him*^f. And will God be less placable, than his creature man is required to be^g?

This rule of conduct is very fit to be observed by one offender towards another: but is it past a doubt that it will, that it must take place between God and man? WE are bound to this repeated, this continual forgiveness of others, by a sense of our common infirmities. HE has a government to support, of what extent, over what worlds, and how connected with this, no man may say: And what would become of government in this world, if every convict was to be pardoned on repentance?

^f Luke xvii. 4.

^g See this argument urged by Mr. Locke, V. II. p. 574. fol. Lond. 1759.

Nor is it enough to reply, that human governors cannot pronounce on the sincerity of such repentance. If they could, they would certainly not regulate their proceedings by that consideration. The law has denounced a penalty on such a crime: And the public interest requires that the penalty, for example-sake, be inflicted.

Something, like this, may be true of God's moral government. No man can say, it is not. And therefore repentance, as plausible as its plea may appear, can never free the guilty mind from all apprehension.

But another dreadful circumstance attends this matter. We often satisfy ourselves, that we repent of a past crime: Yet we commit that crime again; perhaps the very next hour. Can we call that repentance sincere? Or, have we a right to conclude that God, who sees through all the prevarication and duplicity of our hearts, must accept such repentance, on our profession of it? Let what virtue there will be in repentance, when seen by the unerring eye of God to be true and unfeigned, how shall man reckon on the efficacy of it, when he may so easily mistake, and cannot certainly know the real worth and character of what he calls repentance?

Here then, whether we consider what the moral attributes of the Deity, and his righteous government, may demand; or whether we regard the weakness and inefficacy of our best purposes; there is room enough for the terrors of religion to invade and possess the mind, in spite of all that Reason can do to repell, or dislodge them from it.

After all, in contemplation of that infinite mercy which surrounds the throne of God, and of the infirmity incident to frail man, I am willing to suppose (as it is our common interest to do) that *repentance*, at all times, and how oft soever renewed, is a ground, on which he may reasonably build fair hopes and chearful expectations. To repent, is always the best thing we can do: It is always a conduct right in itself; and, as such, is intitled, we will say, on the principles of natural religion, to the divine acceptance.

But what does that ACCEPTANCE import? *The reward of eternal life? A remission of all punishment; or, only an abatement of it?* Here, again, fresh difficulties start up, and come to be considered,

II. Under the second general head of this discourse; in which it was proposed to inquire,

What that favour is, which, when we have done our best to recommend ourselves to God, we have reason to expect at his hands?

1. If presumptuous man could learn to estimate himself at his true worth, he might perhaps see reason to conclude, that his highest moral merit can pretend to no more, than to some *abatement* of present or future punishment.

Let him calculate how oft, how knowingly, how willfully he hath offended; and, on the other hand, when he did his duty, how coldly, how remissly, how reluctantly he did it: with what a gust of passion he disobeyed; and with what indifference he repented: with how full a consent of his mind, with what deliberation, and against what conviction, he sinned; and then, again, with what hesitation, by what degrees, in what circumstances, and upon what motives, he recovered himself from any bad habit: In a word, how full and complete and contagious his vices have been; and how faint and partial and ineffective, his best virtues: Let him, I say, calculate all this, and then tell us where is the stock of merit, on the balance of the account, that should encourage him to do more than hope that some part of the punish-

ment, he hath justly incurred, may by a merciful judge be struck off, in consideration of his virtues? If such a man recovered his health, when he left his intemperance; or his credit in the world, when he shook hands with his injustice; or, if his penitence could avail so far as to shorten the term, or qualify the rigour, of his sufferings in some other state of being, would he not have reason to think he had all the recompense he deserved? Could most men, at least, on a strict scrutiny of their hearts and lives, carry their pretensions higher? But,

2. But let us be indulgent to human virtue, and suppose it pure and active enough to work out all the guilt, which vice had contracted, could it do more than cancel the punishment due to vice, and should we be authorized to expect more than a *full remission* of it? Suppose, that after a long life, checquered with good and bad actions, but in such sort as that the good equalled the bad, and perfectly atoned for them (and which of us will say, that this is not a favourable supposition?); suppose, I say, that after such a life, as this, the whole man were suffered to fall into a state of insensibility, that all his powers and faculties were suspended, or the man himself utterly extin-

guished, could we complain of this allotment, or could reason pretend that it was not according to the rules of strict justice ?

3. Still I agree to make a further concession to the pride of Virtue. Let the moral qualities of some men be so excellent, and the tenour of their lives so pure, as to entitle them to a *positive reward* from the great searcher of hearts and inspector of human actions : would not the daily blessings of this life be a suitable recompense for such desert ; would not health, and prosperity, and reputation, and peace of mind, be an adequate return for their best services ? Or, if all this did not satisfy their claims, could they require more than such a portion of happiness in a future state, as should correspond to their merits, and make them full amends for all the sacrifices they here made to Conscience and to Virtue ? And might not a small degree of such happiness, and for a short term, be an equivalent for such sacrifices ? Could they dream of living *for ever*, and of living *happily* for ever in heaven ; and call such a reward, as this, a debt, a claim of right, which could not justly be withheld from them ? Could any man in his senses pretend, even to himself, that a Virtue of sixty or seventy years, though ever so perfect, ever

so constant, deserved immortal life in bliss and glory? Incredible: impossible: the merit and the recompense are too widely disjointed, the disproportion between them is too vast, to give the least colour of reason to such expectations. A Saint, or a Martyr, has no claim of right to so immense a reward, so transcendent a felicity.

'Tis true, Christianity gives us these hopes, which Reason forwardly assumes, and makes her own; forgetting at the same time, or unthankfully slighting, the only grounds on which they are founded. For, though eternal life be promised to favoured man in the Gospel, it is there promised to him, not as a debt, but as a free gift; and that, not in consideration of his good works, but of his faith in Jesus.

See then, to what the hopes of nature, the conclusions of reason and philosophy, amount, on this interesting subject. We are in the hands of an all-wise and all-righteous God, and are undone without his favour. Yet how that favour is to be obtained, we know not; or, if we do know, we are unable of ourselves to obtain it in the degree, we wish, and to the ends, for which we aspire to it. Our best speculations on the *means* of propitiating Heaven, are mixed with

uncertainty ; and our best *hopes* dashed with mistrust and suspicion. For what man is so righteous as to have perfect confidence in his good works ; or, so sanguine, as to think heaven the due reward of them ? And yet will any thing, short of this, content our impatient desires ? Should our virtues merit no more than some abatement of future misery, so justly due to our innumerable ill deserts, how sad a prospect have we before us ? or, if they do but free us from punishment, what man is so abject as not to shudder at the thought of extinction or insensibility ? or, lastly, if they supply some faint hope of future reward, what generous man but wishes more to himself, than a slight, a precarious, and short-lived happiness ; beyond which, as we have seen, he has no right to extend his expectations ?

If the Gentiles, who had only the light of Nature to conduct them, had no way to get quit of these doubts and fears, their condition was certainly unhappy, but would bespeak the mercy of God : their disadvantages and distresses would be allowed for, and considered by him. But for those, who have now the light of Heaven shining about them, and yet chuse to walk in the dim, disastrous twilight of their own reason, what must be their folly, as

well as misery ? I say, their *misery*. For this last is no secret to observing men, notwithstanding the airs of gaiety and satisfaction, they sometimes assume ; and indeed deserves the tenderest pity, though their perverse *folly* be apt to excite a different passion.

But to conclude : It is enough to have shewn, in justification of the sacred text, that they who *walk in the light of their own fire, and in the sparks which they have kindled*, have this recompense of their choice, allotted to them by the hand of God, and the nature of things, *That they do and must lie down in sorrow.*

To you, who have determined more wisely to govern yourselves by faith, and not by Reason only ; who rejoice to walk in the clear sunshine of the blessed Gospel, and not in the malignant light of philosophical speculation, To you, I say, the reward of your better conduct, is, that ye know how to recommend yourselves to the favour of God ; and ye know what to expect from that favour : Ye understand that, by FAITH AND REPENTANCE, ye have peace of mind in this transitory life, and assured hopes of immortal unspeakable felicity, reserved for you in the heavens.

SERMON XXXV.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 15, 1767.

2 COR. iv. 3.

If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

THE text implies, that the evidence, with which Christianity is attended, may fail of convincing the minds of some men. And indeed from the time that *the Sun of righteousness* rose upon the earth, there have always been those, who could not, or would not, be enlightened by Him.

Now it might be a question, whether this effect were owing to the nature of the evidence

itself, or to some obscurity in the manner of proposing it. This, I say, might have been a question, even among Christians themselves, if the Apostle had not determined it to our hands. He who was fully instructed in the truths of the Gospel, knew the evidence, with which they were accompanied, was enlightened by the same spirit that had inspired them, and had great experience in the different tempers and capacities of men, roundly asserts that Infidelity has no countenance, either from within or without, neither from the sort or degree of evidence, by which the Christian Revelation is supported, nor from any mysterious conveyance of it; but that, universally, the fault lies in those, who do not receive it. *If the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*: to those, who would not be convinced by any evidence whatsoever.

What the evidences of Christianity, in fact, are, and how abundantly sufficient for the conviction of all reasonable men, I shall not now enquire. The subject is fitter for a volume, than a discourse in this place. Let it be supposed, on St. Paul's authority, that those evidences are sufficient; still ye may be curious to know, and it may tend to the

establishment of your faith to understand, how it has come to pass, that so much light could be resisted.

To this question a pertinent answer has been given from the prejudices and passions, from the vices and corruptions of unbelievers; it being no new thing that men should *love darkness rather than light*, when *their deeds are*, and when they have resolved with themselves they shall be, *evil*^a. For, as our Lord himself argues in this case, *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd: But he that doth the Truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be manifested, that they are wrought in God*^b.

But then it has been replied, that, though Vice may be many times the ground of infidelity, and the condemnation of such men be just, yet that some, too, have disbelieved from no such motives; that the Gospel has been rejected by persons, who appear to have been men of large and liberal minds, as free, as others, from all perverse prejudices, and as little subject to any gross vice or passion: Nay, that, in the class of unbelievers, there have

^a John iii. 19.

^b Ibid. 20, 21.

been those who have distinguished themselves as much by the purity of their lives, as the brightness of their understandings.

All this may be true ; and yet our Saviour affirms, *that he, who believeth not, is condemned already*^c : and St. Paul in the text, to the same purpose, *that if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*. There must needs, then, be some latent cause of this strange fact ; some secret depravity lurking in the mind of those, who disbelieve the Gospel, though appearances be thus fair and flattering. And, though Christian Charity be not forward to *think evil* of his neighbour, yet in this case we have reason to suspect it : and what we suspect, we may perhaps find, in a VICE so secret and insinuating, that it creeps upon men unawares ; so congenial, as it were, to our depraved nature, that hardly any man can be sure of his being wholly free from it ; and so ingenious in disguising itself, as to pass upon others, nay upon the man possessed by it, for one of his best qualities.

By these characters, ye will easily see I speak of self-love, or rather the vicious exertion of it.

^c John iii. 18.

in what we call, PRIDE: A vice, which may as fatally obstruct our pursuit of Truth, as any the most vulgar immorality; and the rather, because it is not easily suspected or acknowledged by us.

This vice then it may be, that *hides the Gospel from those* better sort of men, *to whom it is hid.* They had need examine themselves well, for it assumes, as I said, the most imposing forms. Who would look for it, in the cultivation of the mind, and the love of Virtue? Yet in either of these, it may lie concealed: and an inquirer into the truth of the most rational, and the purest of all religions, may be prejudiced against it by a double Pride, by the PRIDE OF REASON, and the PRIDE OF VIRTUE.

I. FIRST, *Infidelity may proceed from the Pride of Reason.*

When it pleased God to bestow the faculty of Reason on his creature, Man, he intended that this substitute of himself should be the guide of life, and the handmaid of Religion. And that it might serve to these purposes, it was made sagacious enough, if honestly exerted, to lead him to some competent knowledge of his Maker, and of his moral duty, and

to judge of the pretensions of any further light from Heaven, which might be graciously vouchsafed to him.

Man, proud of this free Gift, was in haste to make trial of its strength ; and finding it could do something, too easily concluded it could do every thing. Yet its weakness soon appeared ; first, in man's transgression, and consequent forfeiture of another free Gift, that of immortality ; and next, in the portentous errors he fell into, both in respect of virtue and religion. For God, who had graciously intended for him, in due time, another and safer guide, to prepare him for the reception of it, and to convince him, in the mean time, how much it was wanted, had suffered him to abuse this, to the worst purposes, of immorality, and idolatry : by both which the earth was generally overspread for many ages, and even in the most enlightened times, notwithstanding his Reason might, and should have taught him better.

But God's wisdom and goodness foresaw this abuse, and provided, from the first, for the correction of it. He had signified his purpose from the moment of man's transgression, and afterwards by a gradual opening of his scheme,

in many successive revelations ; all terminating in that universal redemption of mankind by the sacrifice, and through the Gospel, of his Son. This last and greatest instance of the divine love for man, it might be expected, after so much experience of his own debility and folly, he would gladly and thankfully receive ; and, that he might be qualified to discern the hand of God from the practices of fallible and designing men, was one main end, as I said, which God designed in lighting up the lamp of Reason in him.

But now this boasted Guide, though found to be poor and weak, grew proud and presumptuous. It would not only judge of the credentials of divine Revelation (which was its proper office, and without which faculty of judging there could be no security from the endless impostures of fanaticism and superstition, but not content with this power) it would decide peremptorily on the nature and fitness of the Revelation itself ; and would either admit none, or such only, as it should perfectly comprehend.

Here, then, Reason forgot its own use, and power : its use, which was to bring him to the acknowledgement of a divine Religion ; and

its power, which did not enable him to judge of the infinite counsels of God, but to try whether any such were revealed to him. In a word, he forgot that his utmost capacity extended no farther than just to see whether the proposed Revelation were such as might come from God, as contradicting no clear and certain principles of reason, and whether the evidences were such as proved that it did so. If it contained nothing repugnant to right Reason, that is, to a prior light derived from the same source of Truth, it might come from Heaven ; if the attestations of it were clear and convincing, it must proceed from that quarter. To try its credibility and authority, was then within the province of Reason : to determine of its absolute necessity and fitness, and to explore the depth and height of those counsels, on which it is framed, was above its reach and comprehension.

Yet Reason assumed to herself, too generally, this latter office ; and this I call, the PRIDE of Reason. Hence all its wanderings and miscarriages ; from this perverse application of its powers arose all the heresies that have distracted the Christian Church, and all the infidel systems that have been invented to overthrow it. In both cases, men would be wise *above, or against, what was written.*

Of the Heresies, I have nothing to say at this time. They appear at large in the ecclesiastical historian. Of the dreams of infidelity, as arising from the fumes of pride, so much is to be said, as my present subject requires of me, but this in as few words as possible.

The pride of Reason has then pronounced (as it operated at different times, and on different tempers), that Revelation is unnecessary, because Reason could see and discover by its own light all that was needful to our direction and happiness—that, if it were wanted by us, it was impossible to be given consistently with the laws of nature and experience—that as to that pretended scheme of Revelation, called the Gospel, its morality indeed was pure enough, but that it carried no other internal marks of its divinity: that its doctrines were such as Reason would not expect, and in many cases could not understand: that it talked of divine things in a manner that was strange and extraordinary; of a purpose to redeem mankind which, if it were needful at all, might have been effected by more rational and less operose methods; and to save and sanctify them by such means as seemed fanciful and delusive: that the divine nature was spoken of in high mysterious terms, which puzzle and confound

our Metaphysics ; and that the offices, in which the Godhead was employed, are either degrading, or such as imply an immoderate and inconceivable condescension.

And what then, say others, is the basis on which this incredible Revelation rests? Why on *Miracles*, which we cannot admit, as being violations or suspensions of those laws, by which we know the Supreme Being governs the world ; and on *Prophecies*, which may have been feigned, as many have been, or which imply such a prescience in the Deity of free contingent events, as is perhaps impossible. If the Gospel then is to be admitted as a truly divine Revelation, convince us, that its external proofs are above all doubt and suspicion ; and that all its internal characters are such as lie open to the perfect scrutiny, and entire investigation of our faculties.

Thus does the Pride of Reason vaunt itself, against Reason. For, if to any or all of these objections (on which so many infidel systems hang) we should only say, *that they are nothing to the purpose*, what could the objectors reply to us? If pressed closely, they could only take refuge in this principle, *that no Religion can be divine, all the reasons of*

which are not fully known to us; a principle, for which they have surely no warrant from right Reason. How do they know what is necessary, or fit, or right, with regard to the divine dispensations, I mean (which is the case here) when they only silence, not contradict our Reason? Every thing may be fit and right, and might appear to be so, if the whole scheme of Providence were fully unveiled to us. It must be fit and right, whether we see it or no, if the Religion in question be credibly attested: And the credibility will depend not on our fancies or expectations of I know not what irresistible evidence (which it might be best and wisest not to give) but on the real moment of the arguments, on which it is established.

So that the last effort of Infidelity is only an appeal to the ignorance of mankind; which proves nothing but the necessity of a long-forgotten virtue, Modesty, in our researches into Religion.

We see then how the *Pride of Reason* has betrayed presumptuous men into a disbelief of Revelation, and how true it is that, *if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*, as well by *this* means, as by any other.

II. But, secondly, there is A PRIDE OF VIRTUE, as well as of Reason: and by this Pride, too, (such is the infirmity of our common nature) *the Gospel may be hid from us.*

On whatever foundation a man chuses to build his moral system, he easily convinces himself of the worth and excellence of moral action. The reasonableness, the utility, and the beauty of Virtue are so conspicuous, that even the vicious look up to her with respect, and the virtuous easily grow enamoured of her. Thus it came to be among the extravagances of the Stoics, its best friends in the pagan world, that virtue was not only the perfection of man's nature, but that it raised him in some sense, above the Divine^d. And to make their arrogant system all of a piece, they further maintained that this super-celestial virtue, in which they gloried, was their own proper acquisition; that they derived it wholly from themselves, and that God did not, and could not give it^e.

^d Ferte fortiter: hoc est, quo Deum anteceditis: Ille extra patientiam malorum est, vos supra patientiam. *Sen. de Prov. c. vi.*

^e *Cic. Nat. Deor. iii. 36.*

This, you will say, was stoical pride; but it is, too commonly, also, the pride of virtue, of whatever denomination. Penetrated with a lively sense of its use and excellence, virtuous men, especially of a certain temperament, take fire from their own heated ideas, and flame out into a kind of moral fanaticism. They consider virtue, as the supreme and only good, absolute in itself, and independant of any other. They exalt and deify themselves in their own imaginations; and, though their language may be more decent, the sense of their hearts is truly stoical.

See, now, whether virtue, under this intoxication, be in a condition to benefit by the sober truths of the Gospel. It presents to us a frightful picture of the moral world; much is said concerning the weakness and inefficacy of moral virtue. This representation, of itself, is disgusting. But one great design of the Gospel was to reform this state of things: And thus far is well: But by what means would it reform it? Why, among others, by Faith and Hope. Yet, in Faith, the proud moralist sees no virtue, at all; and Hope, in his ideas, degrades and servilizes his adored virtue. The Gospel proposes to save us by the sacrifice of Christ: But He acknowledges no need of any

sacrifice; relies, with confidence, on his own merits; and disdains the notion of an intercessor. He holds, that nothing more could be intended by a Revelation, if such were given, than the promotion of our virtue; and that we want not its aid, for that purpose: that we read our duty in the sense of our own minds; which Reason enforces in as high terms, as the Gospel, in a more engaging way, and on principles more sublime and generous.

Above all, the Gospel speaks much of the succours of Grace, as necessary to infuse and to confirm our virtue; a language, which the *Pride* of virtue will not understand: And of a Heaven, and a Hell; by which if any thing more be meant than the proper natural effects of virtue and vice itself, the idea is rejected, as superfluous and even childish,

To such an extreme of folly, and even impiety, may the *Pride* of virtue carry us; and so fatally may *the Gospel be hid from those*, whom this last infirmity of human nature blinds by its specious illusions! And that this is no ideal picture, but one taken from the life, will appear to those who know any thing of human nature; and of the perverse prejudices, by which some ingenious, and other-

wise virtuous men, have suffered themselves to be misled in their religious inquiries^f.

Enough has been said to shew the issue of intellectual and moral *Pride*: And how it comes to pass that men *lose* themselves, who reason, on Religion, without modesty, or would be virtuous without Religion.

The application is short, but striking. It is, 'That men should examine themselves well, before they presume to think slightly of the Gospel. They may learn to suspect the power and influence of their grosser passions, when they see that even these refined ones may corrupt their judgement, and betray them into Infidelity.

The Apostle says expressly, that *if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*: and who, that rejects the Gospel, but must tremble for himself, when his REASON, nay his VIRTUE, may be the instrument of his ruin?

^f Lord Shaftesbury, and others

SERMON XXXVI.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 13, 1774.

1 PETER iii. 15.

—*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh You a reason of the hope, that is in You, with meekness and fear.*

THESE words have been often and justly quoted to prove the rational genius of our religion: but they have sometimes been quoted to prove much more, “The obligation, “that Christians are under, to justify their “religion, in the way of argument, against all “opposers, and to satisfy all the difficulties “and objections, that can be brought against “it.” A magnificent pretension! but surely without authority from the text, as I shall briefly shew, by enquiring,

1. Who the persons are, to whom this direction is given :
2. What that *hope* is, *which is in them*, and concerning which they are supposed to be interrogated: And therefore
3. Lastly, what the proper *answer*, or apology must be, of those persons, when required to give a reason of such hope.

The resolution of these questions will afford us a clear insight into the meaning of the text: and then we shall be enabled to make some pertinent and useful reflexions upon it.

1. St. Peter addresses himself to *the elect strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythinia*—i. e. most probably, to Jewish Christians, dispersed through these countries, in which they were properly *strangers*; though, in some sense, all good men are strangers and sojourners on earth, and therefore the use of this term may not necessarily exclude such Heathen converts to the faith, as lived in those quarters. But whatever be the precise meaning of the term, it is clear, that all persons of this general denomination, or all the *stranger* Christians, residing in the places, here mentioned, are,

without distinction, concerned in this catholic epistle. There is not a word that implies any difference of age, or sex, or education, or rank: not the least regard is had to the office of some, or the qualifications of others: all indiscriminately, of the class specified, who had knowledge and understanding enough to profess themselves Christians, are the objects of the Apostle's address: and of these, universally, is the requisition made, that they be *ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh a reason of the hope that is in them.* But what then

2. Is that *Hope*, of which all such persons were expected and required to render a reason? Plainly the general hope of Christians, the hope of eternal life, the hope of a resurrection from the dead, the blessed hope, in short, of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The context shews, that it was this hope, and this only, of which they were to give an account. For, in the preceding verse, the Apostle had been speaking of the trials which they should undergo for the sake of their religion. Possibly, they were, then, in a state of persecution; or, it was foreseen that they soon would be in that state. *But and if ye suffer,*

says he, *for righteousness sake, happy are ye.* Why? because they knew the *hope* of their calling, and the ample recompense that would be made them in a future life for all such sufferings. Therefore, he advises that they should always have this precious hope present to them, and well established in their minds: nay, and that, for their own better support in the midst of their sufferings, and for the vindication of themselves to others, their persecutors, perhaps, who might ask on what grounds they exposed themselves to such torments, they should have in readiness an *answer*, or apology for their own conduct, setting forth the reason they had to confide in that hope; from which reason it would appear that they acted, as became prudent men, and not as blind, frantic enthusiasts.

It being now seen, to whom the text is directed, and what the *hope*, under consideration, is, we have no difficulty in answering

3. The last question, "What the proper *answer* might, or rather must be, of such persons, when required to give a reason of such hope?"

For what other answer could they give (and this they all might give), than that their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, by whom they had been encouraged to entertain this hope, had shewn himself well able to make it good by his own resurrection? They might say, in the words of the Apostle Paul (who apologized for himself to the Athenians, in like circumstances), We therefore think ourselves happy in suffering for righteousness sake,—*because God hath appointed a day in the 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*^a.

This was an obvious reason of the *hope*, that was in them, and level to all capacities. It was, also, a sufficient reason, if it was any at all, that is, if the fact alledged be true; and, that it was so, they might appeal to the testimony of those, who had seen the Lord and conversed with him, after his resurrection; nay, whom themselves had seen confirming that testimony *by signs and wonders, done in the name of Jesus*.

^a Acts xvii. 31.

We see, then, what is the true and full meaning of the text. The Apostle exhorts those, to whom he writes, all of them, the simpler, as well as more informed, to bear in mind the end of their religion, EVERLASTING LIFE; and the grounds, on which they expected it, the WORD of their divine MASTER, *confirmed to them by them that heard him^b*, and by his rising from the dead.

And now we are at liberty to make some reflexions on the text, which may be useful and instructive to us.

And, first, I observe, as most others have done, that Christians are allowed and encouraged to reason on the subject of their religion, and to build their faith on conviction. For the Apostle's advice is, not to decline the way of argument, but to use such arguments as are cogent and satisfactory. And in this free exercise of the understanding, which is permitted, or rather enjoined to all Christians, the manly genius of our religion is seen, and by it is distinguished from that of every blind and servile superstition. But then,

^b Heb. ii. 3 .

Secondly, I observe, that this work of reason is enjoined, only, with regard to *the hope, that is in us*, that is, to the end and scope of Christianity, and to the authority on which it rests; in other words, with regard to the EVIDENCES of this Religion.

It is true, these evidences are a different thing to different persons, according to their respective situations. To the primitive Christians, such as those to whom the exhortation of the text is addressed, it was evidence sufficient, “That they had the great
 “ facts of the Gospel, especially that decisive
 “ fact, the resurrection of Christ, reported to
 “ them by persons, who had been eye-wit-
 “ nesses of those extraordinary transactions,
 “ or, who had heard them, at least, from
 “ eye-witnesses, and were endowed, besides,
 “ with the power of working miracles in con-
 “ firmation of their testimony.” For in those days, it is to be observed, they, who were commissioned to plant the Gospel in the world, *went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*^c.

^c Mark xvi. 20.

This state of things continued through what is called the Apostolic Age, and perhaps longer, during which time it was easy for the plainest Christian to give such an *answer* to those who required a reason of *the hope that was in him*, as was perfectly satisfactory. But, when the Gospels were admitted by the faithful, as authentic accounts of their Master's history and doctrine, and when the Apostles had further drawn out and explained the principles and proofs of Christianity in their several writings, that is, when the Canon of the New Testament was completed, and generally received (all which was done within the first century from the Christian æra), Then the appeal lay to these scriptures, and the ground of a Christian's persuasion was, the authority of the inspired writers. And now, if believers were asked the reason of *the hope that was in them*, the answer was, "That so it was written " in books, which were in all hands, and 'allowed by all to contain nothing but infallible " truth." Nor could the force of this answer be disputed, when the memory of certain facts was recent, when the places where, and the persons to whom, or for whose use the sacred books were written, could be pointed out, and when the writers of them were known, by the miracles wrought by

them, to have been under the direction of the Holy Ghost.

On the conviction, which this apology carried with it, the world became Christian. But in process of time, and after a course of many ages, it might be doubted whether those books had been transmitted pure and uncorrupted. And under these circumstances the *answer*, being somewhat enlarged, stands thus: "That
" the hope of a Christian is founded on the
" authority of the sacred canon, composed by
" inspired men, as was universally allowed in
" the first ages of Christianity, and not mate-
" rially altered, as we have reason to believe,
" to this day."

The answer given in these three periods, is, you see, very general, because the question is, on what grounds of reason a plain man could justify his profession of Christianity: and the answer, in each case, is a proper one, and of real weight. But the answer of knowing and skilful men is more particular, may indeed be infinitely varied and extended according to the abilities of the answerer; and, from such minute, and laboured apologies much additional light and conviction hath been derived. Still you see the subject of inquiry, is, the

EVIDENCES of Christianity, how different soever in different ages, and in the view of different persons in the same age. All that unbelievers have a right to ask, is, on what grounds we affirm the truth and divinity of our religion: and the sole duty which the text imposes upon us, is to satisfy that question. Their curiosity, and our labour, should not, at least needs not, be extended beyond those bounds. But

Thirdly, what if inquisitive men should go farther, and, when they have set forth the evidences of Christianity to their own satisfaction, and that of others, should proceed to give us a *rationale* of its doctrines: Would not their pains be useful, as tending very much to promote the honour of our divine religion?

Perhaps, they might, if *soberly* employed, and if inquirers would set out with a resolution of stopping in their curious researches, when they had no ideas, or no clear or distinct ones.

But, even with this restriction, *two* things are, further, to be observed. **ONE** is, that no Christian is bound to make this solicitous inquiry into the doctrinal, no, nor into the moral

part of the Gospel. It is enough that his faith and life be regulated by its doctrines and precepts, whether he do, or do not, see the grounds in reason, on which they stand. Nay, possibly his conduct is then most acceptable, when he looks no farther than to the authority of the Gospel; agreeably to that well-known decision of our Lord himself—*blessed is he, who hath not seen, and yet hath believed*: not, that he expects any man to believe or to obey him, without reason: but he most approves the ingenuous turn of that man's mind, who admits his divine mission, on a sufficient indeed, but not the highest, degree of evidence; and much more, therefore, who yields obedience to his laws, acknowledged on such evidence to be divine, without inquiring further into the reasons of them. Indeed, to what purpose do I scrupulously ask a reason of that, which I already know to be just and fit, because reasonably admitted to proceed from divine authority?

The OTHER observation I would make, is, That, if after the most diligent inquiry, we should not, yet, be able to penetrate the reasons of many things, or to give ourselves entire satisfaction about them, this unacceptable experience should not in the least affect

our belief and esteem of the Gospel. For all that follows from such disappointed curiosity is only this, That we are weak and blind; and not that the things themselves are either false or unreasonable. Our duty, therefore, is to confide in the *revealed word*; not questioning its authority, or torturing its language; but accepting with thankfulness, what we do understand, and with reverence, what we do not.

When these two conditions are inviolably observed, the way of minute inquiry into the doctrines of Christianity, so far forth as they are the objects of inquiry, at all, may be usefully and commendably employed. For then none but men of leisure and ability will think themselves concerned in making such inquiry: and even these, if they should not obtain all the satisfaction they propose to themselves, will neither attempt to disturb the faith of others, nor suffer their own faith to be disturbed by their curious speculations. Still: when learned men are taken up in those profound inquiries, and seem most confident that they have penetrated far into the reasons of many things which are kept secret from others, they should especially remember (and that is the Fourth, and *last* observation I shall make

on the text), to present their *answer* or apology to mankind, *with meekness and fear*.

1. With MEEKNESS, or a soft and gentle spirit, breathing in words, neither passionate, nor assuming; that so they may gain as many, and exasperate as few, as they can. This was a caution more than commonly necessary to the first apologists for Christianity, who had to plead its cause at the tribunal of Kings, at that time, their enemies and persecutors. But the rule is always a good one to be observed by the advocates of the Gospel, who never serve it better, than when its prime virtue, CHARITY, corrects, or rather consecrates, their zeal.

2. The *reason of the hope, that is in them*, should, also, be given *with FEAR*: that is, not only with a *fear* of giving needless offence to those, to whom they address their apology, but chiefly with a *reverential awe* of that transcendantly great Being, whose ways they desire to contemplate, and some part of whose councils it is their ambition to unfold. For, when we speak of God, farther than we are authorized by himself to speak, we are in constant danger of ascribing to him our own weaknesses, and of degrading his ineffable wisdom, when we think to exalt it most.

Such reason there is, even when we apologize for the truth of God, to do it *with meekness and fear*.

To conclude: Religious inquiries, when thus conducted (and only then) are commendable and useful. They exercise our best faculties on the noblest subjects: They may be the means of bringing some to the kingdom of God, and they can alienate none from it. Or, whatever the merit and the success of these inquiries may be, the authors of them will have the satisfaction of knowing, that they have inquired in a right manner; and, that, how little soever their UNDERSTANDINGS have *profited* the Almighty^d, they have honoured Him with the noblest sacrifice, which a mortal can offer to his Maker, that of an HUMBLE AND SUBMISSIVE SPIRIT.

^d Job xxii. 2.

SERMON XXXVII.

PREACHED FEBRUARY 4, 1770.

JOHN vii. 46.

Never man spake like this man.

IF by speaking, be here meant what is called *fine* speaking, or a discourse artificially composed according to the rules of human eloquence, the subject is unworthy of this place, and the praise, infinitely disproportioned to the divine character of Jesus. A pagan philosopher, nay, and a Christian preacher, might haply so far forget himself, as to affect the credit of *fine speaking*; or, his followers might think to

honour him by applauding this talent^a: But the Son of God spake with other views, and to nobler purposes; and his inspired historians would not have condescended to make the panegyric of their Master, from so trivial a distinction.

Let us see, then, to what the encomium of the text amounts; and what those CIRCUMSTANCES are, in the discourses of Jesus, which give real weight and dignity to the observation—*that never man spake like this man.*

This will be an inquiry of use, and not of curiosity only; we shall find, in the course of it, very much to confirm our faith, as well as to excite our admiration.

I. The first particular, that strikes an attentive mind in considering the discourses of Jesus, is the MATTER of them; the most im-

^a Hence the name of Theophrastus, or *the divine speaker*, given to the favourite scholar and successor of Aristotle; And hence the stories told of Plato, whose eloquence Quintilian so much admired, that he thought it more than human—*Ut mihi, non hominis ingenio, sed quodam Delphico videatur oraculo instinctus.* Quintil. l. x. c. 1.—Hence, too, the name of *Chrysostom*, given to the famous Greek Father.

portant, and, at the same time, the most extraordinary; of the utmost consequence to mankind, and the most remote from all their natural apprehensions.

But, by the discourses of Jesus, so qualified, I mean chiefly those, which are truly his own, and properly *Christian*: such as acquaint us with the dignity of his person, and nature of his office; with the purpose of his mission, and the manner in which that purpose was to be effected.

His moral discourses, though they be divine too, yet, being intended, for the most part, to deliver the religion of nature, or the religion of Moses, in all its purity, may be thought to contain nothing more than what human reason had, or might have discovered, or what the Law of God, at least, had already revealed. Yet it may deserve to be mentioned as an argument of his superiority to all other moral instructors, that **HE ONLY** has delivered a doctrine of life and manners, free from all mixture of error, and carried in some instances to a degree of perfection which, I do not say Reason, but, no Doctor of reason ever prescribed; and that he penetrated further into the true meaning of the Jewish Law, than any of its expositors had ever done.

But, as I said, I confine myself to his *peculiar doctrines*, such as constitute the substance of that religion, which we properly call Christian.

And here, the weight of his doctrine must be felt by those persons who reflect that, coming into a world overrun with vice and misery, he proclaimed pardon and peace in this life, and everlasting happiness and glory in the life to come, to all who with penitent hearts and true faith turned to him. What Doctor, Philosopher, or Legislator *ever spake as He spake*, on these important articles? What had Nature taught the Gentile world? Some fine lessons of morality, indeed, which might direct their lives for the future; but none that could set their minds at ease from past guilt, none that could free their consciences from instinctive terror, much less could erect their hopes to any assured prospect of immortality. What had Moses taught the Jews? A divine religion, it is true, but such as left them under the burthen of a painful and oppressive ritual, in which the neglect of any one precept, or the irregular performance of any, might shake their security; and of which, when punctually observed, the reward was only some present ease or convenience in this

world. What was there in either institution, that could deliver men from all doubt and uncertainty about their future condition, or that could disarm and appease the universal guilt of mankind?

Let this then admonish us of what, from its familiarity, we are, now, so prone to forget, the importance, which characterized the doctrine of Jesus.

The *extraordinary nature* of it equally appears; but will further and chiefly be seen, if we attend to the means, by which this supreme blessing is said to be conveyed, and effected.

That a divine person, divine in the highest sense of the word, should descend from heaven and take our nature upon him; *the Heir of all things*^b should be content to appear *in the form of a servant*^c; and, having *life in himself*^d, should chuse to suffer death; that, by this astonishing humiliation, he should propose to effect an end, equally astonishing, The salvation of a ruined world; that, being without sin himself, he should offer himself a sacri-

^b Heb. i. 2.

^c Phil. ii. 7.

^d John v. 26.

fice for sin ; that in virtue of his all-atoning death, he should undertake to abolish death, and open the gates of eternal life to the whole race of mortal man ; that, in this way, he should assume to be our *Wisdom and Righteousness*, our *Sanctification and Redemption*^e ; These are the great things of which Christ *spake* ; these the amazing topics with which he filled his discourses. And must we not conclude, that *he spake as never man spake* ? I do not, at present, urge the accomplishment of all these wonders. That is a distinct consideration. But it must be allowed, that he *spake* in this tone, and to this effect. And did ever any man before him utter such things ? Did it ever enter into the heart of man to conceive such things ? which surely are enough to arrest our attention ; to turn our thoughts on the evidence, with which they are accompanied ; and, till we admit the force of that evidence, to convince us, at least, that such a speaker as this, is eminently distinguished from all other speakers, that ever addressed themselves to mankind. He discovered, on other occasions, no defect of mind, or temper ; nothing, that should lead us to suspect him of weakness, or enthusiasm ; And when such a person so

^e 1 Cor. i. 30.

speaks, the sublime and extraordinary nature of his doctrine is no small presumption of its truth.

II. Another circumstance that distinguishes the discourses of Jesus, is the AUTHORITY, with which they were delivered. The people themselves remarked this circumstance, and were astonished at it; *for he taught them*, says the sacred historian, *as one who had authority, and not as the Scribes* †.

Interpreters differ in explaining what this *authority* was; but it consisted, very clearly, in these three things. 1. He taught mankind without any degree of doubt and hesitation, with the air of one who knew the truth of what he said, and was perfectly assured of all he spake. *Verily, verily, I say to thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen* ‡. 2. He taught his great lessons of morality and religion, not as derived from the information of others, or from the dictates of his own reason, but as immediately conveyed to him from the source of light and truth, from God himself. *Whatsoever I speak, even*

† Mark i. 22.

‡ John iii. 11.

as the *Father said to me, so I speak*^h. 3. Lastly, He delivered his doctrine on very many occasions, as the proper author of it, as one who had a right to propose the terms of Salvation, in his own name. *I say unto You*—is the formulary, with which he prefaces his momentous instructions. *He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day*ⁱ. *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*^k. Nay, he goes so far as to assert expressly, *that he hath life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself*^l. And though he says, at the same time, that he had this privilege given him by the Father, and though he declares, elsewhere, that as the *Father had taught him, so he spake*^m; yet there is no contradiction in these affirmations; for he tells us expressly—*All things that the Father hath, are mine*ⁿ; *And I and the Father are one*^o.

These three circumstances, taken together, constitute the proper authority of Christ's doc-

^h John xii. 50.

^k Rev. ii. 10.

^m John viii. 28.

^o John x. 30.

ⁱ John vi. 40.

^l John v. 26.

ⁿ John xvi. 15.

trine. It was the authority of one, who spake from conviction; who spake by the special appointment of God the Father, who even spake, by virtue of his own essential right, from himself, and in his own name.

Compare, now, this *authoritative* way of speaking, with that of the Jewish Scribes; who explained their Law, as they could, by the precarious traditions of their forefathers, and the uncertain glosses of their celebrated Doctors: Compare it with that of the Gentile Philosophers; who quibbled, by the help of a little logick or metaphysicks, on the nature of God and the Soul; who advanced their doctrines of futurity, on the credit of an old fable, or an old song; and even delivered their moral lectures on the weak grounds of their fanciful or discordant systems; in the way of negligent speculation, or, which was worse, of altercation and dispute: Compare it, lastly, with that of all others, who, in antient or modern times, have taken upon themselves to instruct mankind; and see, if any of these ever assumed the exalted tone, or spake with the *authority* of Jesus, of *the Carpenter's Son*, as Julian and the followers of that school affect to call him.

But high pretensions, you will say, prove nothing. Not much, indeed, when destitute of their proper supports; yet so much, as to verify the observation of the text — *that never man spake like this man*. And if they prove thus much, they prove more; the necessity, or reasonableness, at least, of examining whether these pretensions be well founded. For claims of so extraordinary a nature, as they must needs awaken our curiosity, so they may demand our belief. When a voice speaks, as from heaven, it naturally turns our attention to that quarter; and, when it speaks in *imitable thunder*^p, it speaks, methinks, like itself, and in accents that cannot well be misunderstood.

But our next observation will carry us further. For I make it

III. A third circumstance, in the character of Christ's *speaking*, that he expressed himself with more than mortal WISDOM, on many occasions, when the malice and captious subtlety of his enemies put that wisdom to its utmost test.

^p *Non imitabile fulmen.* Virg.

He gave early proofs of his wisdom, when, at the age of twelve years, he reasoned with the Doctors in the temple, to such effect, *that all who heard him, were astonished at his understanding and answers* 9.

These answers, indeed, are not recorded; but many others are, in the course of his ministry; answers to nice, insidious, and concerted questions of the ablest men among the Jews, in critical circumstances, and on the most trying emergencies. And to these questions he always replied with a presence of mind so unshaken, with a judgment so infallible, with a dexterity and prudence so conciliating, and at the same time with an integrity so pure and perfect, that no advantage could in any degree be taken against him. His adversaries came again and again to the charge; whom yet he repelled with so triumphant a superiority over all the efforts of their wit and malice, that he forced them in the end, *to marvel and hold their peace* 7. His divine responses came out so contrary to their hopes and their interests, that they were discouraged and deterred from provoking any more of them—*they durst not ask him any more questions* 5.

9 Luke ii. 47.

7 Luke xx. 26.

5 Luke xx. 40.

The limits of this discourse will not give room for a detailed account of these questions and answers. But they are thick sown in the Gospels: And ye will understand me to point more especially at those, that respected his divine character, and kingly office[†]; in which conversations the danger was, lest he should drop something that might be made a handle against him before the Jewish Consistory, or the Roman Tribunals; while yet he was not to betray his cause, or bely his pretensions. The danger was instant, and, if he had fallen under it, must have been fatal. For, in withdrawing his claim of being the Messiah, the *King of Israel*, he must have owned himself an impostor; in asserting it, at this time, clearly and openly, he would have given his enemies a pretence for treating him, as a criminal of state; an imputation which could not consist with the truth or dignity of his mission. He came into the world to suffer death, indeed; but not as convicted of any crime, not as colourably condemned by any legal sentence. His innocence was to be conspicuous, and his honour unimpaired^u.

[†] See LOCKE'S *Works*, vol. II. fol. p. 545—7. Lond. 1759.

^u LOCKE'S *Works*, vol. II. fol. p. 543. Lond. 1759.

In this respect, then, it seems, as if it might be truly affirmed, that *never man spake as this man*. And, if thus much must be allowed, we are, methinks, but a little way from a further conclusion, *That, therefore, he spake by a divine spirit*.

If it be said, that this conclusion does not hold, *for that the same faculties of the human mind, which make us capable of SEEING this wisdom, may have PRODUCED it*, the ground of the observation is neither likely, nor true. Not likely in the present instance, where the wisdom in question appears to be exquisite and constant: qualities which we are not accustomed to find united in the efforts of human wisdom. But neither, in general, is the position true: For then, the power of perception and invention would be the same; then, the divine intellect would be levelled with the human; then, the wisdom of God himself, so far as it was acknowledged and understood by us, would be our wisdom. Whereas, common sense tells us, that to discover a truth and to apprehend it, to project a measure, and to conceive the fitness of it, are two things ^x: And, though

^x Every one may observe a good many truths, which he receives at first from others, and readily assents to, as consonant to Reason, which he would have found it hard, and

men differ widely in their capacities from each other, yet there is a capacity, which no man may claim, as there is a wisdom, to which no man pretends. The sublime views of God in the system of nature are comprehended, to a certain degree, and justly magnified and unfolded by many men, who, yet, have not the presumption to suppose that they were themselves capable, or that any man whatsoever was capable, of planning such a system. In like manner, we may see and adore the wisdom, with which Christ *spake*, and yet conclude, upon good grounds, that as no man ever did, so no man ever could, speak with such wisdom.

IV. A fourth circumstance (and the last I shall mention) which distinguished Jesus, as a Speaker, was the penetrating influence of his discourses, or the divine ENERGY, with which they were accompanied.

Other speakers have thought it enough to convince their hearers by cogent arguments ;

perhaps beyond his strength, to have discovered himself. Native and original truth is not so easily wrought out of the mine, as we, who have it delivered, ready dug and fashioned into our hands, are apt to imagine. And how often, &c. LOCKE'S *Works*, Vol. II. fol. p. 577 and 579. Lond. 1759.

to excite their passions by lively images ; to touch the general springs of humanity, or to practise on the peculiar foibles and prejudices of the party addressed. But Jesus had the singular art to convince without reasoning, and to persuade without rhetorick. Few and simple words, from that mouth, attained their end with ease : they struck the soul with more than all the effect of that eloquence, which hath been compared to lightning : they needed no help from tropes and figures, from the acquired knowledge of human nature, or from the information of others, but went directly to the heart by their own proper and irresistible virtue. In a word, Jesus saw what no art could divine, he saw intuitively the naked conscience, the secret individual thoughts of those, with whom he had any concern ; and being able, withal, to possess their minds with a consciousness of this intuition, his least word, his look, nay his silence must needs *speak* beyond the eloquence of other men.

There are many instances of this sort, recorded in the Gospels. He saw the malice of the Scribes and Pharisees ^y, while it was yet

^y Luke v. 22. vi. 8. xi. 17.

latent in the heart, and only forming itself into secret purposes and mental propositions ; and he surprized them by his answers, into shame and *madness* ^z. He saw the seeds of ambition putting forth in the minds of his disciples : and by a word or two, he prevented the growth of them ^a. By only *looking* upon Peter ^b, he struck him into remorse and tears. And by *answering nothing*, he *astonished*, at once, and convinced the Roman Governor, who sat in judgment upon him ^c.

This inspection of the heart, was that which confounded the officers, whom the chief priests had sent to apprehend him, and drew from them, on their return, the advantageous report of the text — *that never man spake like this man*. For, by what he said in their hearing, he gave them to understand that he knew their commission before they had opened it : and so disarmed their rage, by only signifying his acquaintance with their design.

The effect of what he said and did was, in many conjunctures, wholly disproportioned to

^z Luke vi. 11.

^a Luke ix. 47.

^b Luke xxii. 61.

^c Matthew xxvii. xiv. and xxiv.

his words and actions : and is only to be accounted for, from the clear insight he had into the mind, and from the secret influence which he knew, by an apt sentence^d, or by an expressive emblem^e, to inject into the conscience of his hearers. And what resistance can, indeed, be made to such a *speaker*, who hath the hearts of men in his hands, and *turneth them whithersoever he will*^f ?

In all views, then, whether we consider the *matter*, the *authority*, the *wisdom*, or the *effect* of Christ's discourses, we must needs be convinced that the text is amply verified, and that *never man spake like this man*.

To conclude: I have not amused you, in this discourse, with vain declamation. I am not solicitous to establish the credit of Jesus, as a consummate orator. My views are other and far higher. I would convince you, by a reference to plain facts, that he was more than man ; that he spake by the unerring spirit of God ; that his word demands not your praise, but your adoration.

^d John xviii. 4—6.

^e Luke vii. 40. ix. 47.

^f Prov. xxi. 1.

If men would take their ideas of this divine teacher immediately from his own doctrines, and not as they are misrepresented, or at best imperfectly represented by the glosses of others, they would come, of themselves, to this important conclusion: if they would make the Gospel their serious study, and not their casual amusement, they would want no monitor to let them into the merits, or the use of it. They would more than see, they would feel the spirit, with which Jesus spake; and they would readily offer to him, not their barren applause, but their sincere obedience.

Till this salutary effect be wrought in those who call themselves the disciples of Jesus, it may not be improper to remind them of what he himself said to ONE, who was affected, as we may now be, by a sense of his divine power in speaking. He had been delivering great truths, with that authority and wisdom, which ever accompanied his instructions, and the effect was answerable. *For it came to pass, as he spake these things, that a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said to him, in the customary style of approbation, Blessed is the*

womb that bare thee, and the paps that thou hast sucked. But HE said, Yea, rather blessed are they that HEAR THE WORD OF GOD, AND KEEP IT §.

§ Luke xi. 27, 28.

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

PREACHED NOVEMBER 20, 1774.

MATTH. xiii. 10.

The Disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest Thou to them in Parables ?

TWO things are very observable in our Lord's conduct towards the Jews. He came to *instruct* them in the principles of a new religion, and to *convince* them of its divine authority. Yet to such of them, as were least enlightened by his doctrine, he generally addressed himself in Parables : And before such, as were backward to admit his pretensions, he was sparing of his Miracles. Now the contrary of this conduct, it is said, might be expected : That he

should have explained himself in the clearest manner to the untaught Jews ; and should have multiplied his miracles, for the conviction of the unbelieving.

I propose to consider both these circumstances in the history of Jesus ; and to shew that his conduct, in either case, was suitable to his character and mission.

I, now, confine myself to the PARABLES ; and shall take another occasion to consider the MIRACLES.

The Disciples, having observed that their Master spoke to the Jews in a more obscure and indirect manner, than he was wont to do in private to themselves, *came and said unto him, Why speakest thou to them in Parables ?*

This method of conveying instruction in Parables, that is, in some feigned story, where one thing is put for another, and in which the circumstances of the story are to be applied to something different in the intention of the speaker, is well known to have been of constant and familiar use in the old world, and especially in the Eastern nations. This figurative cast of language had its rise from necessity,

the rude conceptions of men requiring general truths to be presented to them, in sensible images. But it soon came to be affected as an ornamental way of speaking or writing, the liveliness of the image awakening curiosity, and affording amusement to the mind. Lastly, it was sometimes employed as a mysterious cover of important truths, to which a more than ordinary attention was to be raised, and especially of such important truths as could not be communicated openly and directly without offence. Under this last idea, the Parable, properly so called, presents itself to us. It was contrived on purpose to throw some degree of obscurity over the information, it contained: And it is in reference to this use and character of the Parable, that the Disciples ask why Jesus thought fit to address the Jews in this way:

To this question, why he spake to the Jews in Parables, and not to the Disciples, our Lord's reply is in these words — *Because, to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to them it is not given.*

By this answer we learn, *First*, that the things delivered by him in this obscure way were not the fundamental truths of the Gospel,

but *the mysteries of the kingdom of God*, that is, certain secrets relating to the progress of the Gospel, and the event of it in the world; a consideration, which will be enlarged upon in its place: And, *Secondly*, that it was not *given* to the Jews, at large, to be let into those mysteries, but to the disciples only.

But why *not given to the Jews*? why was it thought less fit for them, to be initiated in these mysteries, than for the Disciples? Our Lord condescends to answer, or rather to anticipate this question, likewise — *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

The answer, we see, is formed on this general principle, “That information in the councils of God is not to be claimed as a debt; but accepted as a reward: that he, who hath acquired some knowledge and improved what he hath, deserves a further communication of it; but that he, who hath been at no pains to acquire any, or who puts his knowledge to as little use, as if he had acquired none, is so far from having a right to more, that he even deserves to have the pittance, he may already

possess, taken from him." And what more indisputable rule of reason, than this, That, in a matter of pure favour, we should deserve, by our good dispositions at least, this distinction, before we obtain it. So that the answer comes out thus — "I speak to the JEWS in parables, because they do not deserve, by the pains they have hitherto taken to learn of me, and by the dispositions they have shewn to improve what I have taught them, to have further information plainly and openly conveyed to them: But to YOU, who have already profited by my doctrine, and are disposed still further to profit by it, to you I address myself in a plainer manner, because ye deserve to be more fully and abundantly instructed by me." And to this answer, thus understood, what objection, or even what cavil, can be opposed?

But, further, when Jesus said to his Disciples, that *to them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the Jews, at large, it was not given*, this determination must be understood as founded, not merely on the fitness of the thing, as here explained, but on the positive will and declared purpose of God. This appears from what follows. For *therefore*, proceeds our Lord, *speak I to them in Parables, because they*

seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias, which saith, by hearing Ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing Ye shall see and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Hence it appears, that the way of speaking in Parables, which Jesus employed towards the Jews, was that which the word of prophecy had declared he should employ towards them. So that this was one, among others, of the marks, by which the Messiah should be known and distinguished. *To speak in Parables*, was a part of his office: It was a duty imposed upon him, in his very commission.

But this, you will say, is only removing the difficulty one step backwards, and transferring it from the Gospel upon the Law; And you still ask, upon what reasons this strange way of proceeding with the Jews, thus foretold and enjoined, was founded?

Now, though it becomes us with much reverence to inquire into the reasons of God's dispensations, yet as we see, in fact, that it was God's will to treat the Jews in this manner, we may be allowed to indulge some conjectures on the subject; And, as we have traced this difficulty up to its source, this will be the proper place to attempt a more full solution of it.

To make way for this solution, let it be observed, that there are two ways in which this famous prophecy of Isaiah may be regarded by us; either, first, as *a mere prediction of the event*, namely, that by this way of speaking to them in Parables, the Jews *would* not be converted; Or, secondly, as *a judicial determination of it*, namely, that this obscure way of teaching was therefore employed, because it was in the divine councils that they *should* not be converted. In either way of considering the Prophecy, this mysterious conduct may, I think, be cleared up.

If we consider the *event* only, as pointed out by this Prophecy, then the reason, which Jesus himself gives of this conduct, and which has been before explained, namely the general fitness of such a procedure in itself, is a satis-

factory account of it. For what more just than to leave men to the consequences of their own behaviour, and not to reward them with that, which they neither desire nor deserve ?

But, perhaps, the event was not simply predicted of the Jews, but *determined* upon them^a. And there may be reason to take the prophecy, the rather, in this light, because however fit such a conduct, as it describes, may be in itself, yet, in fact, it was not observed towards the Gentiles, nor even the Jews after the descent of the holy Ghost; the Apostles not addressing either in the way of Parables, as our Lord had done the unbelieving Jews: and this agreeably to their Master's express injunctions to them — *for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known; What I tell you in darkness that speak ye in the light, and what ye hear in the ear that preach ye upon the house-tops*^b. This different conduct may then lead us to suspect that there was something peculiar in the situation of those Jews, to whom Jesus addressed his Parables, which this prophecy respected; and that it was God's purpose, in the case of such of them as should stand out against this

^a See John ix. 39.

^b Matth. x. 26, 27.

so long abused mode of information, when proceeding from the mouth of the Messiah himself, to leave them under a judicial blindness. And supposing this to be the case, the conduct (as severe as it seems) may be justified by the following considerations.

1. All the notices, which it had pleased God to give to the ancient Jews of the Gospel dispensation, were conveyed in this way of Parable. The terms, employed in the old prophecies, were all taken from the Law, but the true meaning lay deeper, and the right application of those prophecies was to the Christian Covenant, and to the character and dispensation of the Messiah. This method of predicting the Gospel under legal ideas, was employed for the wisest reasons^e: The Jews had been constantly trained and brought up in it; and, notwithstanding the real obscurity this mode of teaching was intended to have, yet with fair and attentive minds they might easily have apprehended the true drift and purpose of it. The Prophets call upon them perpetually to give this attention: they even drop frequent hints, that might lead them to the discovery: and, upon occasion, do every thing but expound in direct terms, their own parables.

^e See D. L. Vol. V. p. 339, &c. Lond. 1765.

What now was the effect of all this intelligence, so gradually, so repeatedly, so solicitously, as it were, imparted to them? Why, they would not hear, nor understand: they perversely and obstinately rested in the cover of these predictions; would look for nothing beneath or beyond it, indulged their prejudices about the eternity of their law, and the temporal power of their expected Deliverer, so far, that, when at length their Deliverer came, for whom this chain of prophetic instruction was meant to prepare them, they did not and would not acknowledge him. For this gross neglect of a mode of information, so long and so mercifully indulged to them, God thought fit to punish them by the very instrument of their offence. He commissioned Jesus still to continue that way of Parables, which they had so outrageously abused; and so, in his justice, *made it the occasion of blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts*^d, to their final rejection and reprobation.

This seems to be the true state of the case: and what has Reason to object to it? Can any thing be more just, than that a much abused mercy should end in punishment? And can any thing be more fit, than that such punishment

^d D. L. Vol. V. p. 341. n.

should be the forfeiture of that blessing, which the mercy was intended to convey, and should even be inflicted by the very means of that mercy^e? What is there in this œconomy of God's religious dispensations, which contradicts our ideas of the divine attributes? Nay, what is there in it, which does not accord to the known methods of his ordinary and moral government of the world? Health and Prosperity, Parts and Learning, are the merciful gifts of God to some men. To these mercies, rightly improved, certain blessings are, in the order of his providence, annexed. Yet how often do we see men deprived of the blessings, for their misuse of those mercies, and deprived by means of the very mercies themselves! The mercies are a snare to them; and in the way of natural punishment inflict those evils, which they were intended to prevent. Thus, health and prosperity, ill employed, bring on a diseased old age, and an uncomfortable enjoyment of life; and parts and learning, so fitted to produce true knowledge, are the means by which many are led into presumption and mistake.

And in this way, we easily conceive how justly the Jews were punished, in their rejection

^e See more on this subject in Dr. Warburton's Sermons, Vol. I. p. 325.

of the Messiah, for their wilful abuse and mis-interpretation of the Scripture Prophecies concerning him; and how fitly the punishment was conveyed by Christ's *speaking to them in Parables*, that is, by that mode of instruction, by that very instrument of mercy, which they had so much abused.

But though this perverseness of the Jews may be reasonably thought judicial, yet even *in his Judgments God remembers mercy*. Let it therefore be considered

2. In the second place, that, though Christ's speaking to the Jews in Parables did eventually harden their hearts, yet not more so, perhaps not so much as the open communication of truth would have done.

I before took notice, that the subject of Christ's parables was not the fundamental tenets of the Gospel, but *the mysteries of the kingdom of God*. This we know from the mouth of Christ himself; and it deserves to be considered. That Jesus was the Messiah, that all men were to believe in him, and to be saved by him, these great fundamental articles of his religion, together with his moral doctrine, were published plainly to all; and the evidences of his

Messiahship, as resulting from his miracles and an appeal to their own prophecies, were in no sense concealed from the Jews. So that, in truth, the light afforded to them was by no means so penurious, or so darkly conveyed, as the objection supposes. What was kept back from them and thrown into shade, was only or chiefly, the future fortunes of the Gospel, called *the Mysteries of God's kingdom*; of which the rejection of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles, were principal. These Christ delivered to the Jews in parables, *and without a parable spake he not on these subjects, unto them.* Now, though it be true that, had that people penetrated these mysteries, they might, by a right use of this knowledge, have been led to a just apprehension of many of their own prophecies, and, in the end, to an acknowledgment of the Christian faith; yet 'tis likely, considering their inveterate prejudices, that the clear delivery of these momentous truths would have had no such effect; nay, that their aversion to the faith of Jesus might have been increased by having this offensive information plainly and nakedly presented to them.

And there will seem to be the more weight in this conjecture, if we reflect that even to the Apostles themselves, till after his resurrection, our Lord proceeded with much caution in

unfolding *the mysteries of his kingdom*. Then, indeed, *he opened their understandings*^f; and, *beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself*^g. But before that event had taken place, so much light only was let in upon the minds of the Disciples, as they were *able to bear*^h: the *parables* were in some measure explained to them; yet a certain degree of obscurity was still left on the explanation itself.

From which conduct of their great Master, apparently assumed by him in consideration of their infirmities, it seems reasonable to conclude, That his greater reserve towards the rest of the Jews, in speaking to them in *unexplained* parables, was, among other reasons, therefore chosen by him, because it was best adapted to their prejudices, and even gave them the fairest chance for apprehending and embracing his doctrine. But

3. Thirdly, and lastly, what if we suppose (as we have the highest reason to do, after the trials, which had been already made of them)

^f Luke xxiv. 45.

^g Luke xxiv. 27.

^h John xvi. 12. Mark iv. 33, 34.

that no evidence whatsoever, not the clearest possible information, would, under any management, have had its due effect on the unbelieving Jews? In this view of things, the proposing of these mysteries under the impenetrable cover of Parables was the greatest of all mercies to them, since a further degree of light would not only have indisposed them to the reception of it, but must have aggravated their guilt beyond measure, and have left them totally without excuse. To *blind their eyes and harden their hearts* was then a *judgment*, if you will, but surely a judgment in *mercy*, if ever there was any such thing; a punishment inflicted upon them in the most tender and compassionate manner, which goodness itself could contrive, or which their deplorable circumstances could admit.

These things being considered, To the question, *Why did Jesus speak to the unbelieving Jews in parables*, we may now reply, *first*, That this conduct was reasonable in itself, on that general principle of EQUITY, *that he only, who hath, shall receive more abundantly*: That, *secondly*, the JUSTICE of God was fitly exercised upon them for their refusing to be instructed by him in the way of Parable, and by the very medium of Parable, so abused:

That still, *thirdly*, this parabolical method of instruction was, in all probability, better adapted to their circumstances, and more LIKELY to be effectual, than a plainer communication: And that, *lastly*, supposing it CERTAIN that no information whatever would have taken effect, this obscure and inefficient one of parables served, at least, as some excuse for their obstinacy, and was contrived, in mercy, to alleviate their guilt.

The result of the whole, is, That we are hence taught to adore the awful ways of God's providence, in this instance of *Christ's speaking in parables*; in which both his Justice and Goodness are so equally and signally displayed.

S E R M O N XXXIX.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 27, 1774.

MATTHEW xiii. 58.

*And he did not many mighty works there,
because of their unbelief.*

THERE were two things, I observed, very remarkable in the conduct of our blessed Saviour towards the Jews. One was, that he chose to instruct the more ignorant and uninformed of them, in the obscure way of *parable*: The other, that he wrought but *few miracles* for the conviction of such of them as were incredulous and unbelieving.

These two circumstances may be thought strange; because the less informed the people

were to whom he addressed himself, the more need there seems to have been of *the plainest instruction*; and the less disposed they were to believe in him, the greater necessity we may think there was for subduing their unbelief by *the force of miracles*. Yet the conduct of Jesus was not according to these expectations, in either instance; and has accordingly furnished the occasion of two corresponding objections to his divine character and mission.

To the *former* of these objections, that which respects his *way of speaking by parables*, I have already replied in a distinct discourse on that subject. The *latter*, which respects his *way of working miracles*, I now propose to consider.

The text, you see, points out the subject, and confines me to it. Jesus, in discharge of his general office, and from a principle, as we may suppose, of private affection, *went into his own country*, that is, to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, with the intention of preaching the Gospel there, and of giving the people of that place the proper proofs of his authority and mission. Accordingly, the sacred historian tells us, *he taught them in their synagogue*; And we know, besides, that he

wrought some miracles; for the people were astonished and said, *Whence hath this man this WISDOM, and these MIGHTY WORKS?*

They were the more astonished, because Jesus was no stranger to them; and the rest of his family, people of an obscure condition, then lived among them. They knew him only under the idea of a *Carpenter's Son*, and they had observed perhaps nothing extraordinary in him; or, if they had, this very circumstance, as is not uncommon among neighbours and countrymen, might have infused some jealousy and dislike of him. Be that as it will, their prejudices against him were extreme, and they expressed them in the most contemptuous manner. *Is not this, say they, the Carpenter's Son? Is not his Mother called Mary? and his Brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his Sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him.* To these disparaging questions, which easily overpowered the evidence of conviction even from their own senses, Jesus only replied, *A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.* And then the text follows, which says, *And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.*

This is the FACT: And the question upon it, is, *Why Jesus forebore to work miracles among these people, because they did not believe in him?*

Before I reply distinctly to this question, permit me to premise *two* general observations; one, on the use of miracles, considered in themselves; and the other, on the use of miracles, as applied to the Christian dispensation.

First, then, I observe, that, a miracle being, for the time, an alteration or suspension of the laws of nature, our best ideas of the divine attributes lead us to conclude, that this violence on his own plan of government is only exerted for some very important end, and will be exerted no farther, nor oftener, than is necessary to that end. It is true, it may be difficult for us to judge, in many cases, of that importance, and of that necessity; but unless both be very apparent to us, in no case, can we be authorized to require or even expect, a continuance or repetition, much less a multiplication of these miraculous exertions. To judge otherwise on this subject, would be to charge God foolishly, and, in effect, to blaspheme his wisdom.

Secondly, I observe, that the use of miracles, as applied to the Christian dispensation, is to give credit to the character and pretensions of Jesus. It is supposed in this argument that miracles, duly circumstanced and fully attested, are sufficient to this purpose; but there is no reason to suppose that more or greater will be wrought, than that purpose requires.

These things being premised, to the question, *Why Jesus did not many miracles, before the unbelieving Jews of Nazareth*, I reply directly by saying

I. In the first place, *because such a display of his power was not necessary to their conviction*. I mean not to say at present, that more or greater miracles would not have convinced them (though it be very unlikely, that they would), but that they were not necessary to the end proposed by them, which was to afford such an attestation to the character of Jesus as might be a reasonable and, in itself, a sufficient ground of their conviction. More than this the Jews had no right to expect. And less than this was not offered: For when it is said, that Jesus did not *many* miracles at Nazareth, it is implied that he did *some*; and thus much they confess themselves in asking, *whence hath this man these mighty works?*

Now *some* miracles, nay *one single* miracle, seen and confessed as such, was a reasonable ground of conviction. More therefore could not be esteemed *necessary*, that is, were not required to furnish the fit and proper means of such conviction. Without doubt, God, if he had been so pleased, might have shattered and confounded all the elements, and have driven the men of Nazareth, and even the Jewish Sanhedrim itself, by the force and terror of his almighty power, into an unwilling acknowledgment of his Son, Jesus. But this is not the way in which he treats his reasonable creatures, even when he exceeds the ordinary methods of his providence. He does that which is simply fit and right, in respect of the end he has in view, and leaves the rest to ourselves. This, as far as we know, is the universal mode of God's government, and as far as we can judge, is the most worthy of him.

Still, it will be said, though Jesus was not obliged to do more for the conviction of these unbelievers, though more or greater miracles could not strictly be required of him, yet so limited a display of his power on such an occasion seemed penurious, and even unkind. A little more zeal, and some supernumerary wonders, might have better expressed his con-

cern for his unhappy countrymen. I reply then,

II. In the second place, that as more or greater miracles were not necessary to the end of giving a just proof of his mission, so they were most probably not expedient to any other good end, but, on the contrary, would have been hurtful and pernicious to his unbelieving countrymen.

We have reason to conclude thus, if we consider that the same prejudices, which obstructed their conviction from *some* confessed miracles, would not have given way to *more*. We have an example in the other unbelieving Jews, especially in the rulers of that people, who, the more and greater miracles they saw performed by Jesus, were the more hardened in their unbelief, and the more exasperated against him. They even give it as a reason for their vindictive prosecution of him, that he *did, and was doing many miracles*^a.

Taking the matter then in this light, what other effect could a waste of miracles have had, but to heap guilt and vengeance upon their heads? By leaving these perverse people to

^a John xi. 47.

themselves, perhaps their prejudices might subside, and they might yield in time to the evidence they already had, or they might submit to other evidence, which they should collect for themselves hereafter. To have irritated their prejudices, now, by further miracles, might have fixed them absolutely in unbelief.

This conclusion becomes the more probable, if we admit the pretensions of Jesus: For then he may be supposed to have certainly foreseen the present impracticability of converting these men, and to have restrained his power before them, on that account. But I am now arguing with those, who make this conduct an objection to his pretensions. I offer it therefore as a conclusion only very probable from the nature of the thing, that his *not doing many miracles* before his unbelieving countrymen, was, among other motives, from *a principle of mercy and kindness to them*. At least, the contrary, I think, cannot be affirmed with any shew or colour of reason.

But whatever kindness our Lord might have for these men, his continuing to work more miracles among them, under the present circumstances, would have been improper, because

III. In the next place (and this is my *third* answer to the objection) *this conduct would have opposed, and tended directly to defeat, the general end and success of his ministry.*

The proper END of his ministry was to preach salvation to the Jews, and to give them such evidence of his being the Messiah, as was sufficient to their conviction. When he had done this in one place, if no very important considerations induced his longer stay, he was to proceed to another. This was so essential a part of his office, that it seems not to have been forgotten, even when there was no peculiar complaint of *unbelief*, in those with whom he had resided. For when the people of another place, of more *faith*, as it should seem, *came to him, and would have stayed him, that he should not depart from them,* He refused to comply with them, and *said, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for THEREFORE AM I SENT^b.*

This then was the end of his ministry. He was to preach the word; but was not obliged to see that it took effect, or to wait the success of it. How repugnant then had it been to this end, to waste unnecessary time and power on

^b Luke iv. 43.

unbelieving Nazareth, when so many other cities, and those better disposed, claimed their share of each!

But, further, the dispositions of these people towards him were such, as seemed likely, not only to retard and interrupt, but totally to *prevent* the execution of his ministry. They would either have found means, had he continued longer with them, to deliver him into the hands of the Jewish rulers, or by some act of violence would have taken away his life. This appears from the rage with which they drove him out of their city, and from their purpose, as St. Luke relates the story, to *cast him down headlong from the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built*^c. So that his attempt to convert them by more miracles, might have put an untimely end to his ministry, when it was now but little more than begun. And, though this event might at any time have been prevented by an exertion of his miraculous power, and without doubt would have been prevented in that manner, had the conjuncture made it necessary; yet this was no reason for his exposing himself to that danger, since, as we before observed, miracles are not to be expected or employed, where the end in view

^c Luke iv. 29.

may be accomplished by human means. Accordingly, our Saviour consulted his own safety on all occasions, during the course of his ministry, by every prudential method: And when he afterwards armed his disciples with the power of working miracles, he prescribed the same conduct to them, and, when they found themselves *persecuted in one city*, bade them *flee to another*^d. It is generally thought, indeed, that nothing but a miracle rescued him out of the hands of the enraged people of Nazareth: If so, his danger among them must have been extreme, and shews the necessity of his removing from them. However, if this last miracle was wrought, it was one more added to the number of those he had worked in that city, and, like all the rest, was lost upon it. On the whole, it appears certain then, that the *unbelief* of these Nazarenes was a just reason for Christ's *not doing many miracles among them*, since the opposite conduct would have tended to *defeat the end and execution of his general office*.

Still, the most direct and convincing answer to the objection is behind: For,

IV. Lastly, I observe that Jesus *did not many miracles* before the unbelieving men of

^d Matt. x. 23.

Nazareth, *because such a display of his power would have been contrary to a general rule of conduct, which he prescribed to himself, and that, on the highest reason.*

This rule was, *not to work a miracle upon them, or for them, who were deficient in faith*: By which term, *faith*, I do not mean a grounded faith in him, as the Messiah, (for that could only be produced originally by miracles) but such an honesty and probity of mind as might dispose them to believe on the evidence of miracles. It was in this case, as in that of *Parables, to him only who hath, more was given.* And therefore the first question he put to those, who repaired to him for a miraculous relief of their necessities, was, *Do Ye believe?* Are ye withheld by no fixed and willful prejudices from supposing that one, coming to you under the character of the Messiah, is empowered to do this for you, or from yielding to its evidence, when it is done? This was so indispensable a rule with him, that St. Mark, in relating this adventure at Nazareth, goes so far as to say that he COULD NOT DO many mighty works there because of their unbelief^e. The meaning of which is, that there was, no *natural* indeed, but a *moral*

^e Mark vi. 5.

impossibility of his working more miracles there; that is, he *could not do it*, consistently with the general principles, on which he acted.

And that these principles were founded in *the best reason*, no man can doubt who reflects, that the highest possible favour, which can be conferred on man, that is, a miracle wrought for his salvation, reasonably supposes some degree of desert, some prior dispositions to profit by it; who reflects farther, that, where such a preparation of mind is not, the miracle is thrown away; nay, worse than that, can only serve to the hurt and condemnation of that person, on whom, or for whom it is performed.

Men have a strange notion, that when God intends to convince any one by the evidence of miracles, he should repeat and enforce that evidence, till it take effect, whether we will or not; nay, that the most obstinate and determined infidelity is only a stronger reason for his contending with it. But this is a very presumptuous, as well as injurious, conception of the divine nature: It is presumptuous in the highest degree, because it supposes that we have a right to prescribe terms to infinite

power and wisdom: It is greatly injurious to the Supreme Being, because it supposes that he has no regard to the moral worth of his creatures, or even to any reasonable end, in the wonders he does for them. The Scriptures represent this matter in another light: they require something, where much is given; they expect from us to *have*, before we receive; they suppose us in short to be moral agents, and not machines. And our Lord himself, speaking in the proverbial language of the Jews, gives it as a special command to his Disciples, *Not to cast that which is holy unto dogs, nor to cast their pearls before swine*^f. All this is agreeable to our best notions of the divine wisdom and goodness, as well as to the usual course of God's providence; and therefore on this footing only the conduct of Jesus towards the unbelieving Jews of Nazareth is abundantly justified.

To draw to a point, then, the substance of what has been said. To the question, *why Jesus did not more miracles, before the unbelieving?* We reply, That such conduct was not necessary to the end of miracles, which was to afford a reasonable conviction—that it was not likely to answer any good end, but, on

^f Matth. vii. 6.

the contrary, would have been hurtful to such unbelievers — that it tended to defeat the design and success of Christ's ministry, by narrowing the sphere, or shortening the term of it — that, lastly and chiefly, it was unreasonable in itself, and contrary to the general scheme and order of God's moral government.

Let no man then abuse himself with foolish imaginations, as if Christ was wanting in that which became his office and mission; still less, as if he acted from any caprice, or unconcern for the souls of men, in not forcing their belief; but least of all, as if his pretensions had any thing to fear from the little faith of those to whom he addressed himself, and could only prevail with the weak and credulous, with those who were unable or indisposed to scrutinize his miracles. Even this last insinuation has been made, not only without grounds, but against the fullest evidence; the miracles of Jesus having been numerous, public, illustrious, and even acknowledged, at least not convicted of imposture, by his bitterest enemies, by those who were most active and most able to examine into the truth and reality of them.

With regard to the miracles in question, let us be so ingenuous as to confess, that, if these

were necessary to announce his office and character to the men of Nazareth, more than these were unnecessary, and that their unbelief affords the best grounds to conclude, that they were so. Consider too, that, if no reasons had occurred to us for this conduct, it could not certainly appear that it was unreasonable. When we know, in fact, what the method of God's dealing with mankind has been, in any instance, we may be able perhaps to discern good reasons for it. But we can seldom affirm with any shew of reason, from any preconceptions or general speculations of our own, what it should or must be. Here we are manifestly out of our depth, and cannot stir a step without the hazard of absurdity or impiety.

If we have reason to admit the divine authority of our Religion, whatever conduct it ascribes to Jesus, must be fit and right, however impenetrable to us. If we admit it not, our concern is to see that we have reason for not admitting it. This matter is to be tried by the evidence given of that authority only, I mean by the external proofs, and historic testimony, on which it rests. When this is done, no slight cavils of reason, no fanciful suspicions, no plausible objections, nor any thing else but the most obvious contradiction

in something it asserts to the clearest dictates of the human understanding (which no man has ever yet found) can possibly shake, or so much as affect, that authority.

In the present case, we have seen how entirely groundless the objection is to Christ's conduct at Nazareth. But if this objection could not have been answered, nothing had followed but a conviction of our ignorance. It might still be true (as we now see it to be), that Jesus acted agreeably to his divine character *in not doing many miracles* before the people of Nazareth, *because of their unbelief*.

S E R M O N XL.

PREACHED MAY 23, 1773.

2 COR. iv. 5.

We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.

WE may consider these words, either as an *admonition* to the ministers of the Gospel, *To preach not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*; or simply as a *fact*, which St. Paul asserts of himself and the other Apostles, *That they preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.*

In either sense, the words are instructive; but I take them in the latter sense, only. I would confirm and illustrate this assumed fact: and then employ it as a medium to prove the

divine authority of the sacred writings. If it be true, *that the Apostles preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*, it will, perhaps, be seen to follow, *That therefore they preached not from their own private suggestions, but by the direction of the Spirit of God.*

The assertion of the Text is, indeed, general, and to this effect, “That a number of persons, who were employed to convert the world to the Religion of Jesus, did, in the tenour of their lives and the course of their ministry, pay no regard to their own interests of any kind, and were only intent on the due discharge of their commission.”

But the subject, in that extent, is too large for a discourse of this nature. What I would offer to your consideration, is ONE SINGLE INSTANCE of that indifference which the Apostles shewed to their own interests, I mean, *Their total disregard of human applause in preaching the Gospel.*

In this restrained sense of the words, men may be said *to preach themselves*, in two respects: When they shew a solicitude to set themselves forth with advantage: 1. as to their MORAL character. And 2. as to their INTELLECTUAL.

I. When men would give an advantageous idea of their *moral character*, they usually express this design, either, 1. *By representing or insinuating their superior worth and virtue*: Or, 2. *By suppressing or palliating what may render it suspected*: Or, 3. lastly, *By dwelling on such topics, and in such a manner, as may give occasion to others to think well of their moral qualities*.

Let us try the Apostolic writings by each of these marks.

1. The first way that men take to illustrate their *moral character*, is, *By representing, or insinuating their worth and virtue, on all occasions*.

Consider those apologists for themselves, who have left us memoirs of their own lives. You will find, in most of these, an ambitious display of those moral virtues, by which they desire to be distinguished. They lose no opportunity of setting forth the purity of their designs, and the integrity of their practice. The rest, may do this with less pomp and affectation: they may preserve a modesty in the language, and a decent reserve in the air and cast, of their narration. Still, the same purpose is discoverable in all these writers, whether they

openly proclaim, or nicely suggest and insinuate their own importance. When men are actuated with a strong desire of appearing in the fairest light to others, it unavoidably breaks out in some shape or other, and all the indirect ways of address cannot conceal it from the intelligent observer.

We have a great example in two, the most extraordinary persons of the pagan world, I mean, XENOPHON, and JULIUS CÆSAR. These admired men thought fit to record their own acts and achievements; and have done it with that air of neglect and unpretending simplicity, which has been the wonder of mankind. Yet, through all this apparent indifference, every one sees the real drift of these elaborate volumes: every one sees, that they are composed in such a way as to excite the highest opinion, not of their ability in the art of war only, but of the justice, generosity, benevolence, in short, the moral qualities of their respective authors. It evidently appears that they designed to be their own panegyrists; though none but such men could have executed that design, in so inoffensive and successful a manner.

But now, if we turn to the sacred writers, we shall find no traces of their *preaching themselves*, in this respect. These plain fishermen

tell their story unambitiously, and without art; or, if we call it art, it is such an one as Greece and Rome had never been able to put in practice. No exaggerations of what may be thought praise-worthy in themselves: no oblique encomiums on their own best qualities or actions: no complacent airs in the recital of what may reflect honour on their own characters: no studied reserve and refinement in the turn and language of their history.

If there be any virtue, which we may suppose them more than commonly anxious to arrogate to themselves, any moral quality, in which they would shine out to the observation of others, what more likely than an unshaken fidelity to their Master? that Master, whom they made it their glory, their sole glory, as the Text speaks, *to preach*? Yet they are so far from respecting their own credit in this particular, that they relate their own infirmities and miscarriages; they acknowledge how wavering and precarious their *faith* was; nay, they tell us that, in his last distresses, *they all forsook him, and fled*^a.

2. This last circumstance reminds us of the next artifice which men employ to set off their

^a Matth. xxvi. 56.

moral character, *that of suppressing or palliating whatever may render it suspected.*

As accomplished persons, as the great men, before mentioned, were, can we doubt that many exceptionable steps were taken by them in the affairs, they managed: that, on some occasions, their prudence failed them, and their virtue, on others; that their counsels and measures were conducted, at times, with too little honesty, or too much passion? Yet, you will in vain look for any thing of this sort in their large and particular histories. All is candid and fair, judicious and well advised: every thing speaks the virtuous man, and able commander. The obnoxious passages are either suppressed, or they are turned in such a way as to do honour to their Relaters.

Or, take another instance. When Cicero had offended against the capital law of his moral code, that, which enjoined the love of his country, first, by his backwardness to join the camp of Pompey, and, afterwards, by his prompt submission to the tyranny of Cæsar, What is the conduct of the illustrious Roman patriot, on this pressing occasion? Does he frankly condemn these false steps, or does he content himself with a simple relation of them?

Neither of these things: He softens and disguises the truth; he employs all his wit and eloquence to palliate this inglorious desertion of his principles, to himself and others.

I might add many other examples. But ye see, in these, a striking contrast to the ingenuity of the sacred writers. They study no arts of evasion or concealment. They proclaim their own faults, and even vices, to all the world. One, acknowledges himself to have been a furious bigot, a persecutor, and blasphemer^b: Another, relates his own cowardice, ingratitude, and treachery^c. There is nothing like a concert between them to cover each other's defects: They expose the vindictive zeal of one^d; the intolerant spirit of others^e; the selfish intrigues of all^f. In a word, they give up their moral character to the scorn and censure of their readers, and appear solicitous for nothing but the honour of their Master—*They preach not themselves, but the Lord Jesus Christ.*

But ye will say, this apparent candour was the most consummate art; and that they confessed some obnoxious passages in their lives,

^b St. Paul. 1 Cor. xv. 9.

^c St. Peter. Mark xiv. 71.

^d Luke xxii. 51.

^e Luke ix. 54.

^f Luke ix. 46.

to procure to themselves credit in other instances. This, no doubt, is sometimes the case with artful writers and speakers: But then only, when small defects and miscarriages are confessed; or, when the facts are too notorious to be dissembled; or, if perhaps they confess such things of themselves, as are highly blameable, and might otherwise have been concealed, they do it to gain the praise of a more than ordinary frankness and ingenuity, they apparently make a matter of vanity, even of that confession. The case is much otherwise with the preachers of Jesus. They scruple not to tax themselves with the most odious vices; and these too, many times of such a nature as shews, they might well have been kept secret from all the world; while yet the discovery is made in such a way, that suspicion itself cannot charge them with the design of drawing any credit to themselves from it.

Hitherto, we have considered how men may contrive to celebrate or insinuate their own virtues, and to suppress or disguise their own vices, in narratives or memorials of their lives; and how free the Apostles are from the suspicion of doing either. But the same design may be prosecuted in writings of another

§ See the *Essais* of *Montaigne*.

sort: and we have writings of another sort from the hands of the Apostles. I observe then

3. That, when writers are studious of their own fame, they find means, in any moral or historic work, though themselves be not the professed subject of it, to do honour to their own character, *by dwelling on such topics, and in such a manner, as may give occasion to others to think well of their moral qualities.*

They declaim, perhaps, with much heat against certain vices, or expatiate with much complacency on certain virtues; or, they labour some disgraceful portraits of bad men, and draw their favoured characters with all the heightenings of panegyrick: And who will suppose, after this specimen of their zeal, that they themselves are not adorned with those good qualities, which they so studiously recommend, or are not exempt from those bad ones, which they so industriously expose? The artifice is so common, that we have it played upon us every day; and yet so imposing, that it constantly succeeds with us. How many popular characters does every one call to mind, that have no foundation but in this favourable prejudice! But let me carry your thoughts

back to ancient times, and fix them on far higher instances. Who that reads the moral prefaces and digressions of the historian SALUST, but must imagine the author to have been a model of ancient frugality and austere manners? And who that looks into the philosopher SENECA, and finds him all on fire in celebrating some distinguished characters, and exposing some detested ones, but will conclude the writer to have been himself accomplished in all virtue?

I make no enquiry, at present, into the real characters of these illustrious persons: I pass no judgment on the real merit of their books. Their zeal might be an honest one; and the form of their writings might be owing to that zeal. But this, I observe, that the form itself is well suited to the purpose of those who would *preach themselves*; and that the sacred writers have not thought fit to adopt this method.

Their books indeed are full of moral sentences and moral precepts (for they are teachers of morality by profession); but short, and simple; and though earnestly enforced, not ostentatiously displayed. The historic part of their writings is wonderful for its calmness, I had

almost said, insensibility. No attempt to colour their good or bad characters. Even the transcendant virtues of their Master are left to be collected rather from the simplest exposition of what he said and did, than from any formal representation of them: And, what is stranger still, his betrayers and murderers are loaded with no invective, nor set to scorn in any odious lights^b. These divine men are superior to the prejudices even of virtue itself; and have so little thought of deriving a vanity from their own honest feelings, that we are almost left in doubt, whether they were, indeed, actuated by them.

II. Thus much for the indifference of the sacred writers to their moral character: Let us now see whether they are more concerned for their INTELLECTUAL.

There are two ways which men take to display their mental qualities: 1. *By labouring to make appear an extraordinary acuteness of understanding*: And 2. *By aiming at the praise of extraordinary wit and eloquence*.

It is superfluous to observe to you how these two characters predominate in all the

^b Pensées de M. Pascal, c. xvi. § 3.

writings and speeches of uninspired men. Consider, if there be one exception in all those whom the world most approves and admires : Consider, if there be not evident symptoms of this vanity in every single writer or speaker, that has undertaken to instruct or reform mankind. I deny not, that many of these have been persons of great modesty and distinguished virtue : Yet they never lose sight of their own mental accomplishments ; they never forget, under some shape or other, in this respect, *to preach themselves*. Even He, who now so freely censures this infirmity in others, is, perhaps, at the instant, an example of it, himself.

Let us see, then, if *the preachers of the Gospel* have the singular prerogative to stand clear of this general imputation.

1. They certainly lay no claim to any superior quickness of understanding. On the contrary, they relate many circumstances, which clearly imply their own dulness and inapprehension. They acquaint us with the gross mistakes, they were apt to fall into, in their conversations with their Master ; they are at a loss to comprehend his parables, nay to look beyond the literal sense of the plainest figures ;

they even record the reproaches which Jesus made to them on these occasions.

But this slowness of conception, it will be said, was in their early unenlightened state, and was, perhaps, affected by them to do honour to their subsequent illuminations. Be it so. But how do these illuminated men employ the divine light, that was imparted to them? In advancing curious theories in *Morals*, or in framing subtle *Metaphysical* systems? Do they affect a philosophic depth or accuracy in their researches into human nature, or a superior penetration in their reasonings about spiritual things? Do they shine in paradoxes? or strike with quaint aphorisms? Do they entertain us with exquisite positions, or remote conclusions? Nothing of all this. What they teach of moral and divine things, is with the air of men, not who make discoveries, but who deliver known and familiar truths. They tell us many things, which we knew not before: But they tell them as matters of divine commission, not of their own collection or investigation. And, for the rest, they presume not to speculate upon them, at all.

Indeed, the general subject of their discourses was such, as gave no scope to the exercise,

and afforded no gratification to the pride, of Reason. They publish to the world a matter of fact, of which they were eye-witnesses; they attest the death and resurrection of Jesus, and preach remission of sins in his name. These were the points *they witnessed both to small and great; saying none other things than those, which they had seen and heard, and which the Prophets and Moses did say should come to pass*ⁱ. Is there any thing in such a doctrine, as this, that looks like *preaching themselves*? Can it be thought that such teachers had an eye to the credit of their own abilities, or that they meant to advance the reputation of their own understandings above that of other men?

2. Still less reason is there to charge this ambition on their manner of preaching, or to imagine that they sought the fame of ingenuity from the terms in which they conveyed their instructions to mankind. If the substance of their doctrine was plain facts, their language was that of plain men. They spake not *with the enticing words of man's wisdom*; scarcely with the ordinary propriety, certainly, not with what is called the purity and elegance, of their tongue.

ⁱ Acts xxii. 15. and xxvi. 22.

But the fact is not disputed, rather is objected to them by such as question their inspiration (with what reason, we shall presently see); so that I may fairly conclude, that such men could have no purpose to recommend themselves by the arts of speaking, or, that, with regard to the praise of wit and eloquence, they could not possibly mean to *preach themselves*.

Nor let it be said, that this unornamented style of preaching was the effect of their ignorance, and inability to reach the graces of a juster manner. For, besides that it is no new thing for men to affect what they have no talents for, it is certain that ONE at least of the Apostles, He, whose province it was to convert the Gentile world, long since enamoured of the study of eloquence, and who, of all the Apostles, wrote most, it is certain, I say, that this great man was not disqualified by a want of parts or learning, from pretending to this prize of eloquence, if his ambition had condescended to it.

III. It appears then, with a reasonable degree of evidence, that the writers of the New Testament had no regard *to themselves*, that is, to the reputation either of their Moral or Intellectual virtues, in composing those books.

The fact, as singular as it is, seems well established: And I draw this interesting conclusion from it, *That, therefore, they preached, not from their own private suggestions, but by the direction of the Holy Spirit.*

This conclusion follows undeniably from that fact. For, if such a number of persons, of different tempers, educations, and professions, could be so disinterested as to overlook their own credit in a point, which all other men have so exceedingly at heart, and which no other men, nay which no other single man has ever been able to give up; and that too, when they were teaching a divine religion, and might therefore seem to have a decent pretence for assuming all sorts of merit to themselves; if this, I say, be a certain fact, what can we conclude, but that the Spirit of God, to whose enlightening influences they ascribed their doctrine, over-ruled their natural self-love in the manner of preaching it, and that *these holy men spoke, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost?*

To return then to the Text, and to conclude. *We preach not ourselves* — said St. Paul, in his own name and that of the other Apostles — *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus*

the Lord. The writings of these men are still extant; and bear the fullest testimony to the truth of what they assert. This, then, among many others, is an intrinsic character, impressed on those writings, of their divine original. It may be regarded, as a standing miracle, which, as oft as we revolve and consider them, speaks aloud, as in a voice from Heaven, that the Scriptures, they have left us, are the *word and work of God.*

If their uninspired successors in the ministry of the word be unable to copy so bright an example of humility and self-denial, forgive them this defect, or impute it, if you will, to natural vanity and unsubdued self-love. But, when ye chance to observe this infirmity in others, forget not to say to yourselves, that this high privilege of *preaching not themselves* was reserved to the Evangelists and Apostles only, to dignify their character; and to excite, confirm, and support our faith; in a word, to manifest to all the world, in the very frame and texture of the sacred Oracles, that they were, indeed, dictated by the Spirit of God.

SERMON XLI.

PREACHED DECEMBER 15, 1771.

MATTH. xi. 5.

The Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

MANY circumstances, attending the Gospel of Jesus, are such, as we should not previously have expected: Yet, when duly considered, they fully approve themselves to our best reason.

We have a memorable instance, in the Text. Among other marks, by which it pleased our blessed Lord to authenticate his mission, one was, *That the Poor had the Gospel preached*

unto them. Go, (says he to the disciples of John the Baptist, who had sent them to know of Jesus, whether he were indeed the Messiah) *Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and* THE POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED UNTO THEM.

We are surprized, perhaps, on the first mention of these words, to find this last circumstance put upon a level with the rest, even with that greatest of all miracles, *the raising of the dead to life.* We may not immediately apprehend, why the *Poor* should be thus considered by the Saviour of the world; or how the truth of his pretensions comes to be concerned in this treatment of them. But, upon inquiry, we shall find there were some important reasons which determined our Lord to this conduct, and which made that conduct, in a peculiar manner, expressive of his person and office.

FIRST, This character was directly applied to the Messiah, in the ancient prophecies. Our Lord himself, in the text, quotes the very words of Isaiah: So that, *in preaching the Gospel to*

the Poor, he fulfilled that prediction, and so far corresponded to the character, which the word of prophecy had given of the Messiah.

But this circumstance, we may suppose, would have been no part of the Messiah's character, but for reasons which made it fit and right, that He should be thus distinguished. Let us, further, inquire, then,

SECONDLY, what those reasons, probably were; only premising one word, to ascertain the objects, both of the prophecy, and of our Lord's charitable attention.

There is no doubt but the word, *poor*, in the prophecies alledged, and in Christ's application of them, is very capable of being understood in a metaphorical or spiritual sense, and was even intended to be so understood; I mean, in that sense, which our Lord gives to the word, *Poor*, when he says—*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* ¹. But this metaphorical sense does not exclude, it rather supposes, the literal. For, who are *the poor in spirit*, for the most part, but *the poor in fortune* ² they, whom neither the pride of

¹ Matthew v. 3.

knowledge and education, nor the pride of wealth and place, has corrupted with vain ideas of their own sufficiency? But, there is a peculiar reason for the literal interpretation of the Text. For the words, *blind*, *lame*, and *deaf*, have, likewise, their metaphorical sense in the prophet, as well as the word, *poor*. Yet our Lord alledges the completion of the prophecy, in the literal meaning of those words; for he refers the messengers of John to what *they saw and heard*; to the miracles, he was then working, or had worked, on *the blind, lame, and deaf*, that is, in restoring their bodily senses and members^b. So that, when the poor are spoken of by Jesus, at the same time, we must needs understand him as speaking of the *poor*, properly so called, that is, of the lower ranks of people, whom he was even then instructing, as well as healing.

We see, then, That Christ *preached the Gospel to the poor*, in the literal, as well as spiritual sense of that word: And, in so doing, he both fulfilled the whole extent of the prophecy; and, as we shall now find, gave an eminent proof of the GOODNESS and WISDOM of his own character.

^b Compare, *Luke* vii. 21, 22.

For, consider the state of the *poor*, how much they wanted, and how much better, than the rich, they deserved, instruction, when our Lord, in mercy, came *to preach the Gospel to them*.

I. The condition of the *poor*, that is, of the people at large, was truly deplorable, at that time. They were every where treated by their superiors with the utmost contempt, and left to struggle with an almost invincible ignorance and corruption.

The Jews, indeed, had the benefit of a divine law : but their Scribes and Doctors *had made it of none effect, by their traditions* ^c. They had corrupted the word of God, by their fanciful cabbalistical glosses ; and had debased their holy ritual, into a frivolous and sordid superstition. They had *the key of knowledge* in their hands ; but they neither employed it to the purpose of opening the true meaning of the Scriptures, themselves, nor would suffer the people to make this use of it. In the mean time, their pride increased with their other vices : they thought themselves *wise and pru-*

^c Matthew xv. 6.

dent^d, and *righteous*^e; and, in sovereign admiration of their own worth and knowledge, *they despised others*. Their insolence to the *poor* was so transcendant, that they reproached them for that ignorance, which themselves had occasioned; and even checked their endeavours to understand the true meaning of their law, in terms of the bitterest scorn and execration. *Have any of the Rulers or Pharisees, said they, believed in Jesus? But this people*^f, *that knoweth not the law, are accursed*.

Such was the state of the *poor*, among the Jews: and that of the Gentile poor was no better. As the former were only insulted, and not instructed, by their RABBIS; So the *latter* were just as ill treated by their PHILOSOPHERS.

These men, indeed, *professed themselves wise*; and had, in some respects, a juster claim, than the Jewish doctors, to that proud, distinctive appellation. Though their reasoning, on many subjects (on which, however, they valued themselves most) was little better than that of the Cabbalists; yet, in moral matters,

^d Matt. xi. 25.

^e Luke xviii. 9.

^f ὄχλοι; *the mob*. John vii. 49.

which are of the highest concern to mankind, they had been able to trace out some plausible and ingenious theories, and had even penetrated so far as to apprehend some general and fundamental principles of natural religion. Yet all this was matter of vanity among them, rather than of public use. Their most interesting speculations were either confined to their schools, or secreted from the common eye, in their mysteries. Their moral systems were calculated to amuse, to polish, and, we will say, to instruct the higher ranks of men ; but they were composed in such a way, and proceeded on such principles, that the vulgar could be little benefited by them. And, for what they knew of religious truth, they studiously kept it from the *poor*, and left them to the tyranny of their senseless, their impure, their abominable superstitions. Even Socrates himself, though he laboured very commendably to reform the lives of his fellow-citizens, yet laboured to little effect, as he would not, or durst not, disgrace their idolatries, the source of all their corruption and misery. The rest of these wise men were well contented, at most, with being *wise to themselves* ; they stood aloof from the prophane vulgar ; and contemplated, with much complacency, or with much disdain, the popular errors.

Such, and so wretched were the *poor*, when our blessed Lord came to announce the good tidings of salvation to them! Incapable of themselves to find out or to understand their duty, and misled, neglected, or contemned by those who should have been their instructors; lost in error and in vice, with no prospect of recovering themselves out of either; without guides, and without friends; in a word, *without hope, and without God in the world* ^ε; What could equal their wants and their distresses? And how loudly did they cry to Heaven for some friendly hand to be stretched out, some celestial light to be dispensed, to them?

But, perhaps, these unhappy men deserved not the care of Heaven. And, without doubt, if we put their claim on that footing, it will be difficult to make out their title to such distinction. Yet they had something, too, to plead for themselves, something to engage the regards of their merciful Creator, if it be true, as I observed,

II. In the next place, that their hearts, depraved as they were, were yet not so utterly

^ε Eph. ii. 12.

perverse, as those of the *rich and great and wise*, who poured such contempt upon them.

And, for our satisfaction in this point, we need but look into the Gospel-history ; where we find, from many facts and testimonies, that the poorer sort among the Jews were they who gave the best proofs of their disposition to embrace the doctrine, and acknowledge the pretensions, of Jesus.

When he *preached* to the Jews, the Scribes and Pharisees, that is, the *rich and wise*, almost universally and without exception, cavilled at his doctrine, perverted his words, and sought occasion only *how they might entangle him in his talk*^h. But the people, giving way to the ingenuous sense of their own minds, *heard him gladly*ⁱ : They were even *very attentive to hear him*^k. Nor let it be thought, that the love of novelty, or some worse motive, which oft seduces the populace in such cases, was the cause of this attention. They give another, and better reason of it—*Never man, say they, spake like this man*^l : Again, *they were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them*

^h Matth. xxii. 15.

ⁱ Matth. xii. 37.

^k Luke xix, 48.

^l John vii. 46.

as one having authority, and not as the Scribes^m ; That is, they had the sense to perceive there was a weight and force and importance in his doctrines, which they had never found in any other, and, least of all, in the light, frothy, and frivolous doctrines of their Scribes ; and they had the honesty to acknowledge and proclaim their own feelings.

Again ; When Jesus wrought his miracles before the Jews, while their superiors were unconvinced, or blasphemed against conviction, the multitudes cried out in admiration, *Is not this the Son of Davidⁿ ? — It was never, they say, so seen in Israel^o — With a becoming candour and piety, they marvelled, and glorified God, who had given such power unto men^p,*

Thus much for the Jews. And the same difference, between the *rich and poor*, afterwards appeared, when the Apostles turned themselves to the Gentiles. So that St. James reasons upon it, as a certain fact. *Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the Judgment seats ? Do they not blaspheme*

^m Matth. vii. 28.

ⁿ Matth. xii. 23.

^o Matth. ix. 33.

^p Matth. ix. 8.

that worthy name by which ye are called [¶] ?
 And St. Paul to the same purpose, when he appeals to the Gentile Christians themselves —
I see your calling, my brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called [†].

And, if we extend our inquiries beyond the Apostolic age, we still find, that, while councils and synagogues, priests and philosophers, governors and kings, were confederated against the rising church, the *poor*, the *weak*, the *ignorant*, the *ignoble*, very readily, and in great numbers, pressed into it.

Considering then this fairness of mind, which distinguished the *poor*, together with their multiplied necessities, we shall cease to think it strange that our blessed Lord should first and principally *preach the Gospel to them*; and that this circumstance should be predicted of him, and urged by himself, as characteristic of his person and office. For what could distinguish the divine Messiah more, than this condescension to those who most needed, and best deserved, his instruction? Who can wonder that, *when he saw the multitudes*, thus

¶ St. James ii. 6, 7.

† 1 Cor. i. 26.

circumstanced, *he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted^s, under the merciless vexations of their superiors, and were scattered abroad^t, and left exposed to every injury, as sheep having no shepherd^u?* Could any splendor of miracles more illustrate his character, than that affectionate address to the poor people, groaning under all their burthens, of which the pride of wealth and wisdom was not the least, *Come unto me, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls^x?*

Our Lord's whole ministry seems uniformly directed to this end of beating down the insolence of all worldly distinctions, which had too much vilified and degraded human nature. For this purpose, he condescended, himself, to be born in the lowest rank of life, to be brought up in what the world calls a mean and mechanic profession, to converse chiefly with the poor and indigent, to take for his companions and disciples the most sordid of the people, and to propagate his religion by the

^s ἰσχυρότεροι — vexati.

^u Matth. ix. 36.

^t ἐπιπέμωμαι — projecti.

^x Matth. xi. 28, 29.

weakest and most unpromising instruments : *Choosing, as St. Paul divinely expresses it, the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise ; the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty ; And the base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are : That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

In a word, he seems studiously to have bent his whole endeavours, to vindicate the honour of depressed humanity ; to support its weakness, to countenance its wants, to ennoble its misery, and to dignify its disgrace.

Nor let any one presume to insinuate, that this conduct of our blessed Saviour was directed to other ends ; As if he sought, by this application to the people, to engage *them* in the support of his new kingdom, and then, by their noise and numbers, to force the rest into it. The suspicion is utterly without grounds. Jesus made no factious use of the popularity he acquired by his condescension ; he discountenanced and repressed every effort of that nature ; and, though his care was chiefly em-

ployed about the *poor*, it was not confined to them : He *preached* indiscriminately to all, he did his miracles before all, in public, in open day-light, in the presence of the greatest persons, and in places of the greatest resort ; in short, his doctrines and his credentials were equally offered to the examination of men of all ranks and all denominations, of the doctors and rulers of the Jewish people, as well as of the people themselves. This, an impostor most assuredly would not have done.

We have now, then, a reasonable account given us, why it pleased God that the Saviour of the world should be known by this mark, among others, of *his preaching the Gospel to the poor*. The GOODNESS of his character was signally illustrated, by this gracious conduct. I have only to observe, further, that his WISDOM was equally displayed by it : And both together must needs furnish a presumptive argument of his divine mission.

Had the ablest speculative philosopher been consulted about the proper method of reforming the world, though with the attending evidence and authority of miracles, I suppose his plan for effecting this design would have been wholly different from that, which was taken. He

would have counselled an application, not to the *poor* chiefly, if to them at all, but to the *rich*, the *great*, and the *wise*. The minister of this important charge would have been directed to shew himself in the most conspicuous scene, to make the capital of the world, imperial Rome, the head-quarters of his mission, to perform his miracles before the Roman senate, and to proselyte, first of all, the wise and learned of that empire; As conceiving this to be the readiest way to the establishment of his new Religion, and trusting to the power of these great instruments, as to some irresistible vortex, to draw the people with them, into the general profession of it.

This, or something like this, we may imagine, would have been the language of human wisdom. But what would have been the event of these profound and politic counsels? Most probably, the design would not have taken effect. The interests, the prejudices, the pride, and the very philosophy of the world would have revolted against it. The plainest miracles would have been shuffled over, as the sleights of magick: and the divinest truths, been derided as unlearned and ignorant conceits.

But what if the event had been otherwise? What, if the new religion had prospered and

acquired an establishment by these mighty means? Posterity would then have turned the argument in another manner. They would have accounted, and with some reason, for this revolution in the sentiments of mankind, not from the will of Heaven, but the power and policy of men. They would have sought the origin of this triumphant religion in the operation of human causes, and not in the controlling influence of divine. The new system might be preferred to many others that have prevailed in the world, but would be thought to have made its way by the same means. It would still be considered, as a mere human engine, calculated to serve the ends of society, and not to interest the conscience, as proceeding from the sole authority of God. And what could have been opposed to these suggestions? The cause is plainly adequate to the effect: And, thus, the glory of God would have been obscured; and the dispensation itself, exposed to contempt.

See then *the riches both of the goodness and wisdom of God*: Of his GOODNESS, in caring for the poor; and of his WISDOM, in providing by his use of so unlikely means, *that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.*

To conclude ; *the ways of God are*, very frequently, *not our ways*^z ; Yet, when the difference is most striking, a diligent inquiry will sometimes convince us (as in the case before us) that they may be justified even to our apprehensions : The use of which conviction should be, to satisfy us, in other cases, that his ways are always adorable, even when to us, in this state of weakness and blindness, they are *past finding out*.

^z Isaiah lix. 8.

S E R M O N XLII.

PREACHED JANUARY 24, 1773.

JOHN xiv. 2.

*In my Father's house are many mansions : IF
IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU.*

THESSE words are not a little remarkable ; and, if carefully considered, will be found to make very much for the honour of the Christian religion, and its divine author.

Our blessed Lord was now upon the point of leaving the world. He foresaw, distinctly, his own approaching death, and the discouragements of all sorts, which, of course, would oppress his disciples, when he should be taken

from them. He therefore applies himself, in this farewell address, to animate their courage by the assurance of future glory. “ *Let not your heart be troubled*, says he, at the worst that may befall you: *Ye believe in the general providence of God: believe also in me*, in the care which I shall especially take to see an ample recompence made you for all your sufferings on my account. *For in my Father’s house are many mansions*; wherein each of you, according to his deserts, shall for ever enjoy an inviolable repose and felicity. And on this promise ye may rely with the most entire confidence: for know this, That, *if it were not so*, no consideration should have induced me to fill your minds with vain hopes; on the other hand, *I would have told you* the plain truth, how unwelcome soever it might be to you.

We have here, then, from the mouth of Christ himself, an express disavowal of RELIGIOUS FRAUD OR IMPOSTURE; and that, in a point where wise men have sometimes thought themselves at liberty, nay under an obligation, to *lye* for the public service, and in a conjuncture, too, when, if ever, it might seem allowable for a good man to deceive his friends on a mere principle of compassion.

For what so beneficial, it may be said, to mankind, at large, as the persuasion of a future state, in which their happiness shall be proportioned to their virtue? And who, that has any bowels, would carry his attachment to strict truth so far, as not to suffer an unhappy friend to *die*, at least, in this persuasion, when the hopes of life, or the comforts of it, had entirely forsaken him?"

These questions are plausible: but our Lord, who was *the Truth*, as well as *the Life*, governed himself by other maxims. He knew that the real interests of mankind are only, or are best promoted by veracity; that every degree of fraud, though it may have some immediate, or temporary good effects, is, in the order of things, productive of much mischief; is injurious to our moral and reasonable nature, which was made for truth, and finds its proper satisfaction in it; is liable to detection, to suspicion, at least; and if it be but the latter (entertained on probable grounds, and become, as it soon will be, universal), not only the chief benefits of the imposture are, thenceforth, lost, but truth itself, in other cases, is taken for imposture: of which there is not a more deplorable instance, than in the subject we are now considering: for, it being well known

that men have been forward to deceive each other in matters of religion, and particularly in what concerns the hope or fear of a future state, hence, an incurable suspicion has sunk deep into the minds of too many, concerning Christianity itself; as if, in this momentous doctrine of life and immortality, it amused us only, as many other schemes of religion have done, with a plausible and politic fiction.

But our blessed Lord, as I said, had other views of this matter, and governed himself by other principles. He knew, who it was that had been *a liar*, and therefore *a man-slayer from the beginning*^a; and left it to him, the adversary of God and man, to signalize himself by *murderous* deceit and imposture. For himself, he tells his disciples, whom of all men, it concerned him most to possess with this salutary belief of a future state; He tells them, I say, that, instead of deluding them with a groundless hope, he would certainly, and even at this season, which made that hope so infinitely precious, declare to them the simple truth, and on no account permit them to continue under a false (if it had been false), though flattering persuasion.

^a Ἰούδης — ἀνθρωποκτόνος — John viii. 44.

Shall we believe this great teacher, on his own word? Or, will you suspect, that even this uncommon declaration, uncommon in the founder of a new religion, was only a refinement of art and policy; and that Jesus hoped, by this shew of frankness, to propagate his favourite imposture the more successfully in the world?

I know, and have just now observed, to what lengths our ingenious suspicions on this subject are apt to run. But consider the circumstances; and then judge for yourselves, whether the suspicion, in this case, be well founded.

In my Father's house, says he, are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. And can we doubt his sincerity in this declaration, when he was now to make an experiment of its truth; and the deception, if it were one, was first to operate on himself, before it affected others? A speculative reasoner, or a politic legislator, when planning his system at his ease, and in no danger of being called upon to make trial of his own principles, might discourse with much complacency, though with little inward belief, of a happy futurity. But for one, who was just stepping into that world, of which he announced such wonders, who was

going, by one confident venture, to put his doctrine to the proof, and to expire in torments from a view to his own promises ; for one, I say, thus circumstanced, knowingly to delude himself and others, is not in human nature, unless perverted by such a degree of weakness or vanity, as no man will think chargeable on the character of Jesus. Socrates, the ablest and the honestest of the ancient sages, had, on moral principles, reasoned himself into a favourable opinion of the soul's immortality. He had often expressed this opinion to his friends, in terms of some force ; and there were times in which he seemed very little, if at all, to question the truth of it. Yet, when he came to die, and had taken the fatal cup into his hand, his resolution gives way, he hesitates, and leaves his followers, after first of all confessing himself to be left, in the utmost uncertainty on this momentous topic: a conduct surely very natural, and becoming a wise man, who had not, and who knew he had not, the most convincing evidence of its reality!

But there are further reasons to think that Jesus was sincere in making this declaration to his disciples, suggested to us by *the terms of his religion*, and by *his own personal character*.

Those *terms* were, that whoever believed in the name of Christ, that is, became a convert to his religion, was thenceforth to encounter all sorts of difficulties, and dangers, and distresses, nay, death itself, and that, in every dreadful shape, which the malice of the world could invent, rather than to retract or forego his open profession of it. This, the disciples had been often told by their Master: who, whether as a prophet, or a wise man (it matters not which, to our present purpose) had distinctly foreseen, and had set before them in all its force, what they were to expect and to suffer for his sake, and the sake of the Gospel. Other teachers of religion and philosophy required no such terms of their followers, or had reason to apprehend no such consequences from the propagation of their opinions. They might therefore keep their doubts to themselves, if they had any, of a future state: In Jesus, such reserve, or dissimulation, would have been the most unfeeling cruelty.

And against whom is this suspicion indulged? Why against HIM (and that was the other consideration I mentioned) whose personal character was that of goodness and philanthropy itself. This character shines out in every page of the Gospel. We see it in all he said and did to his disciples, whom he calls his *friends*, and treats

as such on all occasions: witness his condescension to their infirmities, his concern for their safety (while it might consist with their duty), his compassion for their sufferings, his friendliness of temper, we may even say, his affection for their persons and virtues. In short, the sympathetic tenderness of his nature was evidenced in all ways, in which it could possibly shew itself, even by that of tears.

Now, put these two things together, his *deep concern for the interests of his disciples*, on the one hand, and *the severe injunctions he gave them*, on the other, and see if there be any possibility of mistrusting our Lord's good faith in that memorable declaration—*In my Father's house there are many mansions: IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU.*

His language on the subject, so interesting to them, had, indeed, been always the same. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoyce, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven^b.* This he said in the beginning of his ministry: This he now repeats in the close of it; but with that remarkable

^b Matth. v. 11, 12.

assurance (now for the first time given, and, from the *time* of giving it, not more important, than it is credible) *if it were not so*, if your *reward in heaven* were not such, and so great, as I have ever affirmed it to be, in recompence of all your sufferings, past and to come, for my sake, I would not have left you under an error in what so infinitely concerns You—*I would expressly have told you of it.*

THE USE we have to make of these reflections is, to see what our *Lord's character* truly was; and what our reasonable *hopes and expectations* from him are.

I. But for this declaration, it might be thought, that Jesus, pushed on by an eager ambition of being the founder of a sect, had, for his *own ends*, preached up this alluring doctrine of a future state; or, that, heated by a moral enthusiasm, he had overlooked the mischiefs of his scheme, in contemplation of the *public ends*, it might serve, as applied to the important interests of virtue and religion. Surmises of this sort might have sprung up in the minds of men, not prejudiced against the author of our faith; and would certainly have been cherished and malignantly insisted upon by his enemies. But it now appears, that he disclaimed all such *views and purposes*: that he was cool enough

to see the iniquity of all religious deception ; and just enough to acknowledge the cruelty of it, in the present instance. If he had not certainly known the truth of his doctrine, he would have recalled and disowned it. He felt, in his own case, what it was to encounter death for conscience-sake : and he knew what deaths others were to encounter on the like grounds of persuasion. But *for the joy that was set before him*, how could the shame and agony of that cross be endured ? And, if there be no recompence of reward, should he expose to such, or to equal sufferings, his honest, unsuspecting, affectionate followers ? The instant moment ^c, the imposed duty ^d, the foreseen event ^e, the upright mind ^f, the feeling heart ^g, all conspire to satisfy us, that Jesus was not, could not, be the fraudulent, that is, the insensible, the unrelenting, the merciless inventor or publisher of a politic fable, but a teacher of truth and righteousness sent from God.

Thus much for our Lord's *general character* ; which we shall do well to keep in mind, when we meditate on any part of his instruc-

^c John xiii. 1.

^d Matth. x. 32, 3. and 38, 9. Luke xiv. 26. 1 John iii. 16.

^e John xvi. 2. 33.

^f Matth. vii, 12.

^g Luke xix, 41. John xi, 35.

tions to us; but more especially, when, for our singular comfort, we attend to his great doctrine of a BLESSED IMMORTALITY. Our divine Master has in the clearest and fullest terms, announced this doctrine to us; and, what is more, he has anxiously removed the only possible doubt, which we could have of its truth, by disclaiming the politic use, which too many others had presumed to make of it.

II. It follows, that we may rely, with confidence, on this invaluable promise of a future life; the only source of peace and comfort to the mind, without which the disordered scene of this life is inexplicable to the wisest men, and scarce supportable by the happiest; we may, I say, rely with safety on this *glorious hope*^h of immortality, unless we will suppose that Jesus meant to deceive us even then, when he most deliberately and solemnly pledged himself to us for his veracity: a supposition, which is, in truth, as foolish as it is indecent.

Assured therefore, as we are, that our Saviour both taught this doctrine, and taught it without the least mixture of guile or dissimulation, let us hold fast our expectation of it to

^h ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης. — Col. i. 27.

the end; and in all the troubles of this life, whether endured for conscience-sake or not, provided only they be such as consist *with* a good conscience, let us reckon with certainty on our title to one of those eternal *mansions*, of which there are so *many in the house of our heavenly Father*; and that, for the sake and through the merits of our LORD JESUS CHRIST; the author of our salvation, as well as the proclaimer of it: our merciful Redeemer, at once, and infallible Instructor; to whom be all honour, praise, and thanksgiving, now and for ever.

Amen.

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

PREACHED MAY 5, 1776.

JOHN xvi. 12, 13.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, shall come, he will guide you into ALL TRUTH: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and HE WILL SHEW YOU THINGS TO COME.

THERE is scarce a page in the Gospels, which to an attentive reader may not afford a striking proof of their divine original.

We have an instance in the words before us: in which, Jesus, now about to leave the

world, tells the disciples, that he had *many things to say unto them*, which were not proper for their ear at this time, but that these, and all other necessary truths should hereafter be imparted to them by a *divine spirit*, to be sent from heaven to be their guide and instructor: that, from *him*, they should learn what, for the present, he forbore to communicate to them, of his views and purposes in the religion, they were to teach mankind; nay, and that this divine *Spirit of truth would shew them things to come*.

Now Jesus, I suppose, whatever else may be thought of him, will be readily acknowledged to have been, at least, a discreet and wise man: for without a very high degree of discretion and wisdom, it was plainly impossible for him to do the great things, he did; I mean, to be so successful, as he was, in imposing a new faith and religion on mankind. They, who take Christianity for an imposture, must confess, at least, that it was an imposture, artfully contrived, and ably conducted: otherwise, the effects of it could never have been, what we see they are.

But would any man, acting on the principles of human wisdom, only, have given an

assurance of this kind (an assurance, too, that seemed not *necessary*) to those whom he thought fit to entrust with the care of his imposture, when yet he must certainly know that he could not make good to them what he had promised; and when they, to whom such assurance was given, might easily, and, as he must foresee from his knowledge of human nature, would certainly abuse it, to selfish ends of their own, not consistent with his, and to the hurt of that very cause, which he wanted to promote?

Say, that he had, only, told them—*this divine spirit shall instruct you in many things concerning my religion, which I have not, myself, thought fit to reveal to you*—would not this general promise have opened a door to all sorts of fraud, or extravagance? And could he reasonably expect that any well-concerted scheme of religion, such as was likely to make its fortune in the world, would be delivered and established by men, who were commissioned to enlarge his system, at pleasure, and as their various passions, or fancies, might suggest? And all this, on the same authority with that which he had claimed to himself?

Suppose, they were *honest*, or, *faithful to him*, that is, disposed to teach nothing but what should agree to their Master's doctrine, yet who could answer for their skill or judgment? And, if they were *dishonest*, or *unfaithful*, what ruin must not this licence of building on his doctrine, have brought on the structure, he had already raised?

When Mark Antony was allowed to *forg*e a will for Cæsar, we know the use he made of that liberty. But had he been a better man, than he was, and inclined to give out that only for Cæsar's will, which might probably seem to be so, yet his capacity to make a will for Cæsar, in all respects uniform, and consistent with that great man's known views and character, might well be called in question, notwithstanding the whole contrivance depended on himself; much more, if the arduous task had been entrusted to *eleven* persons, besides, of different abilities and dispositions.

Still, the case is more desperate, than we have hitherto supposed. Besides a liberty of adding what new consistent doctrines, they pleased, to the doctrine of Jesus, the disciples have a greater and more dangerous power committed to them, a power of *prophesying*, or foretelling *things to come*.

To see how the case stands on this last supposition, consider, 1. *What is implied in this PROPHEPIC power.* 2. *What abuses are likely to be made of such an assumed power by ANY men whatsoever.* And, 3. *What peculiar abuses of it were to be expected from SUCH men, as the disciples.* Consider, I say, these three particulars, and then, upon the whole, determine for yourselves, whether any man of ordinary prudence would have commissioned his followers to exercise such a power; or, if he had done so, and had been an impostor, whether the event could possibly have been what it clearly was.

1. The *prophetic power*, implies an ability of looking into the future history of mankind; of foreseeing what revolutions shall happen in states and kingdoms; what shall be the issue of depending wars, or counsels: what the prosperous, or adverse fortune shall be of public, or private persons; of those, who have any authority over us, or connexion with us; of individuals, or collective bodies of men; of friends, or enemies. Whoever has this extraordinary power committed to him, or who thinks he has, has the characters of all men at his mercy; can blast the reputation of the wisest and best men, by a charge of follies and

crimes, *not yet committed*; or can raise the credit of the worst and weakest, by covering their *future* life with wisdom and honour. He can intimidate the greatest men by announcing their disgrace and ruin; or exalt the meanest by bringing out to view their successes and triumphs. In a word, he can speak peace or war, fame or infamy, life or death, to any state or person, against whom he thinks fit to level this powerful engine of inspiration.

And as all men, so all *times*, are equally within his reach. He can pursue the objects of his love or hate through ages to come; and can excite hopes and fears in the breasts of those, who are not to appear on the stage of the world, till many centuries after he has left it, and when himself has nothing to apprehend, let his predictions take what turn they will, from the shame of detection.

Such then being the nature of this mighty privilege to foretell *things to come*, you cannot but see

2. In the next place, *how liable this power is to be abused by ANY men whatsoever, who have a pretence to assume it.*

Make, if you will, the most favourable supposition, that these pretended prophets are *able and learned*: But then, what endless schemes of fraud, of policy, of imposture, may ye not expect from the dextrous management of this faculty! Revolve with yourselves the history of ancient divination, or modern prophecy, when lodged in the hands of artful and designing men; and see, what portentous abuses must needs arise from this commission, and yet what certain disgrace and confusion to the memory of those, to whom it is given.

What blessings will not men, entrusted with this convenient foresight of futurity, lavish on their own friends, or party! And what curses, what terrors, equally belied in the event, will they not scatter over the persons or affairs of rivals and enemies, for the gratification of a present passion or interest!

Suppose them cool enough to distrust the reality of their inspiration, yet the temptation, to make the pretence of it subservient to their own views, would be almost irresistible: Or suppose them, on the other hand, to prophesy with good faith, this genuine enthusiasm might enable them to act their part more naturally indeed, but, in the end, not more successfully.

Had then the Apostles been, each of them, as provident and wise, as their Master himself, and as much persuaded of their own inspiration, as he could desire them to be, they would not, we may be sure, have been encouraged by him, if an impostor only, to think themselves possessed of a prophetic power, when it must have turned to the ruin of his cause, on every supposition; I mean, equally on the supposition of its being regarded as a real, or pretended, power; that is, whether the Apostles were guided by the views of a dishonest policy themselves, or were the honest dupes of their Master's policy. But there is

3. Still more to be said on the improbability of a wise man's giving such an assurance to men *qualified and circumstanced*, as the Apostles were, in other words, *to men of their PECULIAR character and situation*.

1. The *character* of the Apostles, was that of plain, uneducated, illiterate men; men, totally unacquainted with the world, and with those arts, which are necessary to conduct a great design with ability and success; men, of good sense, indeed, and of honest minds, but, from their singular simplicity, only qualified to report what they had seen or heard, and by

no means provident or skillful enough to round and complete a scheme, but half-disclosed by its author, and that half delivered incidentally and by parcels to them, and ill understood.

Yet to these men, Jesus declares, that much was wanting to the integrity of that religious system, which they were appointed to teach: and that all defects in it were to be supplied, not by himself, but by **a divine spirit**, who should hereafter descend upon them, and **LEAD THEM INTO ALL THE TRUTH^a**; nay, who should not only instruct them in such parts of his religion, as he had imperfectly, or not at all, explained, but should, further, open to their view I know not what scenes of futurity, and **SHEW THEM THINGS TO COME.**

These magnificent promises, you see, were likely to make a deep impression on the rude minds of the disciples; half-astonished, we may suppose, at the idea of such superior privileges, and more than half-intoxicated with the conceit of that pre-eminence, which those privileges were to bestow.

Their implicit faith, too, in a beloved and revered Master, would incline them to expect,

^a εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀληθείαν.

with assurance, the completion of these promises: And thus, every principle, whether of simplicity, vanity, or credulity, would make their presumption violent, and leave it without controul.

2. If we turn, next, to the *situation* of these men, buoyed up with such exalted hopes and expectations, we shall find it apt to create a fanaticism, which, of itself, might drive them, in the absence of their politic Master, into any excess. These simple, over-weening men were, at the same time, poor, friendless, despised, insulted, persecuted; exposed to every injury from the number, power, and malice of their enemies, as Jesus, indeed, had honestly forewarned them; yet stung with the desire of founding a temporal kingdom (contrary, it must be owned, to his express declaration) and of rising themselves to the first honours of it. Could any thing flatter their ambition more, than to be told that they had the modelling of their own scheme left to themselves, under the cover of a supernatural direction? Or, could any thing gratify their resentments, all on fire from ill usage, more effectually, than to be assured that the fates of their adversaries, all the secrets of futurity, lay open to their view? How oft has oppression turned faith into fana-

ticism, and made prophets of those, whom it only found zealots! And do we think that secular ambition, concurring with religious zeal, in the like circumstances, could have any other issue; especially, when the prophetic impulse was looked for by such zealots, and, on the highest authority, actually engaged to them? Or can we, who see the probability, the certainty, of this consequence, conceive so meanly of Jesus, considered in the view of a wise man only, as to imagine that He should not be aware of it?

As then it is very unlikely that any politic impostor should make such a promise, as the text contains, a promise liable to be abused by *any* sort of men, and most of all by *those*, to whom it was made; so neither is it conceivable that, if a rash enthusiast had authorized his followers to rely on such a promise, the issue of it could have been that, which we certainly know it to have been.

For consider, what were the additions, made to the scheme of Jesus by his enlightened followers, and what the prophecies delivered by them? Only, such additions, as served to open and display the scheme of the Gospel, in a manner that perfectly corresponded with the

declared views of its author, or at least no way contradicted them: And only, such prophecies, as have either been clearly fulfilled, or not convicted of imposture, to this day.

Then, again, those additions, were directly contrary to the preconceived notions and expectations, of those who made them; such, for instance, as the doctrines concerning *the rejection of the Jews, the call of the Gentiles, the abolition of the Mosaic ritual, and the spirituality of Christ's kingdom*; doctrines, which, in the life-time of their Master, and till enlightened by the promised Spirit of truth, they had either not understood, or had rejected as false and incredible; yet doctrines, which made the principal part of those *truths*, into which they were *led by the Spirit*.

And as to the prophecies, delivered by them, what less could one expect from so general, and so flattering a promise, than that they should be *numerous*, and, at the same time, replete with *presages of good fortune* to themselves and their party, and with *terrible denunciations of wrath* against their opposers? Yet nothing of all this followed. The predictions, they gave out, were indeed so many as to shew that the promise was performed to

them; yet, on the whole, but *few*; in truth, much fewer than can be imagined without a particular inquiry into the number of them: And of these few, the greater part were employed in declaring the corruptions, that should hereafter be made of the new religion, they were teaching, and the disasters that should befall the teachers of it; and scarce *one*, directed against their present and personal enemies.

All this is astonishing, and unaccountable on the common principles of human nature, if left to itself in the management of such a faculty as that of prophetic inspiration. And, though, on these principles, it was to be supposed, nay, might certainly have been concluded, that a set of the craftiest impostors, or of the honestest fanatics, that ever lived, must, in the end, dishonour themselves by the exercise of such a power, and defeat their own purpose; yet, to the surprize of all reflecting men, they have maintained, to this day, their character of veracity, not one of their prophecies having fallen to the ground; and, what is more, with so many chances against the success of their cause, they have triumphed over all opposition, and have established in the world a new religion with that force of

evidence, which, as their Master divinely foretold, *all their adversaries have not been able to gainsay.*

In a word, the EVENT has been, and is such, as might be expected, if the divine assistance promised, was actually imparted to them; but improbable in the highest degree, or rather impossible to have taken place, if fraud, or enthusiasm, had been concerned, either in giving, or fulfilling, this promise.

It would be equally an abuse of your patience, and an affront to your good sense, to enlarge farther on so plain a point. From recollecting, and laying together, the circumstances, which have been now briefly touched, and pointed out to you, ye will conclude, That, when Jesus gave this extraordinary *promise* of the Spirit to his followers, he certainly knew, that he should be able to make good his engagements to them: And that this *spirit*, being of God, would not be at the command of his followers, to be employed by them, as their passions, or short-sighted policies, might direct; but would operate in them, according to the good pleasure and unerring wisdom of HIM, who sent this celestial guide; or, in the words of the text, *that he should not speak of*

himself, but whatsoever he should hear, that, only, he should speak.

No ill effects would, then, proceed from the privilege of being let into *new truths*, or, of being entrusted with the power of foretelling *things to come*. And, from the very consideration, that Jesus had *engaged* to confer such privileges upon his disciples, who, if not overruled in the use of them, that is, if not truly and immediately inspired, would, or rather must, have employed them to the discredit and subversion of his own design; from this single consideration, I say, it may fairly be concluded, especially when we can now compare the assurance with the event, That He himself was the person, he assumed to be, that is, A DIVINE PERSON; and his religion, what we believe it to be, THE WORD AND WILL OF GOD.

S E R M O N XLIV.

PREACHED MAY 29, 1774. T. S.

ACTS i. 11.

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

AS the entrance of Jesus into the world, so his departure out of it, was graced by the ministry of angels. Events, so important as these, deserved, and, it seems, required, to be so dignified. His birth was, indeed, obscure and mean; and therefore the attendance of those *flaming ministers* might be thought necessary to illustrate and adorn it. But his ascension into heaven was an event so full of

glory, that it needed not, we may think, any additional lustre to be thrown upon it by this celestial appearance. For what so likely to raise the ideas and excite the admiration of those, who were witnesses of this event, as the fact itself, so sublimely and yet so simply related in these words of the sacred historian — *while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight?*

We may presume, then, that the heavenly host were not sent merely to dignify this transaction, in its own nature so transcendantly awful; but for some further purpose of divine Providence. And we find that purpose expressed very plainly in the words of the text: which contain an admonition of great importance, and direct the attention of the disciples to the true end, for which this scene of wonder was displayed before them. For *while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up, two men stood by them in white apparel; which, also, said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

The Apostles, we may suppose, were only occupied with the splendor of the shew; or

they were wholly absorbed in the contemplation of its miraculous nature; or they were speculating, perhaps, on the circumstances of it. They were asking themselves, as they gazed (at least, if they had possessed the philosophic spirit of our days, they might be tempted to ask), how the natural gravity of a human body could permit its ascent in so light a medium — how a cloud, which is but a sheet of air, impregnated with vapours, and made visible by reflected light, could be a fit vehicle of a gross and ponderous substance, and serve for the conveyance of it into the purer regions of æther, which we call *heaven* — or, what need indeed there was, that Jesus should be carried up thither; as if the God, to whom he ascended, were not in every place, alike; as if there were any such distinction, as high and low, with regard to him; as if all space were not equally inhabited by an infinite spirit; and as if his throne were not in the depths beneath, as well as the heights above, every where, in short, without respect to our descriptions of place, where himself existed.

From such a state of mind, or from such meditations as these, the Angels divert the Apostles, and call off their attention to a point, which deserved it better, and concerned them

more nearly. 'Tis, as if they had said, "Suspend your admiration of this glorious spectacle; suppress all your fond and useless speculations about the causes of this event, and learn from us the proper uses of it. Ye have seen your Master thus visibly carried up from you into heaven; by what means, ye need not know, and may well forbear to inquire. But this intelligence receive from us (and it much imports you to be made acquainted with it); this same Jesus, who is thus gone up from you for a time into heaven, will come again with the same, or even additional glory, to judge the world in righteousness; to see what improvements ye have made of all he has done and suffered for you; and to fix your final doom according to your respective deserts, or miscarriages. Think well of this instruction, which so naturally results from all he said while he was with you on earth, and from what has now passed before your eyes; drop all your other inquiries, and resolve them into this, above all, deserving your best attention, how ye may prepare yourselves for that day, when *he shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*"

The weight of this angelic admonition was enough to put all curious imaginations to flight,

and to convince the Apostles then, and all believers at this day, “That their true wisdom consists in adverting to the moral and practical uses of their religion, instead of indulging subtle, anxious, and unprofitable speculations concerning the articles of it ; such especially as are too high, or too arduous for them ; such, as they have no real interest in considering, and have no faculties to comprehend.”

Permit me then to enforce this conclusion, by applying it to the case of such persons, and especially of such Christians, as have been, at all times, but too ready to sacrifice conduct to speculation ; to neglect the ends of religious doctrines, while they busy themselves in nice and fruitless and (therefore, if for no other reason) pernicious inquiries into the grounds and reasons of them.

1. In the days of ancient paganism, two points in which religion was concerned, chiefly engaged the attention of their wise men ; “GOD,” and the “HUMAN SOUL :” interesting topics both ; and the more necessary to be well considered, because those wise men had little or no light on these subjects, but what their own reason might be able to strike out for them. And, had they been contented to derive, from

the study of God's works, *all that may be known of him*, by natural reason, *his eternal power and Godhead*, and had then glorified him with such a worship, as that knowledge obviously suggested; or, had they, by advert- ing to their own internal constitution, deduced the spirituality of the soul, together with its free, moral, and accountable nature, and then had built on these principles, the expectation of a future life, and a conduct in this, suitable to such expectation; had they proceeded thus far in their inquiries, and stopped here, who could have blamed, or, rather, who would not have been ready to applaud, their interesting speculations. But, when, instead of this reasonable use of their understandings in religious matters, they were more curious to investigate the essence of the infinite mind, than to establish just notions of his moral attributes; and to define the nature of the human soul, than to study its moral faculties; their metaphysics became presumptuous and abominable: they reasoned themselves out of a superintending providence, in this world, and out of all hope, in a future; they resolved God into fate, or excluded him from the care of his own creation, and so, made the worship of him, a matter of policy, and not of conscience; while, at the same time, they dismissed the Soul into air, or

into the spirit of the world, either extinguishing its substance, or stripping it of individual consciousness ; and so, in either way, set aside the concern, which it might be supposed to have in a future state, to the subversion of all morality, as well as of religion.

Such was the fruit of pagan ingenuity ! The philosophers kept *gazing* upon God, and the Soul, till they lost all just and useful conceptions of either : And thus, as St. Paul says, *they became vain in their imaginations ; and their foolish heart was darkened*^a.

If from the Grecian, we turn to the oriental, and what is called, barbaric philosophy, what portentous dreams do we find about angels and spirits, or of two opposite principles, contending for mastery in this sublunary world ; ingeniously spun out into I know not what fantastic conclusions, which annihilate all sober piety, or subvert the plainest dictates of moral duty ? So true is it of all presumptuous inquirers into the invisible things of God, that, *professing themselves wise, they become fools* !

But these extravagancies of the heathen world deserve our pity, and may admit of some excuse.

^a Rom. i. 21.

The worst is, that, when Heaven had revealed of itself what it saw fit, this irreverent humour of searching into the deep things of God, was not cured, but indeed carried to a greater, if possible, at least to a more criminal excess; as I shall now shew in a slight sketch of the mischiefs, which have arisen, from this audacious treatment even of the divine word.

2. Of the *Jewish* corruptions I shall say nothing, because they did not so directly spring from a licence of speculation in the Rabbins: though their readiness in admitting unauthorized traditions, and in giving way to evasive glosses on the Law, had something of the same character in it, and led to the same ill effects.

But when the *Gospel*, that last and best revelation of the divine will, was vouchsafed to mankind, it might be expected, that the most curious would keep themselves within the bounds of modesty and respect: that they would thankfully receive the information imparted to them, would improve it to its right use, and acquiesce in the want of that light, which it was not thought proper to give.

But, no; the same ungoverned curiosity, that had wantoned so long in the schools of

pagan philosophy, rioted, with a still more luxuriant extravagance, in the Christian church: as if that unholy flame had caught new strength from the fires of the altar; and the revealed articles of our creed had been only so much fresh fuel to feed and augment it.

Hence, in the days of the Apostles themselves, we hear much of men that, *strove about words, to no profit*—of *profane and vain babblings*, that tended to nothing but *ungodliness*^b, of arrogant reasoners, who *intruded into those things, which they had not seen, vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds*^c, of extravagant speculatists, who allegorized and explained away the fundamental articles of the faith, even the *resurrection* itself^d: which, in the literal sense, was rejected as a gross doctrine, not suited to the apprehensions of wise men.

Thus the seeds of this evil were early sown, and began to shoot up in those rank heresies, of which a full harvest presently appeared.

The Gnostic and Manichæan impieties led the way. Others, of as ill name, followed

^b Tim. ii. 14 and 16.

^c Coloss. ii. 18.

^d 2 Tim. ii. 18.

from all quarters ; especially from the sects of pagan philosophy ; which now pressed into the church, and, in their haste, forgot to leave their quibbles and their metaphysicks behind them. The evidences of the Gospel had, indeed, extorted their assent : but how ill prepared they were for the practice of the new religion, sufficiently appeared, when, instead of submitting themselves to the word of God, they would needs torture it into a compliance with their own fancies. Every convert found his own tenets in the doctrine of Jesus : and would be a Christian only, on the principles of his pagan theology.

Thus the pure and simple faith of the Gospel was adulterated by every folly, which delirious reason could invent and propagate ; till, instead of *joy and peace in believing*, the destined fruits of Christianity *through the power of the holy Ghost*^e, all was dissonance and distraction : contentious pride, and fierce inexorable debate.

These mischiefs continued very long ; when Plato, at one time, and Aristotle, at another, gave the law to the Christian world ; and deci-

^e Rom. xv. 13.

ded in all questions, or rather confounded all, which the subtlety of human wit could extract from the plainest articles of the Christian faith.

Even the barbarous ages could not suppress this fatal ingenuity. The wits of the schoolmen teemed with fresh chimæras, in the shade of their cloysters; as the minds of disturbed visionaries are observed to be more than commonly active and prolific in the dark.

At length Reason grew ashamed of these more than fruitless altercations: and a few divine men, at the Reformation, seemed resolved to take the scriptures for their guide, and to shut up all their inquiries in a frank and full submission to the written word. Still their former bad habits, imperceptibly almost, stuck close to them; for which they had only this excuse to make, that the zeal of their opponents forced them into dispute. Necessity, sharpened their invention; their successes, begot pride; and persecution, engendered hate. In this way, and by these steps, it was, that the Protestants grew ingenious and dogmatical. In opposition to the church of Rome, they would explain doctrines, of which they had no just ideas; founded on texts of Scripture, which

they did not understand. Presently, as was natural for men in their blind situation, they quarrelled among themselves; and their presumption, we may be sure, was not lessened, but increased, by this misadventure. The issue of all these conflicts was, an inundation of dark and dangerous writings, on subjects^f, which confound human reason, and in which religion has no concern.

In process of time, however, these evils were, in part, removed. Philosophers^g examined the scriptures with care, and explained them with reverence: and, what is more, Divines^h became, in the best sense of the word, philosophers. Between them, much light was thrown on the general scheme of revelation. Its utility, its necessity, was shewn: its sublime views were opened: its evidences were cleared: its doctrines, vindicated: and its authority, maintained. Reason saw to distinguish between its own province, and that of faith: It grew severe in exacting its own rights: and modest in prescribing to those of the revelation itself.

But while men of superior sense were thus intent on reforming the bad theology of former

^f *Divine prescience, absolute decrees, &c.*

^g Bacon, Boyle, Locke, Newton.

^h Barrow, Clarke, Butler, Warburton, &c.

times, the rest were too generally involved in it. They were unwilling to give up their darling habit of *gazing up into heaven*: that is, of framing, or adopting theories, which had neither solidity, nor use; and of explaining mysteries, which they could not understandⁱ.

Nor was the effect of this folly, merely to disgrace themselves. Christianity was too frequently seen in the false light, in which these rash adventurers had placed it: And men of shallow minds, and libertine principles, were ready enough to take advantage of all their indiscretions. For on this ground only, or chiefly, the various structures of modern infidelity stand. The presumptuous positions of particular men, or churches, are forwardly taken for the genuine doctrines of Christianity: And those positions, being not unfrequently either wholly unintelligible, or even contrary to the plainest reason, the charge of nonsense, or of falshood, is, thus, dexterously transferred on

ⁱ "It hath been the common disease of Christians from the beginning, not to content themselves with that measure of faith, which God and the Scriptures have expressly afforded us: but out of a vain desire to know more than is revealed, they have attempted to discuss things, of which we can have no light, neither from reason nor revelation."

J. HALE'S *Works*, Vol. I. p. 125, *Glasg.* 1765

the Gospel itself. And, though the abuse be gross and palpable, yet, when dressed out with a shew of argument, or varnished over with a little popular eloquence, it shall easily pass on ill-inclined, or unwary men.

It is surely time for us to benefit by this sad experience. We, the teachers of religion, should learn, not to be *wise above what is written*: And you, who would profit in this school, should not think much to restrain your curiosity within these bounds, which, not the Scriptures only, but, right reason prescribes.

For let it not be surmized, that, in deducing this account of the mischiefs, which have sprung from ill-directed inquiries into religion, my purpose is in any degree to discountenance the use of reason in such matters. Christianity, if it be indeed divine, will bear the strictest examination; and it is the prerogative of our protestant profession to support itself on the footing of free inquiry. The way of argument is so far from being hurtful to the cause of revelation, that it is, in truth, the basis and foundation of it. We dishonour, we affront our holy faith, if we believe it hath, or can have any other. Only let us take heed, that Reason do her proper work; and that we do

not dream, or fancy, or presume, when we think we reason.

In the instances, before given, the fault was in concluding without premises, and in arguing without ideas. When men call this *reasoning*, they forget the meaning of the term, as well as mistake the extent of their own faculties. We cannot reason on all subjects, because there are many subjects which we cannot understand: And by the term, *reasoning*, is only meant an act of the mind, which draws right conclusions from intelligible propositions. The nature of the infinite Being, the mode of his existence, the œconomy of his providence, are inscrutable to us, and probably to the highest angels. Why then intrude into such things, as no man hath seen, or can see? All that remains is, to admit no proposition, which is not clearly revealed; and, for the rest, to admit, on the authority of the revealer, what must be true, though we cannot, in the way of reason, perceive that it is so.

The inutility of all researches into divine things, without a strict adherence to this well-grounded principle, is apparent; the presumption of them, is ridiculous; but, above all, the mischiefs of them, are deplorable.

Men bewilder themselves, in inextricable difficulties: they disbelieve, on incompetent grounds: they give up the Gospel, and, with it, their best hopes, for the gratification of the idlest vanity: or they mis-spend their time in exploring articles of faith, instead of attending, to the obvious end and use of them.

To return to the text, which led us into these reflexions. The disciples were *looking up into heaven*, when they should have been considering how to follow him thither. Is not our folly the same, or rather is it not more inexcusable, when gazing, with our weak reason, on celestial things, we neglect the ends, for which a glympse of them is afforded to us? For there is not an article of our creed, which may not make us better, if not wiser: And obedience, that is, *faith working by love*, whatever some may think, is of another value in the sight of God, and of higher concern to man, than all knowledge.

S E R M O N XLV.

PREACHED JUNE 23, 1776.

St. MATTH. xiii. 55, 56.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James and Joses and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are not they all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him.

WE have, in these words, a striking picture of ENVY; which makes us unwilling to see, or to acknowledge, any pre-eminence in those, whom we have familiarly known and conversed with, and whom we have been long used to regard as our inferiors, or, at most, but on a level with ourselves. Our Lord's

neighbours and countrymen, who had been acquainted with him from his youth, could repeat the names of his whole family, and knew the ordinary condition, in which they lived, were out of patience to think that, so descended and so circumstanced, he should be grown at once into distinction among them, and should be taken notice of for abilities and powers, which they, none of them, possessed.

This temper of mind, I say, is here very graphically expressed; and it operated among the Jews with a more than common malignity, shedding its venom on those, whom not their own industry, but the special favour of Heaven had raised above their fellows, and had commissioned to go forth with extraordinary powers (of which they had frequent instances in their history) for the common benefit of themselves and of mankind. Whence it acquired even the authority of a proverbial sentence, — that *a prophet hath no honour in his own country, and in his own house*^a.

But, I mean not to enlarge, at present, on this moral topick. There is *another*, and very

^a Matth. xiii. 57.

important use to be made of these words, which is, to let us see, “how very small a matter will serve to overpower the strongest evidence of our religion, though proposed with all imaginable advantage to us, when we *hate to be reformed*, or, for any other reason, have no mind to be convinced of its truth.”

This strange power of *prejudice* is exemplified in the text, and will deserve our serious consideration.

Our blessed Lord had now given many proofs of the divine virtue, that was lodged in him; and was, therefore, moved, not only by the duty of his office, but, as we may suppose, by that regard which every good man bears to his country, to make a tender of his mercies to those persons, especially, among whom he had been brought up. Accordingly, we are told, that he came to his own city of Nazareth, and *preached in their Synagogue, in-somuch that the people of that place were astonished, and said, whence hath this man this wisdom, which appears in his doctrine; and these mighty works, which we have seen him perform?* And then, calling to mind the mean circumstances of his birth and family,

before repeated, they expressed their dissatisfaction, or, as the text says, *were offended in him.*

But, were those circumstances a reason for rejecting a *doctrine*, which astonished them with its wisdom; and *works*, which they owned to be *mighty*, and above the common power of man? Rather, sure, the opposite conduct was to be expected; and, because they knew certainly, from the mean extraction and education of him who taught and did these things, that he had no means of *acquiring* his abilities (if they were at all to be acquired) in an ordinary way, they ought, methinks, to have had their minds impressed with a full assurance, that they were owing, as they were by himself ascribed, to the power of God.

But, no: rather than admit a conclusion, which hurt their pride, and crossed their foolish prejudices, they stifle the strongest conviction of their own minds; and resolve not to receive a prophet, whom they had long desired and expected, who came to them with all the credentials of a prophet, and with the offer of what they most wanted, the remission of their sins, and the inestimable gift of eternal life. And all this, because the prophet was *the son*

of a carpenter, in their own town, and because his *brethren and sisters*, persons of a mean condition, *were all with them*.

When we contemplate such a conduct, as this, we are ready to say, that it sprung from a more than common perverseness of character, and that the people of Nazareth were more unreasonable and sottish, as the common proverb made them to be, than the rest of *Israel*^b.

Yet, if we turn our thoughts on the other tribes and cities of that nation, on the inhabitants of Judæa, and even of Jerusalem, we shall find, that they reasoned no better than the men of Nazareth had done; and discovered equal, indeed, much the same prejudices as those, by which our Lord's own countrymen had been misled.

For, what else was it to say, as they commonly did, that *no prophet could come out of Galilee*^c; that he could not be the Messiah, because his disciples were illiterate fishermen^d, and not Scribes and Pharisees; because none

^b John i. 46.

^c John vii. 52.

^d Acts iv. 13. See Whitby on the place.

of their rulers believed on him^e; because he conversed, sometimes, with publicans and sinners^f; because he did not observe their minute ceremonies or traditions^g; because he manifested his divine power in healing the sick and casting out devils, and not in breaking to pieces the Roman empire and restoring the temporal kingdom of Israel^h; because — but I need not instance in more particulars: Universally, the Jews, of all places and denominations, rejected their Lord and Saviour for reasons, the most absurd and trivial; for reasons, that came from the heart, and not the head, which shewed they were under the power of some contemptible prejudice, and would yield to no evidence, unless that was complied with.

Still, “the Jews, in general, you will say, were unlike other people. Tell us how the polished Heathens reasoned on the subject of Christ’s mission; and whether, when the Gospel was addressed to them, they opposed it on the footing of those senseless prejudices, which you have enough disgraced.”

Luckily, I have it in my power to accept this challenge; and to shew you, on the best

^e John vii. 48.

^f Matth. ix. 11.

^g Matth. xv. 2.

^h Luke xxiv. 21.

authority, that those men of enlightened minds and renowned wisdom were as weak in their sophisms, and as childish in their cavils against the new religion, as the Jews themselves.

We read in the Acts of the Apostlesⁱ, that St. Paul came to Ephesus, a rich, learned, idolatrous city of Asia; that he applied himself more especially to the instruction of its Gentile inhabitants; *disputing daily, for two years together, in the school of one Tyrannus*, a teacher of rhetorick, or philosophy, as we may suppose, and a convert to the faith of Jesus. That his success was great, we may conclude, both from his long residence, and from *the special miracles*, which he wrought, among them. Yet, when *the word of God had grown mightily and prevailed, a certain silver-smith, who made silver shrines for the Goddess of the place*, had credit enough with this well-instructed city, because its trade was likely to suffer by the downfall of idolatry, to raise such an uproar among the people, that the Apostle's labours were, at once, overturned by this powerful argument, and he, himself, compelled to leave them to their old infatuations: which was much such treatment, as Jesus himself had received from the Gadarenes;

ⁱ Acts XIX.

who, because he had permitted the devils, ejected out of one of their people, to enter into a herd of swine, and to destroy them, would not be saved at this expence, and required him, but civilly indeed, *to depart out of their coasts*. Now, was that *craft*, or this *husbandry*, a matter to be put in competition with the saving of their souls, which they had reason to expect from the preaching of Paul and Jesus? Or, is it not clear, that a petty interest, that is, a sordid *prejudice*, prevailed against the most precious hopes, supported by the fullest evidence?

But these were *prejudices* of the ignorant vulgar. Let us see, then, what success St. Paul had in a nobler scene, among wits and sages, men of refined sense and reason, in the headquarters of politeness and civility, in the eye of Greece itself, in one word, Athens^k. Here, the great Apostle, who had the charity, and the ability, to *make himself all things to all men*, encountered their ablest philosophers; reasoning with them, even before their revered court of Areopagus, on their own favourite topics of *God, and the Soul*, in a strain of argument, which was clearly unanswerable; and concluding his weighty apology with *Jesus and*

^k Acts xvii.

the Resurrection. But what was the effect of all this truth on the minds of these liberal heathens? Why the text says — *when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some* (that is, the Epicureans) *mocked*; and why? because their philosophy admitted no future state: while *others* (the Stoics) *said, We will hear thee again of this matter*; but, for as poor a reason, as the other, because their philosophy taught I know not what of a certain renovation of the world, which, for the credit of their sect, they were half inclined to confound with the Christian resurrection. You see, in both parties, the power of prejudice; where yet the occasion was the most interesting, the hearers the most capable, the ability of the speaker, independently of his assumed inspiration, unquestionably great, and where the conclusion, (so carelessly dismissed) was, after all, a question of FACT, which had no dependance on the fanciful tenets of either party.

I should weary you and myself, should I carry on this deduction through the following ages of the Christian church; and shew, as I might easily do, that the ablest men of science, who opposed Christianity, did it on grounds no better than those of these Athenian sophists. We see what these grounds were, in the frag-

ments, that remain to us, of many ancient unbelievers¹, men, the most acute and learned of their times ; while yet every man of sense, that now reads and considers their objections, will own, whether he be himself a Christian or not, that they are altogether weak and frivolous, and have the face not so much of sound, or even colourable arguments, as of faint and powerless prepossessions against unwelcome truth.

I shall only instance in *one* of these prepossessions, which you will think prodigious. The Roman empire, labouring under its own vices, and many *physical* evils, which then lay heavy upon it, experienced, in the fourth century, that reverse of fortune, which, in its turn, the greatest nations must expect. But by this time Christianity had spread itself through all the provinces, and was become the religion of the state. In these circumstances, the Heathens, very generally, not the rabble only, but the gravest and wisest of the Heathens ; ascribed these disasters to the abolition of idolatry ; and thought it an unanswerable argument against the faith of Jesus, that it did not maintain their empire in that degree of splen-

¹ Celsus, Porphyry, Julian.

dour and prosperity, to which, in the days of pagan worship, it had happily been raised. And this miserable superstition, which we now only pity, or, perhaps, smile at, made so deep an impression on the minds of men, that the greatest of the ancient fathers, and particularly St. Austin¹, were scarce able, with all their learning and authority, to bring it into contempt.

Such was the power of *ancient* prejudice against the Christian religion. But I hasten to set before you, in few words, what its tyranny has been in *later* times.

The accidental and temporary commotions, which reformed religion produced in our western world, furnished in the minds of many, a notable *argument* against the cause of Protestantism, which, when taken up and improved, as it soon was, by state-policy, had, indeed, a fatal influence on its success. But, even as to Christianity itself, that day-spring of knowledge, which broke upon us at the Reformation, and, as they say, has been brightening from that time to this, could not disperse those phantoms of prejudice, which are for ever haunting the human mind.

¹ In his famous book, *De Civitate Dei*.

Men, who piqued themselves on their sagacity, presently started up, and said, that, because popery had been found to be an imposture, Christianity was so too; and because the legendary tales of the cloysters had been convicted of falshood, that the Scriptures themselves deserved but little regard. And when afterwards these suspicions gave way to sober criticism and learned inquiry, *prejudices* still arose, in various shapes, against the EVIDENCES, and the DOCTRINES of the Gospel-Revelation. We were told, that the *prophecies* proved nothing, because some of them were too obscure, and others too plain. Could both these objections come from the oracle, Reason? Or, is it so much as likely, that either of them did so? when, for any thing it could tell, both the clearness, and the obscurity might be suitable to the occasion, and each, be fit, in its place. Then again, there were others bold enough to deny the existence of *miracles*, not, because many have been forged, but because none can be true. Was this, too, the voice of Reason? or, is not St. Paul's appeal to common sense enough to disgrace this fancy to the end of the world—*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that GOD should raise the dead?*ⁿ God, who surely has *power* to do this, or other miracles, when his *wisdom* sees fit.

ⁿ Acts vi. 8.

The *contents* of the Gospel have also been treated, I do not say with as little respect, but with as little shew of reason and argument, as the evidences of it.

For instance, it was current, not long ago, that "Christianity was as old as the Creation;" the meaning of which wise saying was, that Christianity could not be true, because the *moral* part of it was such, as nature taught, and had at all times been able to discover by its own light. Admit the fact: what follows? That therefore a divine revelation needs not repeat and could not occasionally enforce the laws of nature. Is reason, pure unmixed reason, accustomed to trifle at this rate?

But the complaint now is, that nature does not teach the *doctrinal* part of the Gospel. And what then? Was it not equally to be expected that what concerns the essence and counsels and dispensations of God should be a secret to nature, unassisted by revelation, as that our practical moral duties should lie open to its view? And, if the force of this question be not generally felt, there is no doubt, I think, but it will, in a short time. For, it is to be observed of all these idle cavils, that they presently vanish one after another; and, when

each has had its day, is, thenceforth, exploded even by unbelievers themselves.

But, 'tis time to come to a conclusion of this matter. The purpose of all I have said is, only, this, to shew, what weak and idiot prejudices have, at all times, been taken up against Christianity, and how generally they have been mistaken by the acutest of its enemies, for reasons of much weight.

And, if all, who hear me, be led by this experience, to suspect the infirmity of their own minds; if, having seen the disgraceful issue of so many fancies, which for a time have passed for shrewd *arguments*, but have, afterwards, appeared to be nothing more than childish *prejudices*, they can be brought to mistrust those, that occur to themselves; if, in a word, they can be induced to question the pertinence and force of what they too easily consider in the light of objections to Christianity, and to argue soberly and cautiously at least, if they will needs try their skill in arguing against it; the end, I have in view, will be answered, and neither my pains, nor your attention, will be thrown away on this discourse,

S E R M O N XLVI.

PREACHED FEBRUARY 4, 1776.

JAMES iv. 7.

—*Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.*

THAT there are Angels and Spirits, good and bad; that, at the head of these last, there is ONE, more considerable and malignant, than the rest, who in the form, or under the name, of a *Serpent*, was deeply concerned in the fall of man, and whose *head*, as the prophetic language is, the Son of man was, one day, to *bruise*; that this evil spirit, though that prophecy be, in part, completed, has not yet received his death's wound, but is still permitted, for ends unsearchable to us, and in ways

which we cannot particularly explain, to have a certain degree of power in this world, hostile to its virtue and happiness, and sometimes exerted with too much success; all this is so clear from Scripture, that no believer, unless he be, first of all, *spoiled by philosophy and vain deceit*, can possibly entertain a doubt of it.

The subject, indeed, in its full extent, cannot be discussed at this time, nor conveniently, perhaps, in this place. But it may not be improper to make some general reflexions upon it; such as may serve to rectify your APPREHENSIONS of the doctrine itself, which, as I said, is truly scriptural, and to suggest, at the same time, the MORAL AND RELIGIOUS USES, we ought to make of it.

1. An opinion prevailed in the East very early, and was probably derived from some still more ancient tradition of the fall, corrupted, and misunderstood, that two, equally great and independent beings, a good and a bad, shared the government of the world between them; that these beings, of directly opposite characters, carried on a perpetual war with each other, crossed each other's designs and operations, and, as either prevailed, pro-

duced the good or evil, the happiness or misery, of this life.

This opinion was, afterwards, taken up by some, who called themselves Christians; and was especially applied by those, who loved to philosophize (as too many did, and, at all times, have been prone to do) on the secrets of divine Providence, to the solution of that great question, concerning the *origin of natural and moral evil*.

Now, to this notion some countenance, it is thought, has been given by the scriptural doctrine of the Devil, who is spoken of, as *the Prince of this world^a*, as *the Prince of the power of the air^b*, as *the God of this world^c*, and in other terms of the like sort, denoting as well the *power*, as malignity, of this evil Being.

But, though these terms are, some of them, very strong, and certainly imply, not the existence only, but the extensive agency and influence, of this wicked Spirit, yet there is no pretence or colour for supposing that any thing

^a John xii. 31.

^b Ephes. ii. 2.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.

like an equality to the God of heaven and earth, or an independency upon him, was intended to be expressed by them. For it is manifest, that no writings in the world exalt our ideas of that God so high, or set forth his supreme irresistible and sovereign dominion in so strong and decisive terms, as the Jewish and Christian scriptures. And with regard to the particular evil being under consideration, he is represented as *trembling*^d at the very apprehension of the omnipotent Creator, as sentenced by his justice^e, and reserved for the execution of it^f; as exercising a partial, a precarious, a limited power in this world, working only in the *children of disobedience*^g, and in them, consequently, no longer than they continue to deserve that character; and baffled in his attempts, not only by the Son of God, but by the *resistance*^h, by the *prayers*ⁱ, by the *faith*^k, of Christians; as a rebel indeed, yet a rebel cast out^l and disabled^m, and compelled to be an instrument, like all other things, in the hands of the Almightyⁿ.

^d James ii. 19.

^f Matth. xxv. 41.

^h James iv. 7.

^k 1 Pet. v. 9.

^m Luke x. 18.

^e Gen. iii. 14, 15.

^g Eph. ii. 2.

ⁱ Matth. xvii. 21.

^l John xii. 31.

ⁿ Job i. 12.

But nothing shews more clearly, how abhorrent the spirit of Christianity is from the Manichæan doctrine, than the care that is taken throughout the Gospel-history to set forth the triumphs of Christ over the kingdom of Satan, in *casting out devils*; of which the instances are so many, and so circumstantially described, as if our Lord's main or sole purpose had been to expose and explode that great impiety. He not only, himself, commanded, by a word, the devils to go out of the possessed, who accordingly obeyed him, and, in departing, deprecated that power^o, which they knew he had over them; but he, likewise, gave the same authority to his disciples, who went forth with his commission, and *returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us, through thy name*^p. On which occasion, *he said unto them*, as exulting in his dominion over the enemy, and in the rapid, instantaneous, irresistible effect of it, *I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven*^q.

'Thus much may suffice to shew, that, though the Gospel affirms the existence of evil spirits, and of one eminently so, yet that it

^o Matth. viii. 21.

^p Luke ix. 1. and x. 17.

^q Luke x. 18.

gives no countenance to the doctrine of the two principles; as if the evil one were independent of the good, or that Satan could have the madness to think of rivalling the power of God, and of entering into a direct formal contest, as it were, with the Almighty. Whatever of this sort has been said, or insinuated, contradicts the express testimony, indeed, the whole tenour, of holy scripture, and is nothing but poetry, or misrepresentation.

2. Still, on the face of that account, which Scripture itself gives, it must be owned, that the power of Satan is great and even dreadful.

That he was permitted, in our Saviour's time, to vex, and, in various ways, torment the BODIES of men, is clear from the number of *possessions*, we read of in the Gospel; which though some have laboured to explain away (as they have, indeed, the personality of the Devil himself) by reducing what is said of his agency to a mere figure of speech, yet I do not find that their attempts have, hitherto, been, or are likely to be, successful.

That he was, also, permitted to lay such trains, and contrive such measures, as had a fatal effect, sometimes, on the FORTUNES of

men, not of those only, who were the immediate instruments of his malice, but of good and innocent men, who stood at a distance from him, we see by the sad catastrophe of that council, which *he put into the heart of Judas to betray his master*^r; first, in the untimely death of the traitor himself, and then, by a series of connected events, in the crucifixion of the holy Jesus; and by several other instances. And, that he still retains this last power, as formidable as it truly is, must be concluded, if it be true, as we shall presently see it is, that he insinuates himself into the minds of bad men, and is concerned in exciting and promoting their wicked purposes. But, whether he be allowed to tyrannize over the bodies of men, is more problematical. That, for any thing we know, he may operate in the way of *possession*, I do not see on what certain grounds any man can deny: that he does so, I would not affirm, because the Scripture, our only guide as to what respects the agency of spirits, is silent in that matter. But the inquiry is of the less moment, because, since the gift of *discerning* spirits hath ceased in the church, we have no means of distinguishing between *possessions* and *natural disorders*; and, because, if we had, there is no known cure, or antidote, for them.

^r John xiii 2

Had this been considered, all the mischiefs which have arisen from the trade of witchcraft and diabolism, would have been prevented. For they have proceeded, not from the supposed possibility of possessions, but from a fraudulent pretence of knowing when they take place, and from a superstitious belief of certain charms or spells, which may be applied, with effect, to the removal of them. Whereas, the fact is not cognizable by us, the symptoms, whether of the natural disorder, or of the pretærnatural infliction, being equivocal; and Christianity acknowledges no power in words, or ceremonies, to exorcise evil spirits. The only exorcism, which is now permitted to Christians, is that of faith and repentance, that is, of a good life; which every man may, and should apply, when it is needful, to his own case, and which, in that application, can surely do no hurt to himself, or others.

And, with this explanation, I leave the matter of *possessions*. As I have no authority to affirm, that there *are*, now, any such, so neither may I presume to say, with confidence, that there are *not* any.

But, then, with regard to the influence of evil spirits at this day upon the SOULS of men,

I shall take leave to be a great deal more peremptory. For this influence is so constantly supposed in the Gospel; there are so many admonitions, cautions, advices, relating to it; there are so many warnings given us by Christ and his Apostles against the snares, the wiles, the devices, the depths, of Satan, and these, conveyed in the form of general precepts, plainly calculated for the use of Christians in all ages; it is so expressly said, in Christ's own parable of the sower, that the *tares*, that is, bad men, *are sown by the devil*, and that this husbandry will be carried on by him to the end of the world; it is so apparent, that his empire over bad men is exercised in the way of temptation and seduction, by putting bad purposes into their minds, and filling their hearts with corrupt imaginations and intentions; it is, besides, so evident that we are continually in danger of this temptation, by that clause in the Lord's prayer, the daily prayer of all Christians—*deliver us from the evil one*^s—for such is the proper sense of these words, which we translate, *deliver us from evil*—All this, I say, is so manifest to every one who reads the scriptures, that, if we respect their authority, the question, concerning the reality of demonic influence upon the minds of men, is clearly determined.

^s ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ Matth. vi. 13.

Nay, there are many instances, in history, and common life, of prodigious, almost unimaginable wickedness, strangely conceived and executed, which, if they do not prove this doctrine, in the way of sensible experience, perfectly fall in, and harmonize with it. It seems, as if the souls of some men were demoniacal, as the bodies of others have been. Let me appeal to yourselves. Suppose that a person, duly commissioned for that purpose, had dislodged as many devils from Nero or Cæsar Borgia, as our Saviour did from the poor unhappy man of Gadara, would this exorcism have surprized you more in the former case, than the latter? or would not this miracle have furnished us with a better account, than we can now give, of the transcendant wickedness, which *possessed* the hearts of those monsters?

Indeed, in the simpler ages, our forefathers, who read the scriptures, and believed what they read, constantly ascribed any crime, with which they charged another, to *the instigation of the devil*; as you may see from the language of those forms, which are used, in criminal prosecutions to this day: and, if those charges be now considered as *mere forms*, it was not always so; and a better reason will be required, than can be presently given, why any Christian should so conceive of them.

3. But to all this it will be said, “that the
 “ doctrine, here laid down, as scriptural, is
 “ strange and incredible; that it makes the
 “ virtue and happiness of men depend on
 “ others, and not on themselves; that it sup-
 “ poses a power, adverse to the great Creator
 “ and Governor, and able, on many occasions,
 “ to prevail against him, which degrades both
 “ his *sovereignty* and his *wisdom*; and that,
 “ above all, it represents weak simple men as
 “ exposed to the practices of great and subtle
 “ tempters, which overturn all our ideas of the
 “ divine *justice* and *goodness*.”

The objection might be expressed in more words, but you see the drift and force of it. Now, in answer, it would be enough to say, that, let the difficulties be what they will, the doctrine is scriptural. But then, as to those difficulties themselves, I must further say, that they are not peculiar to this doctrine, as revealed in scripture, but bear equally against the natural doctrine of God’s moral government.

For do we not see that we all of us depend in a great measure, for the virtue and happiness we possess, on the conduct of others? Can we look about us, and not perceive an

order of beings, I mean, *wicked men*, opposing themselves to the will of God, traversing his righteous purposes, and prevailing, for a time at least, against his primary intentions? Do they not pervert, corrupt, destroy multitudes every day; and are not the weak and simple permitted to fall into the snares of the wise and crafty? Do not these things evidently take place in our world, and is it thought any derogation from the attributes of God that they should be allowed to do so? Are not men, too oft, a sort of devils to each other, and can we wonder that vice and misery are much in the power of such agents? Yes, but *spiritual unseen* agents!—Does that make any mighty difference? Is it necessary to suppose that *spirits*, of whatever rank, are privileged from abusing their free-will, and from being perverse and wicked, as we see men are? And, what if they are *unseen*? Have we reason to expect, from the present constitution of things, that we should suffer only from the practices of known and visible tempters? As if much of the vice and wretchedness of this life did not come upon us by surprize, as we may say, and when we think little of the cause, or the agent! A lye, flies in the dark, and misleads many into errors, and even crimes. A libel, gets abroad, nobody knows from whom, and

yet shall tempt, perhaps drive, unwary multitudes, into rebellion. How many plots of wickedness are laid and succeed, when the plotter is out of sight and not so much as suspected! Nay, a certain cast of mind, or temperament of body, things, wholly unknown and unthought of by most men, shall, without great care and circumspection, be fatal to our virtue. Even the air, we breathe, (which, like the *prince of the power of the air*, is to us invisible) has a secret, and yet, sometimes, powerful influence on our passions. And shall we still disbelieve the seduction of an evil spirit, because he steals insensibly upon us?

But the true answer to all objections of this sort, whether men or devils be the tempters, is, that neither shall prevail, but by our own fault, by some carelessness, or wilful corruption of our own hearts, which are always sufficiently admonished, that the enemy is at hand, when evil thoughts, however produced, begin to stir in them. Then is the time to watch, and *resist*: and our resistance, the text tells us, will not be in vain. And what though legions of spirits lay siege to us! We may call *more than twelve legions of angels*, even the holy Spirit of God himself, to our assistance, if we please; for *greater is HE THAT IS IN US*,

than he that is in the world^t. So faithful is God, after all our impious surmises and distrust of his gracious providence, *who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able*, though Satan himself be the tempter, *but will with the temptation also*, if we be careful to do our part, *make a way for us to escape*^u.

4. And, this being the case, all objections to the doctrine here inculcated, fall to the ground; so that I have only to remind you, in two words, (for the time will not allow many) of the *moral and religious uses*, we ought to make of it.

I shall but mention ONE, of each sort.

1. In a RELIGIOUS view, the belief of this doctrine is of the utmost importance: for the whole scheme of Redemption is founded upon it. For *therefore* Christ came into the world, and suffered upon the cross, *that, through death*, as St. Paul says, *he might destroy him, that had the power of death, that is, the DEVIL*^x. And, universally, *for this purpose* (I quote the words of St. John) *the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy*

^t 1 John iv. 4.

^u 1 Cor. x. 13.

^x Heb. ii. 14.

the works of the DEVIL^y. It concerns us, then, infinitely, to take heed lest, by denying, or questioning, or explaining away, the existence and agency of the evil spirit, we subvert the foundation of our faith, detract from the glory of our Saviour's passion, and unthankfully *despise the riches of his goodness* in dying for us: nay, and lest we blaspheme the Holy Ghost; who was given to *help our infirmities^z, to strengthen us with might in the inner man^a, and therefore to save us from the power of that spirit, which worketh in the children of disobedience^b.*

2. In a MORAL view it is, also, of great importance, that we entertain right notions on this subject.

I know that the *world* and the *flesh* are powerful enemies enough, and that we need not wish to signalize our courage by a contest with any *other*.

But if there *be* another, we are concerned to know what our danger is, and to provide against it. Security is generally fatal; especially when the strength of the enemy is

^y St. John iii. 8.

^z Rom. viii. 26.

^a Eph. xiv. 16.

^b Eph. xi. 2.

greater than we take it to be. Therefore, let us learn from scripture, what that strength is; and let us use all diligence in *resisting* (as we have long since engaged to do) not the *world* and the *flesh* only, but, also, the DEVIL. This is the advice of the text—*Resist the DEVIL*. And this, too, is the advice of the Apostle Peter—*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the DEVIL, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*^c (words, by the way, which put the *personality* of the tempter out of all question); *Whom resist*, says he, *stedfast in the FAITH*; under the protection of which shield, *we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of THE WICKED*^d.

^c 1 Peter v. 8.

^d τὸ ἅγιον ἔσθ' Eph. vi. 16.

S E R M O N XLVII.

PREACHED MARCH 29, 1772.

PROV. xvi. 6.

By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.

ALL the authority of Solomon's name and wisdom will, I doubt, be no more than sufficient to procure respect to this observátion; which some may consider as a *trite and vulgar truth*, scarce deserving their regard; while others, perhaps, will not so much as allow it to be a truth at all, but indeed a *vulgar mistake*, arising out of the narrow views of ignorant or superficial declaimers. It may be slighted by one set of men, as conveying *no* information, and by another, as conveying a *wrong* one.

Let me attempt then to rescue the sacred text from both these imputations. Permit me to shew you, that the observation, it contains, is neither so generally received, as to make all further discourse about it frivolous and unnecessary; nor yet, on the other hand, of so questionable a nature, as to justify the scorn with which it is sometimes rejected.

I. To those, who are such fastidious hearers of the word, as to disregard an important truth, because repeatedly enforced upon them, I might reply that such truths can never be insisted upon too much, that our duty is to inculcate them, *in season, and out of season.*

But the fact is mistaken. We are so far from nauseating our hearers, with a too common and superfluous truth, when we remind them perpetually, that, *by the fear of God, men depart from evil*, that, on the contrary, very many want to be informed, or at least convinced, of it.

What the text affirms, is, that the *fear of God*, or the RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE, is the proper guide of life. But look now into the *world*, at large: there the acknowledged rule of life, is FASHION. Look into the *civil or political*

world: there the boasted rule of life, is THE LAW OF THE MAGISTRATE. Look into the *learned* world: there too commonly the only rule of life is each man's own reason, or what he proudly calls PHILOSOPHY.

And will it now be said that *the fear of God*, is a principle too stale and too unquestioned to be discoursed upon and recommended to you from this place, when we see so large and so considerable a part of the world actuated by one or other of these different and discordant principles? But neither

II. Is the truth, though far enough from being generally received, so slightly grounded as to justify any man in the contempt of it.

It is a truth, taught of God, and revered by all wise men. It has nature, and reason, and experience on its side; and is only combated by the folly, the short-sighted policy, or lastly, the pride, of half-thinking and presumptuous men.

For to give, now, the godless principles, I before mentioned, a short and separate examination.

1. Tell *the man of the world*, that the religious principle is that by which alone he ought to govern himself, and you are presently told of the power and prerogatives of FASHION.

“ *The fear of God*, he will say, may be the proper rule of monks and hermits; but must be qualified, at least, in many respects, by such as live in the world and mix in the society of it. They who have to converse with mankind, are to accommodate themselves to their notions and practices: they are to think with the rest of the world, or at least they are to act with them: they are to found their moral systems on the liberal and enlarged basis of approved use or custom. Their observation of human life must inform them of the ways that men take to conciliate the good will of their fellows, to prosecute their own advantages in the world, and to acquire the confidence and esteem of that society, in which they are stationed. What they find to be the rule of others, must be a rule to themselves. To do otherwise is not weakness, only: It is, besides, arrogance, incivility, inhumanity.”

All this is thought plausible by some men; and taken together, it must be owned, forms a very easy and commodious system: but how

consistent with conscience, with duty, and with common sense, they will do well to consider. For if *fashion* only be to regulate our conduct in all cases, I ask not what becomes of piety, but of humanity itself, I mean of those offices which we owe to others and to ourselves, and which reason dictates to us in every situation. Custom, you will say, is practical reason. But what! To be led blind-fold by the prevailing practice, whatever it be, what is it but to renounce our intelligent nature, and to live at hazard, and without reason? Further still: If it be sufficient to do as we see others *creditably* do, without examining any farther, we shall often find ourselves involved, I do not say in the most irrational, the most inconsistent, but the most horrid practices. Then, killing with malice and with forethought, if the point of honour prevail, will be no *murder*: And, adultery, if the law of politeness so ordain, shall hide its atrocious nature under the mask of *gallantry*: Then shall society at large become a scene of fraud and rapine; good faith, shall be termed *simplicity*, and fair dealing, *folly*.

Go now, and say that *the fear of God* is a needless restraint on free spirits; and count the advantages which ye have reason to promise to

yourselves, from acknowledging no other guide of life, but *imperious fashion!*

2. A graver set of men come next, and tell us, "That *fashion* is indeed a very uncertain guide of life: But that *LAW*, the result of the public wisdom, armed with the public force, is an adequate rule of human action; that the legislator's province is to enact such salutary laws, and the magistrate's duty, to carry them into execution, as shall be sufficient to secure the peace and order of society; And that every other rule of life is at once unnecessary and ineffectual: *unnecessary*, because the interests of virtue are amply provided for by the wisdom of law; and *ineffectual*, because no other principle has force enough to exact obedience: That, in particular, *the fear of God* is too remote a consideration to restrain the tumultuous passions of men, which are held in subjection by nothing but the instant terrors of civil justice; in a word, that where the law of the state is duly enforced, there is no need of other restraints; and that, lastly, to lay a stress on *the religious principle* is to weaken the operation of law, as it opens a door to fanaticism and superstition."

This plea of the politician receives an apparent force from this certain truth, That law is

indeed of indispensable necessity, and that the general virtue and happiness of a people cannot be maintained without it. We join him therefore very cordially in this encomium on civil justice; but must remind him, withal, that neither is the religious principle superseded by it, nor can civil justice itself maintain its due course, without the support of the religious principle: That, when the authority of law has done its best, there will be much for religion to controul and regulate; *much*, that is not within the reach of law, and without its jurisdiction: That *the fear of the Lord* penetrates deeper and farther, than the sword of the magistrate; and that, even within his own province, all his policy and all his power will take a very imperfect effect, without the concurrence of a higher principle; as he himself is abundantly convinced from the necessity of fortifying his own most important constitutions, by the religion of an oath; which is nothing else but an appeal to the fear of God, under a sense of its being a needful supplement to the fear of the magistrate.

Yet society, they say, is entirely upheld by the authority of law; at least, the world may go on very well, by virtue of that only. Yes; It may go on, as we see it does, full of open

violence, which all its terrors cannot restrain ; and of secret frauds, for which it cannot so much as project a remedy : It may go on, indeed, but polluted by vices of all sorts, which are not the objects of law, and even by crimes, which are often too strong for it : It may go on indeed, till the religious principle be quite effaced from the minds of men (if we may have leave for a moment, to put so desperate, and, thank God, so impossible a case) ; but, when that dreadful time comes, society itself, with all its bulwark of laws, must inevitably be swept away with it.

Universal history bears testimony to this awful truth ; there being no account of any state on the face of the earth, which could ever support itself in general virtue, or general happiness, by the mere force of its civil institutions. And how should it be otherwise, when the fear of God is requisite to enforce the law, as well as to observe it ; to supply the state with faithful magistrates, as well as with obedient subjects ?

If then this vital principle of religion, so necessary to the conservation of all states, cannot be kept free from some mixture of fanaticism or superstition, we are surely to endure

the inconvenience, as we can, rather than put the interests of society to hazard by suspending them all on the weak and false supports of an irreligious policy.

3. Lastly, the PHILLOSOPHER's plea, though specious at first sight, is of all others the weakest. For *fashion*, if it chance to be on the side of virtue, will be punctually followed: And the sword of the *magistrate* can, in part, at least, enforce obedience. But what coercive power is there in *philosophy*? It may see and determine right: but who, or what shall compel this supreme directress of life to observe its own determinations? "The fitness, it may be said, of those determinations themselves; the very reason of the thing being the proper restraint of reasonable natures." Still the question returns, What if I am disposed to throw off this restraint? I act against conviction, indeed, and am self-condemned, which to a liberal mind is no small punishment. But look into the world, and see if that punishment be sufficient to induce the bulk of mankind, nay the gross body of philosophers themselves, *to depart from evil*.

And what, after all, is this magnified reason? One man admits no other rule of life but *ab-*

stract truth, or what he calls *the differences of things* : Another, will hear of none, but an instinctive *moral sense* : And a third, entrenches himself within the narrow circle of *private happiness*. These several systems have been laid down, each in its turn, as the only proper basis of moral action : But could the patrons of them be made to agree in any one ; or could their several schemes be made, as perhaps they might, to consist together : still, they could only serve to acquaint us what the nature of virtue is ; they do but slenderly provide for the practice of it.

Let the philosophers, then, debate this matter among themselves. It is enough for *us* to learn of Solomon, *to fear God* : To fear HIM, who is everywhere and essentially present ; who is conscious to all our actions and all our thoughts ; from whose knowledge there is no escape, from whose justice there is no appeal, and to whose power there is no hope, or possibility of resistance.

With this principle, an unquestioned principle of reason, if there be any, deeply rooted in the mind, we have indeed an adequate rule of life ; or, what is better, a controuling motive to put in practice whatever rule of life we

chuse to follow. Moral systems, taken by themselves, are poor ineffective things; even virtue's self is but a name, till the religious principle be infused into her. Then it is, that she lives and acts, and by her powerful influence inclines the hearts of men *to depart from evil.*

Nor let any man apprehend that this religious fear will degrade, or servilize his virtue. To be free from sin, and only the servants of God, is the truest and noblest liberty.

Dismissing, then, all other rules of life, let us adhere to that, which Solomon prescribes to us. It had been venerable from any hands, but comes with an extraordinary grace and propriety from HIM, who delivers it. So that none of the parties, concerned in this discourse, can excuse themselves from paying a peculiar deference to his judgment.

1. THE MEN OF THE WORLD can have no pretence for declining this determination. The author of it is no obscure sordid moralist, whose views of life are confined to a cloyster or a cottage. He addresses them from the throne of Israel, when it was the pride of the East; and from the center of a court, which he

had made the envy of the surrounding nations. The followers of fashion will then act but agreeably to their own principles, if they respect the example of such a court, and the authority of its sovereign.

2. The POLITICIANS will reflect, that their instructor is himself a great magistrate, consummate in the arts of government ; who yet could find no secret, but that of *the fear of God*, by which he could reign securely himself, or promote the real welfare and prosperity of his people. With what complacency do they sometimes urge a political aphorism, taken from Aristotle ! *But a greater than Aristotle is here.*

3. Lastly, to you, the sages of the world, who are, or account yourselves PHILOSOPHERS, nothing can be so respectable to you, as the authority of ONE, whose name is the name itself of wisdom ; of ONE, who, like you, *had given his heart to know wisdom* ^a ; who had an understanding, at least, equal to yours, and an experience of life, far greater. Yet even HE delivers it, as the result of all his knowledge, *That by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.*

^a Eccles. i. 17. and vii. 25.

It is indeed this principle only, which gives its proper direction and integrity to every other. It controuls Fashion; supplies the defects of Law; and enforces the conclusions of Reason. It rectifies all our systems, and gives sense and solidity to all our speculations.

To conclude, Let us all be wise enough to reverence the plain doctrine of the text, and to act upon it: The rather, as that doctrine is not only just and reasonable in itself, but proceeds from one, whom the Spirit of God had been pleased to inform with celestial wisdom.

S E R M O N XLVIII.

PREACHED MAY 31, 1772.

1 COR. vi. 12.

All things are lawful unto me ; but all things are not expedient : All things are lawful for me ; but I will not be brought under the power of any.

IT would be taking up too much of your time, and of this discourse, to explain minutely the occasion of these words, and the connexion they have with the general argument of this chapter. Let it suffice to say, that they are introduced as an answer to something which the Corinthian Christians did, or might alledge for their neglect of the instructions, given

them by the Apostle. We may conceive them to speak to this effect—"What you enjoin us so strictly to avoid, is not one of those practices which can be deemed unlawful: it is not, as we conceive, condemned by the law of nature, certainly, not by the law of that society to which we belong. Now in matters of this kind, there is no need of advice or direction: the things being indifferent in themselves, we may do as we please, and we are disposed, in the present case, to make use of our Christian liberty."

To this plea, or suggestion, the Apostle replies in the text: "Admitting, says he, the truth of what ye alledge for yourselves, it does not follow that I may not properly and usefully direct your conduct, in the present case. For suppose that *all things are lawful to me, all things are not expedient*: And, again, *though all things are lawful to me, I will not be brought under the power of any.*"

St. Paul, you see, does not stay to consider whether the things forbidden to the Corinthians, were *lawful* or not (though possibly they might mistake in that assumption, as licentious or thoughtless people, we know, every day do) but, be this as it may, he insists that he had

reason to lay them under some restraint even in *lawful* things, because the practice of such things was inexpedient, in many respects; And because, if all other considerations might be overlooked, it is enough that an unrestrained indulgence in them begets slavish habits, and would, in the end, destroy, or very much impair, their moral freedom.

Of the words, thus far opened, I propose to make this use; to dissuade you from giving a full scope to the pursuit even of innocent pleasures; and that, from the two considerations, expressed in the text:

I. That such devotion of ourselves to them is, on many other accounts, hurtful and improper — *all things are not expedient*: And

II. That, in particular, it violates the dignity of human nature, by taking from us, or weakening to a great degree, that manly authority of reason, that virtuous self-command, which we should always retain, and be in a condition to exert, even in indifferent matters — *I will not be brought under the power of any.*

1. Wealth and prosperity have a natural tendency to alter, that is, in the language of

moralists, to *corrupt*, the public manners. Hence it is that the old English habits of plainness, industry, and frugality, are, now, exchanged for those of indulgence, dissipation, and expence. All the elegant accommodations of life have an unusual stress laid upon them; and there seems to be a general effort to advance them all to the last degree of refinement. The superfluous, which we call the fine arts, excite an universal admiration, and administer, in ten thousand ways, to a luxurious, which, again, takes the name of a polite, indulgence. Hence, society, which used to fill only the vacant intervals of business, is now become the *business* of life; and yet is found insipid (so insatiable is the love of dissipation) if it be not, further, quickened by amusements. These have multiplied upon us so prodigiously, that they meet us at every turn, and in every shape; nay, are grown so common, that they would almost lose the name of amusements, if every possible art were not employed to give a poignancy to them, and if fashion, after all, more than the pleasure they afford, did not support the credit of them. As the last resource of the weary disappointed mind, we have found means to interest our keenest passions in one species of amusement, which is therefore called *play*, by way of eminence; and is become the favourite

one, because the most violent: just as the hottest cordials succeed to the free use of strong liquors.

In this state of things (a very alarming one, in all views) nothing threatens the utter ruin of the little virtue, that is left among us, so much, as the general persuasion, that such pursuits may be indulged to any degree, because they are commonly acknowledged to be *lawful*. Here, then, the distinction of the Apostle comes in very seasonably, and may, one would hope, be pressed on the lovers of pleasure, with some effect. We may question, it seems, the *expediency* of these pursuits, how indifferent soever they be in their own nature; and a little reflexion will shew that they are, indeed, *inexpedient*, that is, unprofitable, unadvisable, improper, in a great variety of respects.

I do not suppose, at present, that the expence of them is ruinous to those, who devote themselves to these pleasures (for then they would plainly not be *lawful* to such persons); but consider, if you can afford to pay the price of them ever so well, they take up too much of your time: abundantly too much, if you have any profession to follow, or to prepare your-

selves for, as most men have; but too much, if you have not, because it might, and should be employed on better things.

Then, of the little time, they leave to yourselves, they disable you, in some degree, for making the proper use. For they dissipate the attention; they relax the nerves of industry and application; they spread a languor over all the faculties, and make the exertion of them, to any valuable purpose, painful at least, if not impossible. We hear it generally observed, that there is a scarcity of able men in all the departments of life. Can it be otherwise, when the vigour of the mind, which should nourish all great and laudable efforts, which is so requisite to push the active powers of invention, or recollection, to their full extent, is wasted on trifles, is checked by frivolous habits, and left to languish under them?

Or say, that you have force of mind enough to elude this so natural effect of dissipation, is it nothing that, by giving your countenance to it, you draw in weaker spirits to make the dangerous experiment? that you help to propagate the enfeebling passion through all quarters, till, from this authorized scene of vanity, the Capital. the contagion spreads (as

we see it now does) to the smaller towns, and even to private houses, in the remotest provinces? that you contribute to make respectable I know not what frivolous and worthless arts, and, of course, to multiply the professors of them, to the great discouragement and decay of useful industry? that you hurt the interests of society, by giving an air of importance to the veriest trifles, and by diverting on these the attention, and the passion, that should regularly, and would otherwise, exert themselves on nobler objects?

I might push these questions still further. For I remember what history attests, and what wise men have said, on the chapter of *polite arts and elegant amusements*.

“ They tell us, how sad a sign^a of the times it is, when they grow into general repute among us; that from incessantly indulged appetites (let the object of them be what it will) such an impotence of mind may follow, such a lust of gratification, such an impatience of controuling a predominant fancy, as shall overleap all the

^a SIGNA, TABULAS PICTAS, VASA CÆLATA MIRARI—reckoned, by the philosophical historian, among the prognosticks of falling Rome.

fences of discretion and virtue. The dæmon of taste, say they, shall be obeyed, in defiance of every private and public duty, till distress, disgrace, and infamy break in upon us; till we seek the relief of our wants in fraud and rapine, involve the public ruin in our own, and, in the end, rush blindfold, through an extreme of profligacy, to desperation."

To this effect, and in this tone, have some inveighed against our more refined and elegant *amusements*. - But I return to what are commonly known by that name: and with respect to these, allow me to say that the life of man is a serious thing^b: so serious, that dissolute, I mean, untempered, continued mirth, or pleasure, is not of a piece with it^c. Our virtue, our hopes, nay, our present happiness depends on keeping the mind in a firm and steady frame. Whatever encroaches on this manliness of temper, is pernicious, and unchristian.

I will indulge the extreme candour to suppose, that, in a constant round of *lawful*

^b Homo, res sacra. Seneca.

^c Neque enim ita generati à naturâ sumus, ut ad ludum et jocum facti esse videamur; sed ad severitatem potiùs, et ad quædam studia graviora atque majora.

amusements, you do not forget, or intermit your moral and religious duties. But with what spirit are they performed? With disgust, I doubt; but certainly, with indifference. Nor is this the worst. Temptations are to be expected in this life: and in what condition are we to meet them? Nay, we expose ourselves to needless temptation, even in the midst of these *lawful* pleasures; and we bring no power with us, hardly the inclination, to withstand it. The present scene distracts the mind, and fascinates the senses. And, in this delirium of the whole man, without God in his thought, or heaven in his eye, what wonder if he become the sport, and, almost before he is aware, the victim of every passion!

Still he is not happy in this feverish state: at most, he but forgets himself, for a moment: and the intervals of his amusement, which, in the nature of things, must be many and long, are filled with disgust and languor. Nay, the very amusement wears out by frequent repetition. And then such a sickliness of mind succeeds, and such a weariness of living on in a too much used and exhausted world, as is insupportable and fatal to him ^d.

^d Fastidio illis esse cœpit vita, et ipse mundus; et subit illud rabidarum deliciarum, QUOUSQUE EADEM? Seneca, de tranq. anim. c. xi.

You see then there are many good reasons, which shew the inexpediency of prosecuting even *lawful* pleasures with an unrestrained passion. But, if all others were away, there is ONE consideration still behind, and of so much weight, that St. Paul scruples not to make a distinct argument of it, and to press it on the Corinthian Christians, as fully decisive of the point in question—*All things are lawful for me: but I WILL NOT BE BROUGHT UNDER THE POWER OF ANY*—And to unfold this argument is what I proposed to myself

2. *Under the second head of this discourse.*

It should be the ambition of every man to preserve the independency of his own mind on all his natural or acquired inclinations. The dignity of his character depends on this supremacy: and his virtue is no longer secure, than while he retains the power, on all occasions, to exert it.

1. The stoical wise man was exposed to much ridicule by taking to himself the name and office of a king. The pretensions were high, no doubt, and the language, something arrogant and ostentatious. But, let the terms, we employ, be what they will, all philosophy, that deserves the name, must agree in this.

That to have the command of himself, is the duty and chief distinction of a wise man^e. There is, then, a consistency and harmony in his whole conduct. We naturally respect those who give this proof of respecting themselves; and we place an entire confidence in the vigour and uniformity of their character.

Again: though the virtue of self-denial shine out to most advantage in the conquest of ardent passions and violent temptations, its use is not inconsiderable in curbing all the lighter fancies. The reason is, that custom prevails insensibly, and reaches farther than we, at first, intended. By humouring the mind in trifles, we teach it to presume on its own importunity, in greater matters: and it will be found a convenient rule in the management of our passions, as of our children, to refuse a compliance with them, not merely when they ask improper things, but when they ask any thing with impatience.

Even our curiosity, an innocent and useful passion, should be kept within bounds, and not indulged, as we see it is, on every occasion that presents itself to us.

The continence of Scipio has been much and justly applauded. But he went a step too far,

^e SAPIENS, SIBIQUE IMPERIOSUS—are convertible terms in the moral poet.

in seeing his captive. He triumphed, indeed, over the stronger temptation, but he was not enough on his guard against the weaker: by complying too easily with a frivolous curiosity, he risked the honour of that virtue, which a pagan historian finds so divine in ONE, who was *et juvenis, et cælebs, et victor* ^f.

To apply these reflexions to the case before us. It may seem to be a matter of great indifference, whether we indulge an inclination for *lawful* amusements, or not. But the dignity of our character is concerned in keeping a strict hand over our inclinations of every sort: and, if it were only for an exercise of self-government, it would be worth the while to moderate, that is, frequently to suspend, the use of a favourite, though innocent gratification. To be enslaved by vicious habits, is the ignominy of a little mind: to be superior to all, is the glory of a great one.

2. But, in truth, there is no security in any case, if we let go this *habit* of self-government. One compliance inevitably brings on another; and, though we set out with the design of stopping at a certain point, we shall almost fatally

^f Val. Max. IV. 3.

be carried much farther. We meant to acquiesce in this, confessedly harmless, indulgence: constant use makes it insipid; and then we venture on one of a suspicious character. Being now on the confines of vice, we are easily pushed into that quarter; with some doubt and hesitation, at first; but scruples give way, as the habit strengthens, and all vices being connected with each other, especially all of one sort, we, by degrees, make the trial of all: and thus, from an innocent fancy, or inclination, indulged too freely, at setting out, we slip insensibly, and beside our purpose, into manifest, perhaps universal, dissolution.

So salutary, so divine is the resolution of the Apostle! *All things are lawful for me: but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

To interdict amusements, altogether, to the vivacity of youth, would be severe and cynical. They are abundantly too numerous, at present, and too much frequented: but many of them are supposed to be, and some, without doubt, are, in themselves, *lawful*. Of these, only, I am now speaking: and even of these it must be affirmed, that the unrestrained use of them is *not expedient*; as, for the other reasons sug-

gested to you in this discourse, so chiefly, because it degrades the man, and enslaves him.

To conclude ; the safe and manly part is, *to be temperate in all things*^c: to make our pleasures, the occasional relaxation^b of the mind, and by no means the employment of it: not, perhaps, to affect a total abstinence from them, which the world would account an incivility ; but resolutely to forbear all vicious, or but suspected pleasures: and, for the rest, to keep a great deal on this side of what is thought allowable in the use of them.

^c 1 Cor. ix. 25:

^b Ludo—uti quidem licet ; sed, sicut somno et quietibus cæteris, tum cum gravibus seriisque rebus satisfecerimus.

Cic. Off. L. i. 29.

SERMON XLIX.

PREACHED JULY 5, 1772.

MATTH. v. 38, 39, 40, 41.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also: And, if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also: And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

I SUPPOSE, if these words had been found in any book whatsoever, except the Bible, no man of sense could have entertained the least doubt of their meaning. But, while one sort

of readers think they do honour to God's word by taking every precept in the most strict and rigid sense, and another, by the same mode of interpretation, hope to dishonour it, we may expect that, between them, the usual rules of criticism will be very little regarded.

The text refers us to a law of Moses, which established the *jus talionis*, or *right of retaliation*^a. This law, in the main, is consonant to natural equity; was of general use and authority in ancient times; has, with some modification, been adopted by legislators of all times; and was peculiarly fit, or rather necessary, in the Mosaic institute, composed in a very remote age of the world, and addressed to a fierce and barbarous people.

But this, so reasonable law, had undergone a double abuse in our Saviour's time. What was designed, in the hands of the magistrate, to prevent future injury, was construed into an allowance of private and personal revenge: And, again, what was calculated to prevent great and outrageous injuries, was pleaded in excuse for avenging every injury. The Jews retaliated, at pleasure, on those that offended them, and for the slightest offence.

^a Exod. xxi. 24.

Our divine Master, then, without derogating from the law, when administered in due form, and on a suitable occasion, applies himself to correct these so gross perversions of it—I *say unto you, that ye resist not evil*—that is, that ye do not retaliate on the person, that does you an injury, in the way of private revenge; or even of a public suit, for small and trivial injuries.

You see, our Lord's purpose was, to oppose the mild spirit of the Gospel to the rigid letter of the law, or rather to an abusive interpretation of it: And this purpose is declared in three familiar and proverbial sayings, which, together, amount to thus much; “That, when
“ a small or tolerable injury is sustained by
“ any one, either in his person, or property, or
“ liberty, it is far better (and was, thencefor-
“ ward, to be the law of Christians) to endure
“ patiently that injury, or even to risk a repe-
“ tition of it, than, by retaliating on the ag-
“ gressor, to perpetuate feuds and quarrels in
“ the world.”

That such is the meaning of the text, would appear more evidently, if the injuries specified were, further, considered with an eye to the sentiments and circumstances of the Jewish

people. *A blow on the cheek* was, always, an indignity, no doubt; but the sense of it was not inflamed in a Jew by our Gothic notions of honour; though, if it had, the divine Saviour^b would scarce have advised his followers to extinguish it in the blood of a fellow-citizen: the loss of a *vest*^c, or under garment, was easily repaired, or not much felt, in the cheap and warm country of Judæa: and the *compulsion to attend another*^d, on his occasions, was not much resented by a people, that had been familiarised to this usage by their foreign masters.

But, without scrutinizing the expression farther (which, as I said, is of the proverbial cast, and, therefore, not to be taken strictly) it appears certainly, that the rule enjoined is no more than this, “That we are not to act on the “ old rigid principle of *retaliation*, but rather “ to exercise a mutual patience and forbear- “ ance, in our intercourse with each other, for “ the sake of charity and peace.”

Still, it has been asked, whether this rule be a reasonable one, and whether the conduct, it prescribes, be not likely to do more hurt, than good to mankind?

^b John xviii. 22, 23.

^c χιτῶν.

^d ἀναγκάσει. See Grotius on the place.

The ground of this question is laid in the following considerations:

First, that resentment, being a natural passion, was, without doubt, implanted in us for valuable purposes, and that its proper and immediate use is seen in repelling injuries :

Secondly, That to eradicate, or to suppress this movement of nature, is to dispirit mankind, and to effeminate their character; in other words, to make them unfit for the discharge of those offices, which the good of society requires :

Lastly, That this softness of temper is injurious to the individuals, in whom it is found, as it exposes them to many insults, and much ill usage, which the exertion of a quick and spirited resentment would enable them to avoid :

From all which, conclusions are drawn very unfavourable to the doctrine of the text, and to the honour of our divine Master. It will, then, be proper to give the premises a distinct and careful examination. And,

I. The use of the natural passion of resentment is not superseded by the law of Jesus.

For the legitimate use of this passion is to quicken us in repelling such injuries as would render human life wholly burthensome and uneasy to us, not of those petty affronts and discourtesies which afflict us much less by being dissembled and forgiven, than by being resented and returned. Now Christianity does not require us to renounce the right of nature in repelling injuries of the former class. The law in question, as explained by our Lord himself, does not, we have seen, import thus much: and for the rest, the appeal is open to the principles of nature and common sense—*Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right^e?* The practice of the Apostles (the best comment on the law) shews, too, that, on certain critical and urgent occasions^f, they scrupled not to take advantage of those principles. So that universally, as it would seem, where the ends of self-preservation, or of pre-pollent public utility, require and justify resistance in other men, there it is left free for Christians, likewise, to *resist evil*; the purpose of their divine legislator being, in this instance, to explain the law of nature, and to guard it from the abuse of our hasty passions, not to abrogate, or suspend it.

^e Luke xii. 57.

^f Acts xvi. 37. xxv. 41.

If any case be excepted from the general permission, it is that of *persecution for the sake of his religion*. And possibly this exception was made in the early days of Christianity, to afford a striking proof to the world that this religion owed its success to the divine protection only, and not to the power of men. Accordingly, the command given in that case has an extraordinary, that is, a suitable, promise^g, annexed to it. But the end of God's special providence having been answered, and the prophecies accomplished^h, by the patience of the saints under the fiery trial of persecution in those days (whence the miraculous establishment of our religion is evinced) it seems allowable to suppose that the Christian world was, thenceforth, in this, as in other instances, to conduct itself by the ordinary rules and

^g Matth. v. 11. x. 23. xxvi. 52. From the two last passages we learn, that the Jewish persecutors of Christ and his disciples were reserved for a *special* vengeance of Heaven; to be inflicted upon them in no long time, and here predicted, as it seems, to let the disciples know why, in this case, *resistance* was forbidden, God having taken the matter into his own hands.

^h The accomplishment of prophecy is given by Jesus himself as one reason, why he forbade resistance to the Jews—*how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be*, i. e. that the violence of the Jews should prevail? Matth. xxvi. 54.

principles of human wisdom; provided that the object of that wisdom be necessary *self-defence*, and not dominion, or revenge, which, in all the forms of either, Christianity forbids and reprobates.

But be this as it may, in cases where religion is not concerned, it seems clear that Christians are left at liberty to repel intolerable oppressions by all those means, which human wisdom dictates. And there is no need of drawing the line very exactly between *tolerable* and *intolerable* injuries, because the aggressor, knowing the force of instinctive passion, has reason, always, to fear, that it will begin to operate too soon, rather, than too late.

The apprehension, then, that the proper use of the natural passion, "*resentment of injuries*," is likely to be defeated by the patient genius of the Gospel, is weakly entertained: While, on the other hand, every one must see the convenience of putting this fiery sentiment of indignation under some restraint, and of interdicting the exertion of it in cases, to which so violent a remedy is ill and hurtfully applied.

But

· II. It is said, that this doctrine of the Gospel tends to *dispirit and effeminate mankind*, and to *render Christians unfit for many offices, which society requires of them*.

What these offices are, one does not readily conceive, since it is allowed that *evil may be resisted*, when it becomes excessive, that is, when it is worth resisting. But, I suppose, the objectors mean, this patient spirit of Christianity damps the vigour with which it is for the interest of men in society that their civil rights should be asserted, or a foreign enemy repelled: they think, in short, it makes *bad citizens*, and *worse soldiers*.

Now to the FORMER charge I reply, that it only tends to check, or prevent, the turbulent, the factious, the seditious spirit of any community (which is surely doing it no hurt) while, at the same time, it allows men to assert their essential civil interests by every reasonable exertion of firmness and courage; nay, inculcates those principles of a disinterested love for mankind, and what is properly called a public spirit, which make it their duty to do so. And they will not do it with the less effect, for

waiting till the provocation given appear to all men to be without excuse. *The fury of a patient man*, is almost proverbial: and particularly, in this case, it is to be expected that, when the natural incitement to resistance, long repressed and moderated, comes at length to be authorised by necessity, and quickened by a sense of duty, it will act with a force and constancy, not a little formidable to those, against whom it is directed. There is no danger, then, that *true patriotism* should suffer by the meek principles of the Gospel of peace.

As to the OTHER charge of their weakening the *military spirit*, it must be owned again, they would render wars less frequent than they now are, and less destructive—forgive Christianity this wrong—but, when the necessity of self-defence (the only justifiable ground of war) is real and instant, I know not, why the Christian prince, or Christian soldier, should want courage, because he had given proof of his equitable forbearance; or, that either will be likely to do his duty the worse, for knowing that what he does, *is his duty*.

And, if we appeal to fact, it is enough known, that the Christian soldiery have been no disgrace to their profession: no, not even

then, when the unresisting spirit was at its height, I mean, in the early days of our religion. Christians had many good reasons for not being forward to serve in the Roman armies; but some of them did serve there; without doubt, when they were released from such military obligations and observances, as they esteemed idolatrous: Nay, it appears, that the number of Christian soldiers was, on some occasions, considerable: Yet we no where find, that these patient men misbehaved themselves in a day of action; or, that they threw away their swords, when they had said their prayers.

And I give this instance of bravery in the primitive Christians, the rather, because it cannot be imputed to a *fanatic spirit*, which is able, we know, to controul any principles: It cannot, I say, be imputed to a fanatic spirit, because religion was not the object of those wars, in which they were engaged: They were left, then, to the proper influence of their own principles; which at that time had their full effect upon them, and yet did not prevent them from acting with the true spirit of their profession, that is, with a full sense of the duty imposed upon them by their engagements to the state.

With regard to the *publick*, then, there is no reason to think that our Lord's injunction will disserve it, in any respect.

III. The last, and most plausible objection to the conduct prescribed in the text, is, "That the same spirit, it discovers, is injurious to *individuals*, and only serves to provoke much insult and ill usage, which a quick resentment and return of injuries would prevent."

This is the common plea, and passes with many for a full justification, of that false honour, which predominates in the world, but is equally frivolous with the other pretences, already confuted.

For,

1. It is taken up on a groundless and mistaken notion, that the unfriendly and malevolent passions are the most natural to mankind. On the contrary, man is by nature, kind and generous; proud and vindictive, indeed, if stimulated by ill treatment, but prompted, again, by that very pride, to relent at the appearance of gentleness and submission in the party offending; and easily disposed to lay aside the

thoughts of revenge, when no obstinate resistance seems to make it necessary. There are, certainly, few persons, at least in civilized life, of so base a temper, as to insult others, and much less to insult them the more, for their gentle inoffensive manners. Or, if such monsters there be, they will soon become detestable in society; while the objects of their unprovoked fury will find an asylum in the general good-will and favour of mankind.

They, therefore, who pretend that the world cannot be kept in order, but by resentment and revenge, will do well to make trial of the opposite conduct, before they have recourse to so boisterous a remedy. They will probably find, that *only by PRIDE cometh contention*ⁱ, and that they have injured their species, in thinking otherwise.

2. Let it be remembered, that the Gospel neither forbids us to take the benefit of the laws in cases, where the injury is considerable, nor to resist, without law, in extreme cases; besides, that our corrupt nature will often get the better of *principle*, I mean, when the provocation is not of that size, as to justify either remedy. Whence it follows, that brutal force

ⁱ Prov. xiii. 10.

and malignity will lie under many restraints, and will rarely be encouraged by the passive temper of a conscientious Christian, to proceed to such lengths, as the objection supposes. But,

3. Lastly, and principally, we should call to mind, that, though some ungenerous dispositions should take advantage of our dissembling smaller injuries, to repeat, or even increase them, till they come at length to the utmost verge of what we call *tolerable* injuries, yet it does not follow, from such inconvenience, that the law is to be accounted inexpedient. For the law has a general end in view, the good of society at large, or of the individual: And the law is a proper one, if the end be commonly and for the most part attained by the conduct prescribed, though with some exceptions.

That the lawgiver foresaw the possibility of such exceptions, is clear from the language, employed by him. If a blow *on one cheek* be patiently received, it may be succeeded by a blow *on the other*: if we suffer our *coat* to be taken away, our *cloak* may follow it: and if we make no resistance to the requisition of going *one mile*, we may be compelled to go *two*. The inconvenience, then, is supposed and ad-

mitted in the law itself; but it was seen not to be of moment enough to evacuate the law. Generally speaking, it will be better to bear the inconvenience, than to violate the law; better for the injured party himself, but certainly better for society, at large.

We are certain, that the law will operate this effect, because the lawgiver is, by supposition, divine. He, who knew *what was in man*, what his nature, and true interest, is, could not mistake in adapting the law to the subject of it. And then, for the *exceptions*, he has it in his power to make amends for those, and to recompense fully, as he engages to do, any sacrifice we make to conscience, acting within the scope and purpose of the law.

So that, on the whole, it is but a just deference to the law, and to the authority of the lawgiver, to abstain from *resisting evil*, according to the true sense and spirit of the command, though, by so doing, we subject ourselves to some, nay to much inconvenience. For he must be slenderly instructed in the school of Christ, who is yet to learn, that greater sacrifices, than these, must be made, if need be, for the sake of *him who died for us*.

Enough, I hope, has been now said, not only to vindicate the sacred text, but to let you see how repugnant the doctrine of it is to that contentious, vindictive, and even sanguinary spirit, which prevails so much among those, who, by a strange abuse of language, call themselves Christians.

The root of this mischief, is, a pride of heart, nourished in us by an ill-directed education, and fostered, through life, by the corrupt customs and maxims of the world. To counteract this inveterate evil, we shall do well to consider who and what we are; weak, infirm, and sinful creatures, who are provoking Heaven every day, and should not therefore resent it much, if we receive but little respect from men. We should consider, too, that we are the followers of HIM, who suffered every indignity without deserving any, and yet requires no more from us, than he practised himself, and for our sakes.

Such considerations will make us humble and meek and placable; ready to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven; and disposed to make allowance for those defects in others, which we have so much reason to lament in ourselves.

Still, if we find the duty, of *not resisting evil*, painful and uneasy to us, let us be careful to avoid the occasions, which require the exercise of it. A prudent Christian (and Christianity excludes not, nay enjoins, prudence) will rarely be put to this trial of his virtue. We bring an insult on ourselves by indiscreet liberties, by offensive actions or rash expressions; and then, rather than retract a folly, we commit a crime.

After all, the most cautious, inoffensive conduct may not exempt us, in every instance, from discourtesies and affronts, from the petulance or injustice of unreasonable men. In this case the authority of our divine Master must controul the movements of nature. We must resolve to endure what we dare not resist; and, for the rest, may assure ourselves, that, in giving this proof of our Christian temper and principles, we do what is perfectly fit and right in itself, is singularly conducive to the good of society, and, whatever our impatient passions may suggest, will contribute more than any resistance, to our own true enjoyment, even in this world.

S E R M O N L.

PREACHED MAY 14, 1775.

LUKE ix. 26.

Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.

IF we compare this text with the parallel one of St. Mark ^a, it will seem probable that it more immediately concerned the Jews; who, in consequence of their being *ashamed* of Christ, and rejecting him, as their Messiah, should themselves be covered with shame, and be rejected by him from being his people, when he came to take vengeance of their crimes

^a Ch. viii. 38.

in the destruction of Jerusalem. In this view, the words are prophetic of what should, and, in fact, did, befall the *unbelieving Jews* of that age, in which Christ lived; for *before that age was passed, all these things were fulfilled on that adulterous and sinful generation*: were so remarkably fulfilled, that the unbelieving Jews, only, were involved in that calamity, while the Christians, even to a man, as we are told, providentially made their escape from it.

But, though this be the primary sense of the text, we have reason to believe that something further, and still more terrible, was intended by it. For the destruction of Jerusalem was emblematical of that final destruction, which should await all the enemies of Christ in the day of judgment; as we may probably gather from the exaggerated terms in which the prophecy concerning Christ's coming to judge Jerusalem is delivered, and as we certainly conclude from those passages of scripture, which professedly describe the final day of judgment, when *all that believe not shall be condemned*^b, and concerning which our Lord himself says—*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words,*

^b Mark xvi. 16.

hath one that judgeth him : the WORD which I have spoken, THE SAME shall judge him in the last day ^c.

Whence, you see, we are authorized to take the words of the text in their full force, and to understand them as a general declaration to ALL, who shall be *ashamed of Christ and of his words*, that *of them* shall Christ, also, be *ashamed*, in the great day of retribution, sublimely expressed by the circumstance of his *coming in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels*.

To be *ashamed of CHRIST*, is very intelligible language, and means to disown him for what he claims to be, 'The Messiah; and to take it for a degradation to us, a reflexion on our own sufficiency and importance, to regard him as our Lord and Saviour. In like manner, to be *ashamed of his WORDS*, is, to think it beneath us to receive his doctrine, and to observe it: It is to say, or to behave ourselves as if we said, with neglect and scorn, that we will not condescend to be influenced and directed by it.

^c St. John xii. 48.

But how, and in what respects, may we be said to incur the guilt of this charge? In what ways, may we testify to the world that the shame of CHRIST and of his WORDS is predominant in us?

The inquiry, you see, is of the last importance; for this *shame* of Christ, in whomsoever it prevails, and so far as it prevails, will be repaid in kind, in that day, when he shall *come in glory*, in that day when it so much concerns us to *have boldness* before him, *in the day of judgment*^d.

To assist you, then, in making this momentous inquiry, permit me to lay before you, gradually and distinctly, the CHIEF of those cases, which appear to me to express, or imply, the existence of this *false shame*; and may therefore let us see whether we are, or not, involved in the guilt of it.

I. They (if any such there be) who reject Christianity on the grounds of a fair impartial inquiry, cannot so properly be said to be *ashamed* of Christ, as to be *convinced* that he has no claim to their respect and veneration.

^d John iv. 17.

For they deny him, they will say, not from a principle of *shame*, or disrespect, but of what they take to be *right reason*.

But then, if any oblique views have influenced their disbelief; if conceit, or vanity, or presumption, has any share in forming their conclusions; if a careless or fastidious neglect of the means, by which they might be better informed, has mixed itself with their inquiries; if they have felt the smallest disposition in themselves to struggle with evidence, or to be concluded by any thing but evidence; if any, or all, of these motives can be imputed to them, they will find themselves liable, more or less, to the charge of the text; and it surely concerns them to see that they stand clear of all such imputations: It concerns them the more, because, if the revelation be divine, the revealer knew what evidence was fit to be given of it, and that the evidence given was sufficient to the conviction of a reasonable inquirer. To the severe scrutiny of their own hearts, the disbelievers on principle are, therefore, referred: and, *if their heart condemn them* in any degree, let them reflect with awe, that *God is greater than their heart, and knoweth all things* ^e.

^e John iii. 20.

But, whatever these immaculate unbelievers may have to say for themselves, there are others who have the spots of *shame* indelibly impressed upon them.

Such were the Jews of old, who rejected Christ, not because they wanted evidence of his mission (for they could not deny, nay they frankly owned, that *he did many miracles*^f), but because he was the *Son of a Carpenter*^g; because he was of *Galilee*^h, and dwelt at *Nazareth*; because their *rulers did not believe in him*ⁱ; because they were afraid of being *put out of their synagogue*^k; because *they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*^l; in plain words, because on one account or other, they were ASHAMED OF HIM.

SUCH, too, in succeeding times, were many of the pagan wise men, who disbelieved, because the doctrine of the cross was *foolishness to them*^m; because the Jews, who were the first converts to the faith and the first preachers of it, were, in their eyes, a contemptible

^f John xi. 47. Acts iv. 16.

^g Mark vi. 3.

^h John vii. 41. i. 46.

ⁱ John vii. 48.

^k John xii. 42.

^l John xii. 43.

^m 1 Cor. i. 23.

people ; because the vulgar were generally inclined to believe in him ; because his doctrine contradicted and degraded their philosophy ; because their pride of reason would not submit to be tutored by the Galilæan ; in a word, for a hundred frivolous reasons, which only shewed, that they were **ASHAMED OF HIM.**

Such, too, in later times (may we affirm without a breach of charity) have been, and are, many of those over-modest men, who know not how to withstand the raillery of prophane scoffers ; who think the credit of their parts concerned in rejecting their creed, and applaud themselves for sitting loose to the principles, which they call the prejudices, of their Christian education ; who affect to have a religion of their own making, if they have any at all, or, rather, disclaim all regard to religion, on the authority of this or that renowned patriarch of infidelity ; to say all, in a word, who have the infirmity, and yet make it a matter of vanity, to be **ASHAMED OF JESUS.**

Now, of such unbelievers it must be said, that they clearly come within the description of the text ; they are *ashamed* of the **Son of man**, and yet, perhaps, *glory in their shame* :

to what end, let them reflect, when they read on, and find, that *OF such shall the Son of man, in his turn, be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.*

II. [1.] Of men *professing* Christianity, they are most exposed to the censure of the text, who, under a full conviction that Jesus is the Christ, yet, in *WORDS*, formally disown and reject him. Such was the Apostle Peter, who *thrice denied* his Lord, though he had not the least doubt of his divine pretensions. And why did he deny him? Because, it lessened him in the eyes of a stranger or two, to have it believed by them, that he was connected with a supposed criminal; because he had not the confidence to bear up against the reproach of a *maid-servant*, who *looked earnestly upon him, and said, This man was, also, with him.* Such was the power, which a false shame had upon this great, and otherwise fervent, disciple of Christ! A memorable instance of human frailty, which should admonish believers to be on their guard against all approaches towards a crime, the less pardonable, because committed against the clear sense of the mind, and almost without temptation.

St. Peter, it is true, might alledge the passion of *fear*, as well as *shame* : he probably thought his life in some danger, and had an eye to his personal safety, as well as credit, when he denied his Master. Yet when he reflected on his unworthy conduct, though under these circumstances of alleviation, he *wept bitterly*, as he had reason to do. What then should they feel, who have not this cloke for their shame ? who deny their Lord without any inducement to do so, but the weak apprehension of disgusting some persons, whose sentiments, after all, they do not really adopt, themselves. Yet is this no uncommon case. Men are ashamed to confess with their mouths, what they believe in their hearts ; and give themselves airs of a frank libertinism, when they tremble at their own impiety : And all this to be well with a frivolous circle, which they frequent, or to merit the good word of certain fashionable blasphemers.

[2]. Another sort of men seem to come within the description of the text, who, though neither prompted by a sense of danger to their persons, nor of disgrace to their reputation, are yet induced by a regard to their *interest*, when it presses upon them with a certain force, to

dissemble their conviction, or rather openly to avow their shame of Jesus. Such are they, of whom our Lord himself speaks, *who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away*ⁿ: And such, in particular, was the young man in the Gospel, who had no vice to keep him from believing, nay who would gladly perhaps have sacrificed any thing, but his fortune, to the Christian faith. It seems, as if he had been upon the point of entering, without reserve, into the service of his new master, when, being told, that he must part with *all he had*, and then *follow him*, he grew sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions^o. Poverty was a cross, which this amiable young man was not prepared to take up. His faith, which, before, gave a promise of life and vigour, died away at the proposal. He now found, doubtless with some surprize to himself, that he had the seeds of infidelity lurking in him. He could not resolve to give this last proof of his sincerity: he, therefore, withdrew himself from Christ; in other words, he was *ashamed* of him. Let us pity the weakness of this unhappy young man; and only ask ourselves, if, in his circumstances, or in any approaching to them, we should not

ⁿ Luke viii. 13.

^o Mark x. 17. 23.

have hesitated, as he did, about *believing in the name* of the Lord Jesus. If we should, let us implore the divine grace to strengthen our faith, and frankly confess, that a secret principle of *shame*, though skulking behind some other and more venial infirmity, has taken hold of us.

[3]. Still we may not have gone these lengths of infidelity. We assure ourselves, perhaps, that no consideration would induce us, simply and wholly, to renounce the faith, and that, if the hard alternative was proposed to us, we should rather give up wealth, fame, and life itself, than formally deny our Lord, and disclaim all hopes of interest in him. But let us explore our hearts a little, those *hearts*, which, as we are told and have reason to know, are *deceitful above all things*^p. Have we never in lesser instances detected ourselves approaching somewhat towards this ignominious crime of apostacy?

Have we not contented ourselves with being the disciples of Christ in private, and with *going to him*, as the Ruler of the Jews did, *by night*, in secrecy, and, as it were, by stealth, not to

^p Jer. xvii. 9.

draw the observation of men upon us? Have we been willing and ready to serve him in the congregation, to attend his ordinances, and to revere his sacraments? Have we dared to let the world see that we are not ashamed of the cross of Christ^q? and that we glory in *remembering him*, as we are admonished to do, at his holy table^r? Have we no reluctance to let our friends, nay our servants, know^s that we live in a daily sense of our duty to him, and that we hope for all the blessings of this life and the next, only through his merits and intercession? Have we never heard his pretensions slighted, and his holy name blasphemed, without expressing a becoming zeal for the honour of our Redeemer? Have we testified our displeasure at freedoms of this sort by an open reprehension of them on all fit occasions; at least by a look and manner, which shewed how offensive they were to us? On the other hand, have we never, in such circumstances, by an assumed air of complacency, seemed to authorize what we secretly disapproved, and to yield our assent to propositions which we inwardly detested? In a word, have we none of us, at any time, given occasion to unbelievers to say

q Public Baptism, disused.

r The Lord's Supper, neglected.

s Family Prayer, omitted.

or think of us, that we were *almost* inclined to be of their party ; or at least, that we had not the zeal, and firmness and resolution, which men ought to have, who profess themselves believers in Jesus ?

To these, and other questions of the like sort, it concerns us to think what answers we could honestly make. But of this be we assured: If we have not constantly and uniformly signified, declared, proclaimed our attachment to Christ ; if we have not taken care to avoid all irreverence toward our Lord and Master ; nay, if we have not been enough upon our guard to let no man suspect us of *indifference* towards him—we certainly have not done our duty ; we have virtually denied *the Son of Man* ; we have, in effect, been *ashamed* of him.

And THUS MUCH may suffice for a commentary on that part of the text, which more immediately respects the PERSON of Jesus Christ — *Whosoever shall be ashamed of ME* — but our Lord goes farther, and says — *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of MY WORDS — of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, in the day of judgment.*

Here, then, is a new subject of discourse. I call it a new one ; because, though the two

topics run into one, and he that is ashamed of Christ's *words*, may not improperly be said to be ashamed of *Christ himself*, yet, for the sake of method, it may be convenient to keep these two points distinct, and to give to each a separate consideration.

It remains, then, to set before you the principal of those ways, in which we may incur the guilt, especially, of being ashamed of our Lord's *words*, that is, his DOCTRINES, and LAWS: a copious and important subject! on which I shall reserve what I have to say to another occasion. In the mean time, let us lay to heart what we have now heard concerning the honour due to the PERSON of our great Redeemer. *Be we not, therefore, ashamed of our Lord* ^t— but *let us* resolutely abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming ^u.

^t 2 Tim. i. 8.

^u 1 John ii. 28.

S E R M O N L I.

PREACHED MAY 21, 1775.

LUKE ix. 26.

Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of MY WORDS, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.

THE text distinguishes between *being ashamed of CHRIST*, and *being ashamed of his WORDS*. And, though the two charges, in effect, run into one, yet I have found it convenient, in point of method, to observe that distinction. Considering the subject, in this double view, we shall see more clearly, *what* the crime is, which we are here cautioned to avoid, and *when* we are guilty of it.

I have already gone through the first division of the text, and shall now enter on the second. If we have not formally disowned, or, in effect, at least, been *ashamed* of CHRIST, that is, of his name, dignity, and person, and of the relation, which we bear to him, as our SAVIOUR and REDEEMER, yet have we not felt in ourselves, and evidenced to others, something of that disposition in regard to his WORDS, that is, considering him in the light of our LORD and MASTER?

Now, to do justice to this part of our subject, we must consider the *words* of Christ, first, in THEMSELVES, or as composing that form and manner of address, in which he thought fit to deliver himself to us: and, secondly, in the SUBJECT MATTER of them, that is, as comprehending both his *doctrines* and *precepts*, *articles of faith*, and *rules of life*, all that, as our heavenly *Instructor*, he requires us to believe, and, as our *lawgiver*, to put in practice. In both respects, I doubt, we shall, many of us, find that we have too much, and too often, been ashamed of Christ's *words*.

I. Under the first consideration of the words themselves, that is, of his *manner* in addressing himself to us, let it be observed, that, though

it be true, in several respects, that *never man spake as this man*, yet this commendation must not be extended to the *language* of his discourses, in which no peculiar art or elegance is affected. He condescended to speak, as any other Jew might have done, and as his Apostle afterwards did, plainly and clearly enough to convey his meaning, but not with *the enticing words of man's wisdom*, that is, of men cultivated and polished in the school of Greek or Roman learning. Hence, both in ancient and modern times, such as were, or pretended to be, so accomplished, have not unfrequently objected to the style of the Gospel, as rude and barbarous, and not composed with that beauty, which they have been taught to admire in the masters of fine writing. Now, though this pedantry might, perhaps, be excused in an old Pagan sophist, and is naturally enough assumed by a modern classical unbeliever, one is shocked to find it in professed Christians. And yet, I doubt, there are not a few of those, who are *half ashamed* of the Gospel, because not written in the best Greek, or according to the rules of the most approved rhetorick: I doubt, there are even those who might tell us, if they would (as a polite Italian philologist has done) that they read their bible but seldom, lest a familiarity with it should hurt their

style ; or perhaps abstain from reading it, altogether, because not fashioned according to their ideas of elegant composition.

It would be paying too much respect to this frivolous delicacy, to enter into a formal confutation of it. What I shall say to it is, briefly, this ; first, that the style of scripture, though not classical, is by no means destitute of life and beauty : secondly, that, although it were, where the matter of it concerns us so much, it is childish to lay any great stress on the manner : that, *further*, the very objection turns to the honour of the Gospel, which was purposely so composed that the effect of it, in the conversion of the world, might be seen to flow from supernatural causes, *and that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

To all which I might add, what perhaps is a secret to our polite objectors, that the rules of writing and speaking are more arbitrary than they are taken to be : that they refer to our customs and manners, and derive their merit from that reference, only ; that, in different times and places and under different circumstances, the same manner may be good and

bad ; and that there is no universal archetype of perfect speech, existing in nature ^a.

But these minute inquiries are not for this time and place. On whatever principles the style of scripture may be vindicated, or if it cannot be vindicated at all to a fastidious reader, still I affirm, that the taking offence at it is a species of that false shame, which the text condemns, and which deserves condemnation. When the *word of God* is held up to us in the great day, and the inquiry is, what attention we have paid to it, think how poor a subterfuge it will be from the *shame*, that will then overtake us, to reply, in the face of men and angels, that it was not the *word* of Cicero or Plato.

Having dismissed this trifling cavil, let us now see,

II. In the next place, in what respects it may be charged upon us that we have been ashamed of Christ's *words* ; that is, of their SUBJECT MATTER ; considered in the double view of the *doctrines*, and *precepts*, contained in them.

^a See Bp. Warburton's DOCTRINE OF GRACE, Ch. ix.

1. As to the DOCTRINES of Christ, that is, the peculiar articles of Christian faith, one would think that to reject, or question, or explain away these, was inconsistent with the very profession of Christianity. Yet this conduct, in some shape or other, presents itself to us every day, in those who are, or who desire to be thought, Christians; and one cannot but wonder at the pains they take to draw upon themselves this charge of inconsistency.

Some, bolder than the rest, would expunge whole chapters, nay books, from the sacred canon, when the narrative rises above their faith, or the doctrine will not sink to a level with their wisdom; others content themselves with nibbling at single sentences, or, perhaps, words; and, if no obscure manuscript be at hand to favour the system they adopt, take refuge in a forced, unnatural punctuation. How many ancient and modern heresies have we seen supported by that presumptuous, or this minute strain of criticism!

Some, again, when the text is not called in question, turn their ingenuity another way, and strike out new modes of interpretation. They mangle and disfigure plain facts, or resolve them into allegories: of this class were those primi-

tive heresiarchs, who maintained that *Christ was not come in the flesh*^b, and that *the Resurrection was past already*^c; and of the same family, too, are those presumptuous moderns, of whatever name, who stumble at the cross of Christ, and sink the doctrine of Redemption in a metaphor.

A third sort excell in puzzling a clear text, in putting a violent construction on artless words, in explaining mysteries by metaphysics, or, to get rid of them at once, in making the plain fishermen of Galilee speak the language of Platonism, or of the Jewish cabbala.

In a word, it would be endless to specify all those, who by studied devices, of various kinds, mutilate, prevert, misinterpret, confound the word of God, obtruding their own sense upon it, and finding any thing there rather than the plain obvious mind of the Revealer.

And why is all this industry employed, these daring liberties taken? Why to make *Christianity not mysterious*, to shew how reasonable its doctrines are, and to remove all objections against them. The pretence is fair. But shall we then admit nothing in scripture, in that

^b 1 John iv. 2.

^c 2 Tim. ii. 18.

scripture which we call divine, but what we perfectly understand, and can make appear, in all its parts, to harmonize with our systems? Alas, what is this, but to prescribe to the Spirit of God; to substitute our wisdom in the place of his; in a word, to be ashamed of Christ's words, and to idolize our own reason.

To give one remarkable instance, out of many, of this false shame. If there be any thing clearly revealed in holy scripture, it is, that there is a world of spirits, good and bad: and of the last, that there is ONE, placed at the head of them, who sets himself in opposition (as indeed all bad men do) to the will of God; who had a share in seducing our first parents, and still works in the children of disobedience; who was even permitted to tempt Christ, and to possess Judas; in a word, who is styled the *Prince of this world*, and, for the overthrow of whose empire, principally, the Son of God came down from heaven: If I say, there be any clear undisputed point of doctrine in the Gospel, it is this: the whole scheme of Christianity depends upon it: and yet what pains have not been taken to exterminate evil spirits, and disenchant the world of them; although by such methods, as would render language itself of no use, and confound all the rules of just criticism and sober interpretation?

These interpreters, I know, pretend (and many of them, I dare say, with good faith) a zeal for the honour of God, in their attempts of this nature. But let them look deep into themselves. They will, perhaps, find, that they are paying, at the same time, a secret homage to their own understandings, as if the whole of God's moral government lay open to their view, and they were able to pervade every part of it; that they hold a revelation in no esteem, which puzzles their philosophy; and that, therefore, they force a meaning of their own on the words of Christ, because they are inwardly *ashamed* of that, in which his words are most naturally to be taken.

Leaving, then, these rationalists to the scrutiny of their own inmost thoughts, let us inquire,

2. What regard is due to the *words* of Christ, considered not as articles of belief, but *rules of practice*.

And here, I doubt, it must be acknowledged that we have, all of us, more or less, been *ashamed* of our divine Master. For we are convicted of this shame, whenever we disobey his commands, seen and admitted to be *his*, on

account of any repugnancy they have to the fashion of the world, and to the consideration we affect to have in it. And who is there, that, in this respect, can hope to stand clear of all blame, *when he is judged?*

Be meek and lowly of heart, says our Lord. On the contrary, we are proud and arrogant, that we may not be thought to want spirit. *Take no thought for to-morrow*, are the words of Christ: but the world says, be rich and great; and we think of nothing else but *to-morrow*. *Blessed are the pure in heart*, says our spotless Preceptor: Are we not *ashamed* of these words, when we had rather run the risk of any defilement, than appear unfashionable? And so in a multitude of other instances.

Still, perhaps, we respect the rule, in some sort, and blame ourselves for the breach of it.

But what shall we say of those, who reject the *word spoken* with a high hand, and offend against it on principle, as we may say, and by system?

Go and sin no more, says our Lord to an adulteress convict; and his words imply a severe censure of having sinned at all, in that instance.

But are there none who think this a hard saying, who regard it as a narrow prejudice ; who treat the observance of it as a needless scruple ; nay, who pique themselves on the violation of it ? Are there not some, who delight in this sin by way of preference ? who lay it down for a maxim, that this commerce, under certain circumstances, and covered with a certain veil of manners, is allowable, is reputable, is meritorious ? Nay, are there not those who would take it ill to be thought incapable of aspiring to that distinction, which, in certain quarters, this commerce supposes ?

But let me not enlarge farther on this horrid subject. Consider only, whether the parties concerned must not deride a precept, which they are proud to transgress, and whether in the saddest sense of the word, they may not be said to be *ashamed* of it.

ANOTHER instance occurs, the mention of which, I am sensible, can be of no farther use than to illustrate my subject. A placability of temper, the forgiveness of injuries, the love of our enemies, nothing is more insisted upon in the Gospel, than these virtues, which make the very essence of a Christian's temper. The precepts to this purpose are numberless and ex-

press, and enforced with all possible authority. Yet, to persons, in certain conjunctures, and of a certain rank in the world, it would be an affront, but to remind them of their duty. We know, who it was, that, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously*^d. But what then? Neither precept, nor example, moves him, who calls himself a man of honour, and is the slave of fashion. He has command enough of himself to assume an air of tranquillity, and to observe all the forms of good-breeding. But his hate is rancorous, his resentment hot as hell, his revenge, immortal. Let his pretences be what they will, his conduct cries aloud to all the world, “ I renounce the Gospel, I am *ashamed* of the meek and merciful religion of Jesus.”

To conclude : We now understand in what ways, and in how many respects, we may be *ashamed of Christ and his words*. In recounting those several ways, whether respecting the name and dignity of our Lord, or the rule of faith and practice, which he has given us, we have seen, at the same time, how little, how base, how ungrateful, how impious, how in-

^d 1 Peter ii. 23.

excusable, in all views, this *shame* is: especially in all those, who wear the name, and do not wholly disclaim the faith, of a Christian. More words would be thrown away on those, who are insensible to such considerations. Or, if any further remonstrance can be of use, if there be a motive left that can reach their case, it must be one, that alarms their fears, and shews the danger, the unspeakable hazard, to which they expose themselves by this miserable conduct. And, in the whole extent of God's word, there is not, in the nature of things there cannot be, a more awakening, a more terrible denunciation, than that of the text, which therefore I cannot do better than leave with you in its own proper form, as pronounced by our Lord himself — *Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy Angels.*

S E R M O N LII.

PREACHED JANUARY 29, 1775.

St. MATTH. xvi. 18.

I say also unto thee, that thou art PETER, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

THE way of giving a new name to an eminent person, more immediately concerned in any great transaction; a name, expressive of that transaction, and therefore proper to fix and perpetuate the memory of it; this custom, I say, was of known use in the ancient world. Thus, when God renewed his covenant with *Abram*, and engaged to *multiply him exceedingly*, the name of this patriarch was

changed to *Abraham*; which name, in the Hebrew language, signifies *the father of a great multitude*^a: and, for a like reason, the patriarch *Jacob* took the name of *Israel*^b; to omit many other instances of this usage, which occur in the sacred scriptures.

Just so, when one of the Apostles, known before by the name of *Simon*, had made a memorable confession of his Master's being *the Christ, the son of the living God*, i. e. the redeemer, the prince of Israel, the Messiah foretold, our blessed Lord, to give weight and emphasis to this confession, confers a new name upon him. For he *answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven*: That is, no man hath revealed this great truth to thee, nor has any interest of man, any thing, indeed, but the spirit of God, influencing thy impartial and well-disposed mind, prompted thee to entertain and avow it thus heartily and publicly (the proofs of it not being, at present, so strong, as they hereafter shall be): Therefore, to express my approbation of this great testimony to a truth, which is the fundamental

^a Gen. xvii. 5.

^b Gen. xxxii. 28.

article of my religion, and, at the same time, to signify to thee the honour, with which I mean to reward thee for it, *I further say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

The name, *Peter*, signifying a *rock* in the Greek language, implies, we see, the immovable truth of the confession, here made, on which the Christian religion was to be built; and the immoveable firmness, too, of the Confessor, who should have a share, with the other Apostles, in supporting the whole fabric, and be himself, in point of time, the first stone, on which the glorious superstructure was to be made.

It follows — *and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* — that is, *Death*, or *Destruction* (for that, only, the oriental phrase — *the gates of hell* — here signifies ^c) shall

^c "Αἴνε, or *death* [see Grotius in loc.] is here personized: and, the gates of cities, being anciently the places of counsel and judgment, as well as their chief defence and strength, hence the *gates of death* are the power and policy, which this person should employ to accomplish his ends: which is, in other words, to say, that those ends, or *destruction*, should by no means be effected.

never prevail against this church, being founded on thee, and the testimony, made by thee, as on a rock of ages, which shall never give way, or be removed.

We see, then, the full meaning of this famous text, which contains, in effect, two prophecies: ONE, respecting the foundation of the Christian church, and (so far as the Apostle Peter was personally concerned in the prediction) then verified, when Peter laid the first stone of this august building in the converts made by him both among the Jews^d and Gentiles^e: the OTHER prophecy, respecting the perpetuity of this church; which the divine Providence would, in no future age of the world, permit to be destroyed.

So that, not the supremacy of Peter over the rest of the Apostles (as the church of Rome vainly pretends), but the priority of his claim, in point of time, to signal services in the conversion of mankind, is expressed in this memorable promise made to Peter — *on this rock will I build my church*: and, for the second assurance, here given, and which, to so zealous a master-builder, as our Apostle, must have

^d Acts ii. 14.

^e Acts x. and xv. 7.

been singularly welcome — *that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it* — we may, now, by the experience of more than seventeen hundred years, understand, how far it has been, and how likely it is, in the full extent of the words, to be fulfilled.

But, to see a little more distinctly what this experience is, and what presumption arises out of it for the truth of our holy religion, let us call to mind, if you please, the more remarkable of those attacks, which have been made, at different times, on the church of Christ, and yet how constantly and successfully they have been repelled.

I. No sooner had the foundations of the church been laid on the *rock* of this testimony — *that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God* — than the storms of persecution arose, and beat violently upon it. Nor was it, indeed, strange, that this new doctrine, published every where, with great boldness, by men who had been eye-witnesses of what they affirmed, and calculated to overturn all the favourite maxims and usages of the world, should meet with the fiercest opposition. And how easy did it seem for that world to crush the infant society, now

struggling for life in the hands of twelve poor, illiterate, and friendless men, if the decree of Heaven had not gone forth — *that the gates of hell should not prevail against it!*

I know, indeed, that this violence of persecution was, in the end, of advantage to the Christian cause; and, from the nature of the human mind, when once persuaded of any thing, true or false, might be expected to be so. For cruelty, in such cases, only excites an unconquerable firmness and perseverance. But what was persuasion in succeeding converts to the gospel of Christ, was knowledge, or rather the infallible evidence of sense, in the first publishers of it. The Apostles witnessed a matter of fact, when they made known the resurrection of Christ, on which their whole doctrine rested. And it is not in nature for any single man, much less for twelve men, to suffer, and to die, for a false fact, not taken upon trust from others, but asserted on their own proper and personal experience. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, they neither saw, nor felt, nor conversed with him after his resurrection, that is, they had no persuasion for force to harden into obstinacy, but a consciousness of falshood in their attestation, which

could not have held out against the rage of their persecutors^f.

If it be said, that criminals are often supposed, and not without reason, to die with a falshood in their mouths, I answer, it is very possible: but, besides that the Apostles gave no signs, in the rest of their conduct, of a want of principle, by declaring the truth, in this case, they might have saved their lives, whereas a criminal, for the most part, is but the more likely to lose his, by a true confession.

Or, if, lastly (for suspicion, I am aware, is not easily satisfied, if) the perseverance of the

^f An ancient apologist for Christianity seems to think, that, if a sect of philosophy had been persecuted, as Christianity was, it would presently have vanished out of the world. His words are — τὴν μὲν Φιλοσοφίαν τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν εἰς ὅ τι χυλὸν ἀρχῶν καλύσει, σίχεται παραχρῆμα. [Clemens Alexandr. Strom. L. vi. p. 827. Oxon. 1715.] Perhaps, the learned father was mistaken. But a religion, founded on facts, not on opinions, and persecuted from the beginning, could not have supported itself, if those facts had been false. This is the case of Christianity. The subsequent persecutions, when the truth of Christianity was admitted on the credit of the first martyrs, might tend to advance this religion, even though it had been originally an imposture. The difference of the two cases is palpable. The Apostles shewed, by their sufferings, that they *knew* what they attested to be a true fact: Succeeding sufferers shewed, that they *believed* it to be so.

martyred apostles be accounted for from a false point of honour, I admit, that this strange principle sometimes overpowers conviction; but rarely, in any number of men confederated in the same cause, and, least of all, in a number of men of so plain and artless characters, as the Apostles.

On the whole, we have reason to conclude, that, if Christianity had not been true, it must have perished with its first preachers: at least, it cannot be denied, that in outliving the violence, with which it was assaulted, both by Jew and Gentile, on its appearance in the world, this religion has thus far verified the remarkable prediction of its author.

II. The external peace of the church was scarce settled under Constantine, when internal commotions shook its frame, and with a violence, which was likely to bring on, and that in no long time, its entire dissolution. By these commotions, I mean the heresies, that sprung up in abundance, and distracted the Christian world for several centuries. The zeal, or rather fury, with which these disputes were carried on, was unappeasable; and, if it be true, that *a house divided against itself cannot stand*, there was reason to expect that the

household of Christ would exemplify this maxim: While, at the same time, the Christian name was so dishonoured by these contentions, and the lives, as well as the faith, of Christians, so polluted by them, that believers themselves were almost tempted to renounce a profession, which laboured under so much infamy; and the rest of the world could scarce fail to contract an incurable aversion to it.

This, indeed, was so much the case, and the advantage, given to the enemies of our faith, by these scandalous abuses of it, so great, that one is not surprised to find

III. A *third*, and still more alarming danger of the Christian church, in the sudden rise and propagation of the Mahometan religion.

For it was the corruption of Christianity, that gave occasion, or success, at least, to this daring imposture. And now it might seem, that *the gates of hell* were set wide open, and destruction ready to rush upon, and seize, its defenceless prey, the Christian church, disheartened and disabled by its own vices. The uncontrollable spirit of this ruthless sect was, indeed, alarming to the last degree; when a secret providence, first, softened its ferocity, and, then, put a stop to its successes.

I ascribe these effects to the *good providence of God*, watching over the preservation of our holy faith ; for what else could make the disciples of Mahomet tolerant in spite of their ignorance and bigotry ; and pacific, when their law breathed nothing but war and universal dominion ?

Still the church had other trials to undergo ; and *hell* had yet in reserve some further engines of its wrath to employ against her. For

IV. While the African and Asiatic Christians were in danger of a total suppression by the rage of their Ottoman masters, the European had almost as much to apprehend from exhaustless swarms of Northern barbarians. And, what darkened the prospect still more, all knowledge and learning had disappeared, during these turbulent ages. Hence, to the destructive fanaticism of the East, was added the grossest *superstition* of the West ; which, growing up in a long night of ignorance, and yet directed by policy towards the establishment of a vast and gloomy empire, involved all Christendom in its pestilential shade, and threatened the very extinction of all true religion.

Yet it pleased God, in this distressful state of his church, to provide for its continuance,

and even integrity, in due time, by making the cloystered ignorance of the Monks serve to the preservation of the sacred canon ; and the enslaving projects of a tyrannical hierarchy, to the restoration of religious and civil liberty.

And thus, though the powers of *hell* had been successively let loose against the church of Christ in the terrible shapes, first, of Jewish and Gentile persecution ; then, of heresy, in the church itself ; next, of Mahometan enthusiasm ; and, lastly, of Antichristian superstition ; yet have they not prevailed against this sacred structure, founded on a *rock*, guarded, as we believe, by heaven itself, and therefore destined to be eternal.

I have touched these several particulars slightly and rapidly, just to put you in mind of what the Christian religion has endured, since its appearance in the world ; and to let you see how unlikely it is that this religion should have kept its ground against these various and multiplied attacks, if it had not been divinely protected.

But of all the trials, to which it has been exposed, the greatest by far, if this religion had been an imposture, is ONE, which I have not

yet mentioned; and that is, *the examination of severe, enlightened Reason.*

And this trial, to complete its honour, our divine faith hath TWICE undergone: *once*, in the very season of its birth; and now, *again*, for two or three centuries, since the revival of letters, in our Western world: periods, both of them, distinguished, in the annals of mankind, by a more than common degree of light and knowledge; which must, in the nature of things, have been fatal to any scheme of religion, pretending only to a divine original, and not really so descended.

But this part of the argument is too large, as well as too important, for me to enter upon at present. Let me therefore conclude with a short and interesting reflexion on so much of it, as we have been considering.

It was natural, no doubt, for the author of a new religion, full of his scheme, and impressed with the importance of it, to promise to himself the perpetuity of his work. But a wise man might easily conjecture that a religion, like the Christian, would meet with the fiercest opposition: and, though this be not a proper time to shew it, it might be shewn, that *the spirit*

of *Christ* ^g distinctly foresaw the several species of opposition, which his religion had to encounter ^h.

Yet, in the face of all these perils, our Lord predicts, in the most direct and positive terms, that his church should brave them all, and subsist for ever. It has subsisted to this day, after encountering such storms of persecution and distress, as must, in all likelihood, have overturned any human fabrick. Is not the true solution of the fact, this, that it was founded on *the word of God, which endureth for ever* ⁱ ? The rest, then, follows of course. The wise master-builder (to use his own words on another occasion, near akin to this) *had built his house upon a ROCK : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house : and it FELL NOT, for it was founded upon a ROCK* ^k.

^g 1 Peter i. 11.

^h Of Persecution. John xvi. 2.

Of Heresies. Acts xx. 30. 1 Cor. x. 19.

Of Mahomet's impiety, ix. 1—12. See Mede.

Of the great Apostasy. 2 Thess. ii. &c.

Of these, and other woes still to come. The Revelation, *passim*.

ⁱ 1 Peter i. 25.

^k Matth. vii. 24, 25.

S E R M O N L I I I .

PREACHED FEBRUARY 5, 1775.

ST. MATTH. xvi. 18.

And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

THE religion of Jesus hath descended to us, through two, the most enlightened ages of the world. It was, first, published in the reign of Tiberius: It was re-published, as we may say, at the Reformation: and is it likely, that an imposture should have made its way in the former of these periods? Or, is it possible, it should still keep its ground against the influence of all that light and knowledge, by which the latter has been distinguished?

To see what force there is in these questions, permit me to lay before you a slight sketch of the trials, to which Christianity has been exposed from the improved reason of ancient and modern times, and of the effect, which those trials appear to have had on the credit and reception of that Religion.

I. Jesus preached the Gospel in the reign of Tiberius: that is, in a time of profound peace, when arts and letters were generally diffused through the Roman empire; and in Judea, at that time a Roman province. So far was this thing from being *done in a corner*^a!

This religion, on its first appearance in the world, had therefore to encounter two sorts of men, well qualified, and not less disposed, to give it a severe examination; I mean, the learned JEWS, on the one hand, and the reasoning GENTILES, on the other. Yet it prevailed against all the efforts of both.

It was, first, proposed to the JEWS, and its pretensions were to be tried by the correspondence of its principles and history to the doctrine and predictions of their sacred books. That vastly the greater part of the Jewish

^a Acts xxvi. 26.

nation resisted the evidence of that appeal, is well known: but that great numbers did not, and, of these, that some, at least, were of principal note for their rank, and knowledge in the scriptures, is equally certain and allowed; with this further concession, that the evidence, whatever it was, prevailed over the most inveterate prejudices, that ever possessed any people, and the most alarming difficulties and discouragements, to which human nature can be exposed. Let the fact, then, be considered, with all its circumstances, on both sides. And as to the merit of the argument, we are well able to judge of it. The sacred writings of the Jews, to which the appeal lay, are in all hands: and with what triumphant superiority the followers of Jesus reasoned from them, we see, in their numerous works, still extant, and especially in those of the great Apostle, St. Paul. So that, if all the scriptural learning, and all the bigotry of Judaism, could not stop the progress of Christianity, as we know it did not, it may fairly be presumed, that the way of inquiry was not unfavourable to the new religion, and that truth and reason were on that side. But

2. From the Jews, let us turn to the GENTILES, at that time flourishing in arts and let-

ters. To them was the Gospel preached by the Apostles, and especially by their Apostle, St. Paul, through the whole extent of the Roman empire; and not without success in the head quarters of Gentilism, in the chief towns of Asia, in Greece, at Athens, and even at Rome itself.

The pride of Gentile wisdom, indeed, kept its professors, for some time, from taking more than a superficial notice of the new religion. But its rapid progress among the people, joined to its declared purpose of prescribing to the general faith of mankind, broke through this real or affected indifference, roused, at length, the attention of the great and wise, and provoked the zeal of both to shew itself in every mode of opposition. The great persecuted, and the wise reasoned: and this latter species of hostility (the more alarming of the two, if Christianity had been an imposture) was carried on with vigour, and without intermission (whatever intervals there might be of the *former*) through several successive ages. The four Gospels, and the other authentic documents of our religion, were now in all hands, when this lettered war commenced against Christianity, and continued, till Paganism was utterly overthrown and subdued. Many adver-

saries of the Christian name engaged in this unequal contest: but the most distinguished are, CELSUS, in the second century; PORPHYRY, in the third; and JULIAN, in the fourth: all of them, eminent philosophers; and the last of this great triumvirate, an imperial one. The two first wrote with all freedom, because against a persecuted, and on the side of the predominant, religion; and the third had the whole power of the state in his own hands.

The works of these great chieftains of infidelity, it must be owned, are not extant in their proper form. But Celsus is almost entire in Origen; a great part of Julian may be seen in Cyril; and considerable fragments of Porphyry's work have been preserved in Jerom and other old writers.

Ye do not expect me to produce, on this occasion, the substance of what these three philosophers have said against the Christian cause. Any that will, may see it in the original authors, just mentioned, or in many modern collections, that have been made out of them. It may be enough to say, that those, who give themselves this trouble, will find much abuse and misrepresentation, and some argument: but the last so weak, and inconclu-

sive, that one cannot wonder much at what Chrysostom tells us, "That the early books, " written against Christianity, soon fell into a " general contempt; that they perished almost " as fast as they appeared; and that, if they " still subsisted any where, it was, because " they had been preserved by the Christians " themselves^b."

But, setting aside, for the present, the merits of the question, the fact^c, we know, is, that all the efforts of Greek and Roman philosophy were not successful: that the church was soon filled with its professors, even before the empire became Christian: and that this great event itself happened within little more than three centuries from the birth of Christ. *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed*, notwithstanding the severity, with which its pretensions were tried.

^b Τοσούτος ἐστὶ τῶν ὑπὸ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένων ὁ γέλως, ὥστε ἀφανισθῆναι καὶ τὰ βιβλία πολλά, καὶ ἅμα τῷ δειχθῆναι, καὶ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ πολλά. Εἰ δέ περ τι καὶ εὐρεθῆναι διασωθέν, παρὰ Χριστιανοῦς τῆτο σωζόμενον εὔροι τις ἄν. Tom. II. p. 539. Ed. Bened.

^c "The Christian religion," says the finest of our English writers, whom I need not therefore stay to name, "made its way through paganism with an amazing progress and activity. Its victories were the victories of " reason, unassisted by the force of human power, and as " gentle as the triumphs of light over darkness."

It will be said, however, “that the argument, drawn from the success of Christianity, is not altogether so convincing, as we pretend: that, for a time, the learned heathens paid but little attention to the new sect; that, when it had taken such root among the people as to become the general subject of inquiry, learning was now very much on the decline; that barbarism had prevailed to a great degree before the days of Constantine, and then increased so fast, especially after the irruption of the Northern nations, as to leave no traces, almost, of light and knowledge; and that to this sottish state of ignorance, and, its usual attendant, credulity, which continued through many ages, the widely extended and permanent establishments of Christianity are, therefore, most probably to be ascribed.”

Now, though I cannot assent to what is here alledged, or insinuated, that the adversaries of Christianity wanted either time, or light, or zeal enough to discredit its pretensions, if the way of reason and disputation could have done it, before that long night of ignorance came on which is supposed to be so favourable to religious imposture; yet I will not deny that taste and literature were degenerating in the

Roman empire, from the time that learned pagans began to interest themselves in the controversy with the Christians; and that, therefore, had the last only prevailed through this period of declining letters, something would have been wanting to the force and integrity of that argument, which infers the truth of their cause, from its success. But the fact is, that the event has been the same, in opposite circumstances; as I shall now shew,

II. Under the SECOND head of this discourse; in which I proposed to point out to you, very briefly, the influence of REVIVING, AND REVIVED letters on the credit and reception of the Christian faith.

From the middle of the 14th century, and even earlier, there were some efforts made to break through that gloom of ignorance and superstition, which had so long overspread the Christian world; and, before the end of it, it was visible enough that these efforts would, in no long time, be attended with success. Accordingly, a zeal for true and ancient literature made its way through most parts of Europe, and with so rapid a progress, that multitudes of able men arose within the compass of the next century, and were enough instructed to

assist in the reformation of religion, which followed in the commencement of the 16th. From that time to the present, arts and letters have been studied with unceasing application; and all the powers of reason put forth in the cultivation of knowledge, in the discovery of error, and the search of truth. It is pretended, that we are now enlightened beyond the example of all former ages: it is credible, that, in some places, where liberty has attended the pursuits of learning, the utmost ability of the human mind, on the most important objects of science, has been exerted and displayed.

Now, amidst this blaze of light, gradually ascending from the dawn of science to its meridian lustre, what has been the fortune of the divine religion, we profess? It has been the first, and last object of attention. It has been examined with the most suspicious and sceptical curiosity. It has stood the attacks of wit, of learning, of philosophy; and, sometimes, of all these acting in concert, without any restraint or reserve whatsoever. Yet it keeps its ground; or rather the belief of it is entertained, not only by the multitude, but, more firmly than ever, by the ablest and wisest men.

For the truth of this assertion, I can only refer you to your own fair and candid observation; the proof of it being much too long to be given, at this time. For it would require me to set before you the several topics of argument, which have been employed against Christianity, and the futility of them. It would, further, oblige me to make appear, that the number of those, who still embrace Christianity, is not only vastly greater, but their names, too, beyond comparison, more respectable, than of those who reject it: all which it would be tedious, indeed, but not difficult to shew.

However, till some such proof be produced, ye will be apt, I know, to remind me of many eminent persons, who have been the declared enemies of our religion: ye will object to me the complaints, which even divines make, of an overflowing infidelity in the present times.

In abatement of this prejudice, I could say with much truth, that the character of those eminent persons has been raised too high; and that these complaints, though not without foundation, have been carried too far. But I have other, and more momentous considerations to suggest to you, on this subject.

At the revival of letters, when the manifold corruptions of Christianity had been discovered, it was too natural for the disabused mind to entertain some suspicions of the revelation itself; and when reason, now emancipated from authority, had tried its strength, and found itself able to detect innumerable errors in religion and science, it too hastily concluded that there was no subject too vast for its comprehension, and that its power and right to decide on all questions whatsoever was evident and beyond dispute. From that suspicious, and this delirious state of the human mind, infidelity sprung up, and on either stock it still grows. "We have been deceived in many things, with regard to this religion; therefore in every thing." "We know much; therefore we are capable of knowing all things."—These, as extravagant as they appear, are the two sophisms, into which all modern free-thinking is to be resolved.

But now it is so evident to men of sense, that "a revelation may be true, though much imposture has been grafted upon it, and that its doctrines may challenge our belief, though they be not within the reach of our knowledge:" This, I say, is now so uncontroverted among men of sense, that, if the list of

those, who, in the course of two or three centuries, have supported the infidel cause on those grounds, were ever so great or so conspicuous, it could furnish no argument, or even presumption, in favour of that cause itself.

But the truth is, that list is neither formidable for its numbers, nor for the capacity of those, of whom it consists. It shrinks into nothing, when we oppose to it the multitudes of able men, who have been, during this period, and are, the advocates of Christianity; and, among these, when we recollect the names of Grotius, Pascal, Bacon, Locke, Boyle, Newton, and many others (not of the sacred order, though I know not why the authority of these should be left out of the account); when, I say, we look up to these great lights and ornaments of the Christian world.

Nor let it be surmized, that the reasonings of infidel writers have been better, or other, than they are here represented to be, or that they have not been enforced with full liberty, and in all their strength. What the liberty, or rather licence, of these enlightened times has been, we all know: And of their arguments, ye may all judge: though this labour

be the less necessary, as most of them have not only been triumphantly confuted by believers, but successively exploded by unbelievers themselves; and the rest of them, have not prevented men of thought and ability from being generally on the side of the Christian religion, even to this day.

Ye see, I am as concise as possible, and omit very much of what might be said on this subject, not to exceed the limits usually prescribed to a discourse in this place. But when ye contemplate the present state of Christianity, in an age of the greatest light and freedom, and the respect that is still paid to it, I must just desire you to call to mind the state of pagan religion under the like circumstances; and to reflect that, when men of sense examined its pretensions in the Augustan age, there was not a single person, in the priesthood or out of it, of ability and learning, who did not see and know that the whole was a manifest imposture, and destitute of all evidence, that could induce a well-grounded and rational assent^d. Can any thing like this be

^d This effect of inquiry upon the Gentile religions was foreseen by men of sense—*Non sunt ista* [the traditionary tales of the heathen Gods] *vulgo disputanda, ne susceptas publicè religiones disputatio talis extingvat.* Cic. Frag. Olivet, T. III, p. 556.

said, or even suspected, of the Christian faith?

I know, that fraud and falsehood, by being mixed with a great deal of acknowledged evident truth, may obtain respect even with some acute and inquisitive men; as, without doubt, has been the case of Popery, since the Reformation: I know, too, that a false religion, unsupported by any truth, may even keep its ground in a learned age, when restraint or other causes have prevented a free inquiry into that religion; as may have been the case of Mahometanism, in one stage of the Saracen empire: but that a religion, like the Christian, as delivered in the Scriptures, which must either be wholly false, or wholly true, and has been scrutinized with the utmost freedom and severity, should yet, if the arguments for it were weak and fallacious, maintain its credit, and subsist in the belief of the most capable and accomplished reasoners, is, I think, a prodigy, which never has appeared, or can appear among men.

I suppose, enough has been, now, said to shew, that, in fact, the knowledge of past or present times has not discredited the cause of Christianity; and that what there is of infidelity

may be well accounted for from certain prevailing prejudices, which unhappily sprung up with returning Letters, at the Reformation. I might go on to shew, that the evidences of the Christian religion, as drawn out, and set before us, by its modern apologists, are now stronger, and more convincing, than they ever were in any former period; and that, on the whole, this religion has not lost, but gained infinitely, by all the inquiries, which improved science has enabled men of leisure and curiosity to make into it. But it is time to return to the TEXT, and to conclude this commentary upon it, with one or two short reflexions.

FIRST, if it be true, that after so many trials of every kind, those especially of reason, and philosophy, to which the religion of the Gospel has been exposed, the belief of it remains unshaken in the minds of men, Then is the prophecy of the text thus far signally verified; and it is indisputable, that *the gates of hell have not, hitherto, prevailed against it.*

SECONDLY, if it be scarce imaginable that any future trials, from without, should be more severe, than those which Christianity has already suffered; or that those, from within, I mean the trials of severe rational inquiry,

should be more formidable, than what it has undergone in two periods, the most distinguished for the free exertion of the human faculties, of any that have occurred in the history of the world; then may it seem credible, or rather then is the presumption strong and cogent, that neither, hereafter, will the prophecy be confuted, and that the *gates of hell shall not*, at any time, or at all, *prevail against it*.

THIRDLY, and lastly, We may learn, from both these conclusions, to put our trust in this impregnable fortress of our Religion; to embrace with stedfastness, and to observe with the utmost reverence, a RULE OF FAITH AND LIFE, which bears the signatures of immortality upon it, and appears to be under the special protection, as it proceeded originally from the special favour and authority, of God himself.

A
LARGER DISCOURSE,
BY WAY OF
COMMENTARY,
ON
THAT REMARKABLE PART
OF
THE GOSPEL-HISTORY,
IN WHICH
JESUS IS REPRESENTED,
AS DRIVING THE BUYERS AND SELLERS
OUT OF THE TEMPLE.

A

DISCOURSE *

ON

CHRIST'S DRIVING THE BUYERS AND
SELLERS OUT OF THE TEMPLE.

I PROPOSE, in this discourse, to take into consideration a very remarkable part of the Gospel-history; in which Jesus is supposed to have exercised an act of authority on some persons, whom the Jews permitted to carry on a certain traffic within the walls of the Temple.

I shall, FIRST, recite the several accounts, which the sacred historians have given of this transaction; and shall, THEN, hazard some

* The substance of this Discourse was delivered in a Sermon at Lincoln's-Inn, May 15, 1768.

observations, which will, perhaps, be found to lessen, or to remove, the objections commonly made to it.

I begin with St. John's account of it, which is delivered in these words :

Ch. ii. 13—17. “ And the Jews passover was
 “ at hand, and Jesus went up to
 “ Jerusalem, and found in the
 “ temple those that sold oxen,
 “ and sheep, and doves, and the
 “ changers of money, sitting ;
 “ And when he had made a
 “ scourge of small cords, he
 “ drove them all out of the tem-
 “ ple, and the sheep and the
 “ oxen ; and poured out the
 “ changers money, and over-
 “ threw the tables ; and said
 “ unto them that sold doves,
 “ Take these things hence ; make
 “ not my Father's house an house
 “ of merchandize. And his dis-
 “ ciples remembered that it was
 “ written, The zeal of thine
 “ house hath eaten me up.”

Thus far the Evangelist, St. John : And the order of the history shews, that this was done

at the *first* Passover which Jesus attended, after he had taken upon himself his prophetic office.

The other Evangelists relate a similar transaction, which had happened at the Passover, immediately preceding his crucifixion. Some have imagined that, on this last occasion, the same act was repeated by him, on two several days; but I see no sufficient ground for that supposition. St. Mark is easily reconciled with St. Matthew and St. Luke by only admitting, what is very usual in the sacred writers, some little neglect of method in the narration of one or other of those historians.

Mat. xxi. 12, 13. “ And Jesus went into the
 “ temple of God, and cast out
 “ all them that sold and bought
 “ in the temple, and overthrew
 “ the tables of the money-chan-
 “ gers, and the seats of them
 “ that sold doves, and said unto
 “ them, it is written, My house
 “ shall be called the house of
 “ prayer, but ye have made it a
 “ den of thieves.”

Mark xi. 15—17. “ And they come to Jerusalem:
 “ And Jesus went into the tem-

“ ple, and began to cast out
 “ them that sold and bought in
 “ the temple, and overthrew the
 “ tables of the money-changers,
 “ and the seats of them that sold
 “ doves ; And would not suffer
 “ that any man should carry any
 “ vessel through the temple. And
 “ he taught, saying unto them,
 “ Is it not written, My house
 “ shall be called of all nations
 “ the house of prayer ? But ye
 “ have made it a den of thieves.”

Luke xix. 45, 46. “ And he went into the tem-
 “ ple, and began to cast out
 “ them that sold therein, and
 “ them that bought, saying unto
 “ them, It is written, My house
 “ is the house of prayer : but ye
 “ have made it a den of thieves.”

In reading these passages, one is led to con-
 clude, that the ACT itself, here ascribed to our
 Lord, was of no small importance ; for it is re-
 lated, we see, by every one of the four Evange-
 lists. The substance of what we learn from all
 of them, compared together, is this : “ That
 Jesus, at two several times, *once*, before the

first Passover which he attended after the entrance on his ministry, and *again*, before the Passover which preceded his passion, went up to Jerusalem, and entered into the *temple*; that is (as all interpreters agree, and as the nature of the thing speaks) into the *first*, or outermost court of the temple, or that which was called *the court of the Gentiles*; because the Gentiles, who acknowledged the one true God, were permitted to come and worship him there; that in this court (which was separated from the next or second court by a sept or low wall, and deemed by the Jews *prophane*, in contempt of the Gentiles, to whose use it was dedicated) *he found those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money*; that is, persons who attended there to furnish what was necessary for the service of the temple, and so made a kind of market, of this first court or division of it: that, upon observing this prophanation, *he made a scourge of small cords*, or, as the word in the original strictly means, of *rushes*, such as he may be supposed to have found upon the spot, and with this scourge drove these traffickers from their station; signifying, by this and such like actions, his displeasure at this pollution of a part of the temple; and saying to them, withall, *It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer of all nations: But ye have made it*

an house of merchandize, or, as the equivalent expression is, a den of thieves."

Thus stands the history itself: And the light in which it is commonly understood, is this; "That Jesus, in virtue of his prophetic, or, if you will, *regal* character, did this act of authority, to testify his zeal for the honour of God's house, thus polluted and desecrated, contrary to its original purpose and design, by the base and commercial uses, that were now made of it;" and it is probable, that the Disciples themselves, *at the time*, considered it in this light, only, *for they remembered*, St. John says, *that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*—applying a passage out of the Psalms, to this act of zeal in their master.

It is true, this circumstance is only related by St. John, who records the *former* transaction, and omits the *latter*: the reason of this difference will, perhaps, be seen, as we proceed in our inquiry.

But to this solution of the case some objections have been made.

Besides the strangeness and indecency, as many apprehend, of the proceeding itself, and the improbability that the persons concerned in

this chastisement, who had public allowance for what they did, should patiently submit to it (for we hear of no resistance, nor of any complaint, made by them)—Besides, I say, these obvious considerations, the act itself was an act of CIVIL POWER, which Jesus always disclaimed, and for which, it will be said, he had no warrant, either from the ruling Jews, themselves, or from his regal, or prophetic character: not, from *the ruling Jews*, who, we know, were offended at his behaviour; not, from his *regal* character, which was not of this world; nor yet, lastly, from his *prophetic* office: for, though that might authorize him to declare his sense of this prophanation, it may be thought not to extend so far as to justify him in disturbing the civil rights of men, and doing a direct violence to their property and persons. Jesus himself, we understand, was so tender of *both*, that, upon another occasion, when it was proposed to him to divide a contested inheritance between two claimants, he said to the proposer, *Man, who made me a judge, or a divider over you*^a? Whence it may seem reasonable to infer, that he would not have interposed, by an overt act of authority or jurisdiction, in *this* case; notwithstanding the reference it had to the honour of religion, or the right he might have to con-

^a Luke xii. 14.

denn an abusive practice, from his spiritual character.

These difficulties seem to shew, that there is something more in the case, than a mere expression of zeal against the prophaners of the temple: not but this might be one end, but it could not be the sole or even principal end, of so extraordinary a transaction.

I do not indeed find, that the ancient commentators on the Gospels have said any thing to the difficulties, I have mentioned. They seem to have looked no further than to the obvious sense of this transaction, and to have acquiesced in the opinion of its being intended to evidence our Lord's zeal for the honour of God's house, without any further view or purpose whatsoever. They found it related as a matter of fact; and they piously admitted the authority of Jesus to controul the civil usages and rights of the Jews, by virtue of his transcendant power and divine character.

But the moderns have been aware of the objections, which lie against this interpretation. Our learned Selden, in particular, has an entire chapter, in his book *De jure naturali et gentium juxta disciplinam Hebræorum*, on this

subject^b. His notion is, That Jesus exerted this act of power, in virtue of what the Jews called THE RIGHT OR PRIVILEGE OF ZEALOTS^c; by which they meant, not a general zeal or indignation (such as is before spoken of) against what they conceived to be derogatory to the honour of their religion; but a *right*, strictly so called, derived to them from the civil institutions and approved usages of their country, of interfering, in some extraordinary cases, to repel a manifest insult on their law, by private force, without waiting for the slow process of a judicial determination.

The principal, or rather sole foundation, on which this notion is erected, is the case of *Phinehas*, related in the book of NUMBERS^d: which the Jews afterwards construed into a *law*, or embraced at least as a *traditionary* rule of conduct, derived to them, as they supposed, from

^b L. iv. c. 5.

^c And to the same purpose, our excellent Archbishop Tillotson — “ His [Christ’s] whipping of the buyers and “ sellers out of the temple, the only action of his life in “ which there appears any transport of anger, was no other “ than a BECOMING ZEAL for the honour of God’s house, “ which he saw so notoriously profaned; which zeal was “ WARRANTED, after the example of Phinehas, by the ex- “ traordinary occasion of it.” Works, vol. iii. § 136. p. 222.

^d Numbers, ch. xxv.

the times of Moses. But this case will by no means bear the construction, which has been made of it. For,

1. It was a single and very *particular* case, without any intimation from the historian, that it was afterwards to be drawn into precedent.

2. It may seem to have been, if not commanded, yet in some measure authorized, or it was at least, by an express revelation, afterwards justified. For the matter is thus related. Upon the defection of the Israelites at Shittim into idolatry, in consequence of their prophane, as well as impure commerce with *the daughters of Moab*, God sent a plague among them, and besides commanded Moses to put to death all those who had been guilty of such abominations. Moses obeyed, and *said unto the judges of Israel, slay ye every one his men, that were joined unto Baal-Peor.*

This command was issued very properly to the *Judges* : but a *private* man, *Phinehas, the son of Eleazer, the son of Aaron the priest*, instigated by his zeal, and presuming perhaps on his relationship to the high priest (from whose family, a more than ordinary zeal in such a case might be expected) did, under these circum-

stances, take upon himself to execute that command on two persons, surprized in the very act, for which the penalty had been denounced, in the presence of all the people. Now, though this proceeding was irregular in itself, yet the notoriety of the fact, the most atrocious that could be, and the most daring insult on the divine authority, seemed almost to supersede the necessity of a legal process. The consequence was, that God himself was pleased to accept and reward the deed, because the author of it, on such a provocation, and at such a time, *was zealous for his God, and had made an atonement for the children of Israel.*

But to argue from a single instance, so circumstanced, that the same zeal was allowable in other cases, in which no such countenance had been given, and no such necessity or provocation could be pretended, is evidently so unreasonable, that no stress ought to be laid on this argument. The Jews, indeed, in succeeding times, might fancy a general rule to have been implied in this single instance; and we know from their history, to what enormous excesses this their easy belief, concurring with a natural violence of temper, afterwards transported them, during the last calamities of

of this devoted people^e: but our Lord was very unlikely to give a countenance to their traditions, or to add the sanction of his authority to a principle, so weakly founded, and so liable to the worst abuse.

3. This *traffic of the merchants*, in the court of the Gentiles, how unfit soever it might be, depended on the same authority, as this pretended *right itself of the zealots*; that is, on the allowed usage and constant discipline of their country. No express precept of the law could be alledged for either. So that this *right* could not be exerted but at the expence of *another*, equally well founded.

4. Mr. Selden himself appears to have had some distrust of his own hypothesis, by the care he takes to interweave, in his discourse, a charge of *fraud* on the merchants, together with their *prophanation* of the temple. But the learned writer forgets, that ZELOTISM (if I may have leave to use a new term) respected *religion* only, and not private morals. For even *the act of zeal*, performed by Phinehas (from which, only, the very idea of this *Jewish right*, if it were one, was derived) had, for its

* JOSEPHUS, *De Bello Judaico*, l. iv. c. 12.

object, not the *fornication* simply, but the *idolatry*, of the criminals: it was a sacrifice, not to the honour of *virtue*, as such, but to the *honour of God*. And, indeed, nothing but the singular structure of the Jewish polity, in which the honour of God was so extraordinarily considered, could give any the least colour to the *fiction* of such a right.

5. *Lastly*, whatever degree of credit this principle of *zealotism* might have acquired among the Jews, it was very unlikely, perhaps we may say, impossible, that Jesus should act upon it. When the Disciples, *James* and *John*, on a certain occasion, were instigated by this *zeal* to call for fire from Heaven on the heads of some persons, who had offered an insult to their master, Jesus himself rebuked them in these terms — *Ye know not what spirit ye are of: For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them* [Luke ix. 55.] — *To burn with fire*, is indeed something more than, *to scourge*: but, though the vengeance be not equal, in these two instances, the *spirit* is the same from which it is derived, and by which it is justified: and this *spirit*, we are expressly told, is not that by which Jesus chose to conduct himself. It was to no purpose to alledge the case of a Phinehas,

or even an Elias: these were no precedents for HIM, who *came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*

I conclude then, upon the whole, that Jesus did not perform this act of driving the merchants out of the temple, in the Jewish character of ZEALOT; in what *other* character he might possibly perform it, I shall now inquire.

The ingenious conjecture of Mr. Selden, already considered, was apparently taken up by him to avoid the difficulties which he found in accounting for this act of zeal in our Lord, from his *prophetic* character only. These difficulties, he saw very distinctly, and has explained with much force.

“ Though the Saviour of the world, says he, was undoubtedly both God and King, and, by his absolute dominion, not over the Jews only, but the whole race of mankind, must be supposed to have had a right of doing whatever he saw fit to do; yet since we know, that he constantly submitted himself in all things to the established forms of civil justice, whether of Jewish, or Roman institution; and, as being desirous to exhibit in his own person a most

absolute example of obedience to the course of human authority, was careful always to abstain from every thing, that might be thought a violation of it in any private man; since, besides, we know, that, considering the peculiar envy, to which his life was exposed, he could not possibly have gratified his enemies more, than by putting it in their power to bring a criminal charge against him: it must, on all these accounts, be thought reasonable to suppose, that our Lord would not have ventured on so extraordinary an act, as that of driving the merchants out of the temple, unless it had been such, as, even in the opinion of those who were most prejudiced against him, he might lawfully and regularly perform ^f.”

^f Certè, quamquam Servator humani generis et Deus et Rex erat, adeoque ita universi, nedum Judæorum, dominus, ut quicquid ei placeret illud non licitum fuisse nefas est putare; attamen, cum cæteras res omnes etiam et seipsum receptis atque stabilitis reipublicæ formulis judicariis, qua Ebraicæ cæ essent, qua Romanæ, permissis, atque absolutissimum justitiæ exemplar ab omni vi illicitâ, veluti privatus, abstinere voluerit; quin et tanta ei imminuerit invidia, ut nihil magis incidentium in votis esset, quam ut eujuscunque delicti reum eum peragere potuissent; haud rationi sane ita consonum videtur existimare ejectionem illam factam seu vim illatam ab eo fuisse sine agnitâ, etiam ab ipsis qui tam malignè ei invidebant, lege seu more, quo in id genus homines templi sanctitatem ita polluentes incurere licuerit, atque vi ejicere. L. iv. c. 5. p. 464.

All this, the reader sees, is prudently, piously, and ably said, by this very learned writer; and I readily subscribe to every word of it. We only differ in our conclusion from these premises. Mr. Selden holds, that what Jesus did on this occasion, *cannot* be reconciled to the idea of his PROPHEPIC CHARACTER, as sustained by him in the course of his ministry: I, on the contrary, conceive, that it very well *may*. But then I consider that *character*, as exercised by our Lord, at this time, in *another manner*, and to *other ends*, than the learned writer supposed.

In a word, I see Jesus in the light, not of a ZEALOT, but of a PROPHEPIC only, in this whole transaction. I see him acting, not on precarious principles and rabbinical traditions, but on the sure basis of scripture; and regulating his conduct by the known ideas of his office, such as had at all times been entertained of it, and were even now familiar to the Jews in the times in which he lived.

To make way for what I have further to advance on this subject, it will, then, be necessary to consider, *first*, the PRACTICES AND USAGES of the Jewish prophets, I mean the *manner*, in which that high office was some-

times discharged and exercised by them, even to the very times in question: and, *secondly*, to consider the true scope and meaning of the PROPHECY itself, to which Jesus appeals, and on which he justifies this obnoxious part of his conduct.

1. It is impossible for those, who have read the scriptures of the Old Testament, not to observe, how much they abound in figures and material images. Nay, the prophets are frequently represented as instructing those, to whom they are sent, not in figurative expression only, but in the way of action and by sensible signs. And this mode of information has been shewn by learned men^s to arise from the very nature of language, in its rude and imperfect state; being indeed an apt and necessary expedient to supply the defects of speech, under that circumstance: It has further been made appear, from the history of mankind, that this practice universally prevailed in all barbarous nations, as well as in Judæa; nay, that it every where *continued* to prevail, as an ornamental method of communication, long after the necessity was over,

^s Mr. Smith's Discourses, *Disc. vi. ch. vi.* Bishop Chandler, *Def. of Christianity*, ch. iii. § 1. and, very lately, the Bishop of Gloucester, *Div. Leg. b. iv. § 4.*

which had given birth to it; especially among the inhabitants of the East, to whose natural vivacity it was so well suited. Hence, the Jewish prophets, it is said, but conformed to the established practice of their own times, when they adopted this use of representative action: as, when one Prophet *pushed with horns of iron*, to denote the overthrow of the Syrians^h; and another, *broke a potter's vessel to pieces*, to express the shattered fortune of the Jewsⁱ; with innumerable other instances of the like nature.

This the prophet Hosea calls, *using similitudes by the HAND of the prophets*^k: and the effect of it was, to impress the proposed information on the minds of men with more force (being addressed to their eyes and senses) than could have been done by a mere verbal explication.

This mode of teaching by signs, then, let it be remembered, was familiar to the Jewish nation, and prevailed even in the days of Jesus; as is clear from John the Baptist's *wearing a garment of camel's hair, and eating locusts and wild honey*^l; to signify the mortification

^h 1 Kings xxii. 11.

^k Hosea xii. 10.

ⁱ Jeremiah xix.

^l Matth. iii. 4.

and repentance, which he was commissioned to preach — from Christ's *riding into Jerusalem*^m; to signify the assumption of his regal office — and from his directing his disciples to *shake off the dust of their feet*ⁿ, as a testimony against them, who would not receive his Gospel.

And we find that, sometimes, even a miracle was wrought to furnish a convenient *sign* — As when Simon's *draught of fishes*^o, was made to denote the success he should have in his ministry; according to the interpretation of Christ himself, who said to him, *Henceforth thou shalt catch men* — As, again, when Jesus *curst the barren fig-tree*^p, to signify the unfruitfulness and rejection of the Jewish nation — And, as when he permitted *the unclean spirits to enter into a herd of swine*, which, thereupon, *ran violently down a steep place and perished in the waters*^q: an exertion of his miraculous power, which, among other purposes, might be intended to express, in the way of *representation*, the tyranny of evil spirits, and their attendants, evil habits, over sensual and voluptuous men (of whom *swine*

^m Mark xi. 7.

ⁿ Matth. x. 14.

^o Luke v. 6.

^p Mark xi. 14.

^q Matthew viii. 32.

are the acknowledged emblems), and the consequent *perdition in which they drown them*. Nay, the very parables of our Lord, are but this mode of information, by material signs, once removed.

It may, further, be observed, that the two Christian Sacraments themselves are founded on this principle: and so prevalent was the use of conveying information in this form, that even the Roman Governor, when he condemned Jesus, *took water and washed his hands*^r *before the multitude*, to signify to them, that he was innocent of that horrid crime.

From all this we may certainly conclude, that it was very customary in our Saviour's time for men to express themselves by outward and visible signs: that this mode of expression was especially of ancient and approved use among the Prophets, when they would enforce some high and important topic of instruction: and that, not impossibly therefore, the famous transaction in the temple may be only an information of this nature.

If then we would know, what that *information* was, or, in other words, what was the

^r Matthew xxvii. 24.

peculiar *object* of it, it will be proper, in the next place,

2. To turn to the PROPHECY, to which Jesus appeals, and to consider the true scope and purpose of it.

The prophecies of Isaiah, it is well known, are chiefly taken up in predicting the future glories of Christ's kingdom, of which *the call of the Gentiles* makes a conspicuous and shining part. This great event is foretold in a vast variety of places; and in different forms of expression, one while, plain and direct, at other times, figurative and obscure. The Messiah is spoken of as *bringing forth judgement to the Gentiles*; and more clearly still, as *being given for a light to the Gentiles*^s. In other places, the expression is ænigmatical; as where the Heathen are mentioned as *prisoners*, who shall be set at liberty^t—as *strangers*, who should build up the walls of Jerusalem^u—as *blind people that have eyes, and deaf that have ears*^w—and under a multitude of other images.

^s Isaiah xlii. 1. 6.

^t Ibid. ver. 7.

^u Isaiah lx. 10.

^w Chap. xliii. 8.

Full of these ideas, the Prophet begins the fifty-sixth chapter with the following triumphant exhortation — *Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice, for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed*; the very language, almost, in which the Baptist afterwards announced our Saviour to the Jews: whence it may appear, of *what* salvation the Prophet is here speaking. But to *whom* is this salvation promised? Why, in general, to those *who keep the Sabbath from polluting it*, ver. 2; that is, in the prophetic style, to those who should embrace the Christian faith: for the *Sabbath* being the sign or token of God's covenant with the Jews, hence the prophets transfer this idea to the Christian Covenant; and, by *keeping the Sabbath*, they express the observance of that future covenant, to which mankind should be admitted under the ministry of Jesus.

But, perhaps, the Jews *only* were to be admitted to this new covenant of salvation. The prophet expressly asserts the contrary: for not only the Jews of the captivity (to whom we are to suppose the course of the prophecy to be immediately directed) are concerned in this salvation, but **THE SONS OF THE STRANGER**, that is, the Gentiles (whom the Jews always con-

sidered under the idea of *Strangers*, just as the Greeks did the rest of the world, under that of *Barbarians*) — *Even them* (says the Prophet, speaking in the person of God) *will I bring to my holy mountain*, ver. 7, and make them joyful *in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar*. The language is still *Jewish*, according to the prophetic style, which describes the Christian dispensation under Jewish ideas: but by *holy mountain* is meant the Church of Christ; and by *Sacrifices*, the spiritual services of that new œconomy. And, to make this purpose of his prophecy the clearer, he even departs, in one instance, from his *legal* manner of expression, in saying, *I will make them joyful in my HOUSE OF PRAYER*; which is a spiritual and Christian idea; the Jewish temple being properly a *house of sacrifice*, and not of *prayer*; for which last service there is no express precept in the law. And then follows the prophecy, quoted by Jesus, as explanatory of what he was then doing — *for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people*. The prophet, as solicitous to be understood, repeats and marks out this distinction: I spoke of it, says he, as my house of prayer, *For my house shall* [in those latter days] *be called* [that is, shall be] *a house of*

prayer, and that too, *for all people*; that is, not for the Jews only, but for *all the Gentiles*. And, as if all this were not still clear enough, he adds — *The Lord God, which gathereth the outcasts of Israel, the Jews dispersed in the captivity, saith, Yet I will gather OTHERS to him, besides those that are gathered to him, ver. 8. that is, the Gentiles.*

This famous text, then, is clearly a prediction of the call of the Gentiles into the Church of Christ, a prediction of that great event which should take place under the new-dispensation, when the Jewish enclosure was to be laid open, and all men indifferently, the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, were to be admitted into the Christian covenant.

It is true, our English version of this text, quoted by our Lord, very much obscures, or rather perverts, its sense. It stands thus in the Gospel of St. Mark — *My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer, xi. 17.* Whence it appears, that our translators considered this text, as describing only the *destination* of the Jewish temple, and not as predicting the *genius* of the Christian religion. But the scope of the prophecy, as above explained, and the Greek text itself, clearly

shews, that it ought to have been rendered thus—*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the Gentiles*: ὁ οἶκός μου, οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν.

Thus much being premised, both of the prophetic manner of teaching by signs, and of the true meaning of this prophecy, let us see now what light these considerations afford to our present subject.

Jesus enters into that court of the temple, which was called *the court of the Gentiles*; who had leave to worship the God of Israel there, but were permitted to advance no further. This court, he finds polluted by the sale of beasts, and the traffic of merchants; the Jews, in their sovereign contempt of these poor heathen, not only excluding them from their own place of worship, but debasing them still farther by the allowance of this sordid society to mix with them. What is the conduct of our Lord, on this occasion! Why, agreeably to his prophetic character, he declares himself sent to break through all these exclusive privileges and distinctions; to accomplish that great mystery, which the old prophets had so much and so triumphantly spoken of, as reserved to be revealed by him; and to admit

the Heathen to an equal participation of the blessings, which the Gospel-covenant was to dispense, with the Jewish people.

But, in what manner does he declare this purpose? Why, he *makes a scourge of small cords*, and, by the representative action of driving this prophane company out of the temple, shews that he is come to break down that partition-wall, which separated the Gentile and the Jewish worshippers, to vindicate the despised Heathen from the insults offered to them, and to lay open the means of salvation to all people. *He began to cast out them that sold therein and them that bought, saying to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the Gentiles.* The action, we see, is used as *expressive* of his design; and his *design* is clearly ascertained, by applying to himself the express words of Isaiah. The whole is, then, *a prophetic information, by way of action*, of the genius of Christianity, which was to extend its benefits even to the Gentiles.

I have before acknowledged, that a *secondary* purpose of this transaction might be, to give the Jews to understand, how culpable they had been in permitting even a lawful traffic to be

carried on in any part of their temple. For it was usual with Jesus to accomplish several ends by the same act, and even to lay the greatest apparent stress on that end, which was not first in his intention : of which some examples may hereafter be given. But the primary design of *this* act (and but for the sake of which it would not have been undertaken) I suppose, was, to point out the diffusive nature and influence of his spiritual kingdom.

It may be said, perhaps, that, if such was the intention of Jesus, it had been more properly and significantly expressed by a different act, I mean, by that of *bringing the Heathen into the temple*, rather than of *driving the merchants out of it*. But we are to reflect, that, as the Heathen were already permitted to come into this part of the temple (and it would have given, at this time, too great a shock to the prejudices of the Jews, to have carried them into any other), that act would have conveyed no new information ; it being on all hands agreed that the devout Heathen might worship there. The business was, to shew that their religious privileges were, hereafter, to be the same with those of the Jews ; and that no more contempt was to be countenanced, towards the one, than the other.

All distinctions were to cease ; and this information was, therefore, most fitly conveyed by an act, which expressed the same regard for the court of the Gentiles, as for the court of the Jews : that is, the honour of each is equally asserted, and no prophanation allowed of either.

In further confirmation of the sense, here given to this transaction, it may be observed, that the relation of it is joined, or rather interwoven with that other of his *cursing the barren fig-tree* : which was plainly an emblem, and so is *confessed* to be, of *the rejection of the Jews* ; just as that we have been considering is *presumed* to be, of *the call of the Gentiles* : these two things being closely connected in the order of God's dispensations. Whence St. Paul speaks of the one, as the consequence of the other ; of *the fall of the Jews*, as *the riches of the world* ; and of *the loss of the Jews*, as *the riches of the Gentiles* ^x. Now, if we turn to St. Mark, we there find ^y, that the *fig-tree is cursed*, as Jesus is coming from Bethany to Jerusalem — that, when he came to Jerusalem, he went into the temple, and *drove out the money-changers*, &c. — and that the next

^x Rom. xi. 12.

^y Mark xi. 14.

morning, when he and his disciples were returning the same way, *as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots*^z.

If then it be allowed, that Christ meant, by the *sign* of the blasted *fig-tree* (the story of which is so remarkably incorporated with that other of purging the temple), to express and predict *the rejection of the Jews*, how natural is it to suppose that, in purging the temple, he meant to express and predict, by another *sign*, *the vocation of the Gentiles!* Or, if there be still any doubt in the case, Christ's own parable of the *Vineyard* (which follows close in the history^a) will effectually remove it. For the application of this parable is made by Christ himself to BOTH these subjects^b — *What shall the Lord of the Vineyard do? — He shall come and destroy THOSE husbandmen, and shall give the Vineyard to OTHERS* — That is, He shall REJECT THE JEWS, and ADMIT THE GENTILES: an interpretation, so clear and certain, that the Jews themselves could not avoid seeing it; *for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.*

^z Mark xi. 15—20.

^a Mark xii. Luke xx. Matth. xxi.

^b Luke xx. 16—19.

But I think it appears, from the conduct of the ruling Jews, on occasion of what had passed in the temple, that it was well understood for *what general purpose*, and under *what character*, Jesus had exhibited that extraordinary scene. For they presently come to him, and say, *By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority^c?* That this question relates to *what things* he had done in the temple, when he applied the scourge to the merchants, the context clearly shews; and is indeed beyond all doubt, since we find the same question put to him, and almost in the same words, when he had performed this act before, at the first Passover: *Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing thou doest these things^d?*

Now, if the Jews had seen this transaction in the light of an *act of authority* or of *violence* against the persons of the merchants, it neither agreed with their *character*, nor indeed with their *principles*, to put this question. *The chief priests and elders of the people* are the persons who interrogate Jesus in this manner^e:

^c Matthew xxi. 23.

^d John ii. 18.

^e Matthew xxi. 23.

and would they, who constantly *laid wait for him, that they might accuse him*^f, let slip so fair an opportunity of citing him before the magistrate, as a disturber of the public peace, and a violater of their civil rights and customs? Instead of taking this obvious advantage against him, they at once drop all the malice of their character, and only ask him, in the way of civil and almost friendly expostulation, *By what authority he did these things*. It is certain, they never had so specious a pretence, as this affair administered to them, of bringing a public accusation against him. Yet it seems never once to have entered into their thoughts. Nor can it be said, that they stood in awe of the *people* (as they sometimes did, when they were enough disposed to lay hands on him); for the people, in this case, when so free an attack was made on their privileges, as well as prejudices, would naturally be on their side.

But neither would their *Principles* suffer them to put this question. Jesus had, as they conceived, committed a flagrant act of injustice, in assaulting the persons of men, who were under the protection of the state: and they call

^f Luke xi. 54.

upon him only for *a sign*, since he did these things. Is it credible that men, so attached, as they were, to their own laws and customs, should demand, or accept a *sign*, in such a juncture? Could all Paul's miracles justify him, in their opinion, for *not walking after their customs*? Or, would a *sign* from heaven, of how transcendent a nature soever, have absolved Jesus, in their apprehension, from a crime, so palpably proved upon him? They would certainly have said, as they did say on another occasion, *We have a Law*, which forbids all offences of this sort; and *by that Law*, he ought to be tried and judged.

Thus, I think, the matter stands, if the Jews had regarded Jesus, in the light of a CRIMINAL. On the other hand, if they saw him only in the light of a PROPHET, of one who *assumed* that character, and had now, in the way of his office, employed this act to convey some important information to them, their conduct was very natural in demanding some proof of his being what he pretended to be: and that proof, could be no other than a *sign*, or miracle; which was the proper evidence of his being a person sent from God.

This evidence, indeed, of his prophetic mission had already been given to the Jews, in the *signs*, or miracles, which he had wrought among them. But they wanted more than a general conviction of his being invested with the prophetic character. They were anxious to know by what *authority* he did THESE THINGS; in other words, what *Commission* he had, and how it came to be in his commission, to put the Jews and Gentiles on a level. A prophet he might be; but not a prophet, authorized to declare himself so roundly, as by this expressive act he had done, against the peculiar people of God, and in favour of the despised heathen. Of his commission to publish such a doctrine, as this, it was no ordinary *sign* that would satisfy them. They pressed him, therefore, for some *sign*, purposely and expressly wrought for this end; some *sign*, so extraordinary in itself, and so peculiarly adapted to the nature of the case, as to furnish an immediate and decisive answer to their demand, *Who gave thee THIS authority?*

This question our blessed Lord thought fit to elude (for reasons, which will, in part, appear in the progress of this discourse) at both the times, when it was proposed to him: once, by referring them to the authority of John the

Baptist: and, again, by referring them (but in ænigmatic terms) to his own resurrection. Yet even *the Baptist* would have let them into some part of the secret, which they desired to penetrate; for, knowing the master-prejudice of his countrymen, he addressed them in these remarkable words — *Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our Father: for I say unto you, God is able even of THESE STONES^h to raise up children unto Abrahamⁱ. And then, for the miracle of his own resurrection, that would not only be the fullest proof of his prophetic mission, but would, at the same time, be the completion of what he was now signifying to them, by this prophetic act: for the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, into which all the nations were to be admitted, was to take place from that event. *Destroy*, says he, *this temple*, [meaning, as we are told, *the temple of his body*] *and in three days I will build it up^k*. So that, although Jesus refused to gratify his questioners by working instantly before them the *sign*, which they demanded: yet he refers them to *such* a sign, which would be wrought in due time, and to the very pur-*

^h By *these stones*, the ancient interpreters universally understood *the Gentiles*. See Whitby *in loc*.

ⁱ Matt. iii. 9.

^k St John, ch. ii. 19.

pose of their inquiry; that is, it would be a *sign*, which should, *both*, demonstrate his prophetic commission to declare, by this *significant act*, the favour which God intended to confer on the Gentiles, and should, *also*, realize his declaration, or set before them *the thing signified*. Such is the force of that divine answer—*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up.*

Where, by the way, we may, further, observe, that the *symbolic language*, in which he here predicts his resurrection, not being at all apprehended by the Jews, was afterwards made the foundation of a charge against him, as if he had entertained the criminal *design* of destroying the temple of Jerusalem¹. How much more would his enemies have laid hold on this *symbolic act*, which he performed in the temple, in order to found a charge of sedition against him, if they had not conceived of him as acting in the character of a *prophet* only, and so had clearly comprehended, at least, the *general* scope and meaning of that act!

That it was taken in this light, I mean, of a *prophetic action*, by the very persons on whom

¹ Matthew xxvi. 61.

this seeming outrage was committed, may be reasonably presumed, since they make no resistance to it, nor complain of any injury, done them by it: a conduct, very strange and unlikely, if the parties concerned had received any considerable damage: or if they conceived that any *intended* violence had been offered to them. It is plain, they considered the whole transaction, as a piece of *scenery*, or representation only; under the cover of which, Christ proposed, in the manner of the Eastern sages, and especially of the Jewish prophets, to convey some momentous information to them, and to impress it with much force and energy on their minds.

Nor can it be concluded from the narration of the Evangelists, that any thing more was intended by their master. They relate this adventure, simply as *a matter of fact*; and it could not well be related otherwise, for the *information* was given in the *fact*. They intermix, indeed, no explanation; because they probably saw not, any more than the generality of the by-standers, the *specific* information, it was meant to convey. They only saw, in general, that *some* information was the end and purpose of the act. The ruling Jews, who interrogated Jesus concerning this act, I have no

doubt, saw or suspected, at least, the real drift of it. But, as Jesus could not be brought to explain himself by any direct answer, they were left to their own conclusions about it: and were content, we may suppose, to keep these conclusions to themselves: the rather, as the turn, which our Lord thought fit to give to this act, as if it respected only the honour of God's house, put it out of their power to charge that other meaning, decisively, upon him.

We may further observe, that the *history* of this fact is not to be construed with the utmost rigour. Some of the evangelists express themselves in such terms, as, in the strict sense of them, imply, that Jesus actually drove all the beasts and traffickers out of the temple. But we need only suppose that he applied himself to this action, *as if* his purpose had been actually to drive them all out: and that he continued to employ himself in it in such sort, and for so long a time, as that the persons present might take notice of what he did, and so be able (I do not say immediately, but in due season) to interpret this *sign*, together with Isaiah's *prophecy*, in the manner he intended. I say, *we need only suppose this*: because if no more was done by Jesus, the Evangelists, in their concise and simple way of narration,

would naturally express themselves, as they have done, in their accounts of this fact; and I believe, if we consider the accounts we have of many other informations *by action*, recorded in the old Scriptures, we shall find it necessary to understand them with some such restrictions and qualifications.

If, after all, it be thought, that some *violence* was offered to the merchants, and that some *inconvenience* was suffered by them, in consequence of it; I suppose they deserved this punishment for their pollution of the temple; and I admit that the prophetic character of Jesus authorized him, in the course of his ministry, to inflict it; just as, without doubt, it authorized him to destroy the barren *fig-tree*, when it served his purpose to discharge a part of his office by making use of that *emblem*, though it might be with some loss to the proprietor of it. The case was the same here, when he drove the traffickers from their station. But there is a wide difference between supposing the *violence*, offered to them, to be the *direct and proper purpose* of the act, and the *incidental effect* of it. And the silence of the merchants themselves, under this violence, sufficiently shews, as I observed, that they *felt* this difference.

But the main difficulty, perhaps, is still behind. For, it will be asked, Why was this *mysterious* method used by our Saviour at all, in conveying the supposed momentous information, when he might have expressed his meaning *directly*, in plain words?

1. One reason, I suppose, might be, the inveterate and insurmountable prejudices of the Jewish converts to this part of the Messiah's character. For, though the prophets had given frequent, and sometimes the most clear, descriptions of it: yet, so possessed were they with the notion of their *being*, and of their *continuing* to be, even under the dispensation of their Messiah, a chosen and peculiar people, that they never could hear (no, not the Apostles themselves, till enlightened by the holy Spirit, and by a special revelation for that purpose; they could never hear, I say) without the utmost indignation, *That God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*^m. This indirect information was then in condescension to the weakness of his own disciples and followers.

And of this tenderness to their infirmities we have a remarkable instance in the case of

^m Acts xiv. 27.

the *fig-tree*, so often mentioned; the drift of which was unquestionably to denote the approaching *rejection of the Jews*, for their unfruitfulness under the means of grace, and their rejection of the Messiah. But, the minds of the disciples being too infirm, at this time, to bear the open communication of so mortifying a truth, Jesus purposely diverts them from the main purpose of that miracle (though it was wrought, and the *sign* given, for their future information and recollection) and turns their attention on another and very remote circumstance, *the efficacy of faith* to enable them to work this and greater miracles^a. But it was a *general* rule with our Lord to consult the infirmities of his disciples, and to communicate to them only so much of his purposes and councils, as they could bear; leaving the rest to be collected by them, in due time, from casual hints and obscure passages, when they should afterwards call them to mind, and be in a condition, under the influence of the holy Spirit, to profit by them. Thus, in John xvi. 12. *I have yet many things to say to you, but YE CANNOT BEAR THEM NOW*: and then refers them to the spirit of truth, for further information.

^a Mark xi. 21, 24

Connected with this tenderness for his disciples,

2. A *further* reason, without doubt, was a prudential regard to the general *success* of his ministry, with the rest of the Jews.

For that great event, the call of the Gentiles, was not to take place during the life of Jesus; *who was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*^o; that is, he was *personally* to address himself only to THEM; the conversion of the Heathen being to be effected, after his ascension, by the ministry of his Apostles and followers. Hence, had our Saviour plainly unfolded this secret to the Jews, he would certainly have indisposed them for paying any regard to his mission. And yet, so important a part of his character was not to be wholly concealed. It was therefore signified in this covert way; and (being itself a prophecy of something yet to be deferred) in the mode, and with the usual obscurity, of a prophetic information.

What I have just now observed of the caution with which our Lord revealed his purpose of

• Matthew xv. 24.

calling the Gentiles, explains the reason why St. John's account of the *first* transaction in the temple, differs so much from that which the other Evangelists give of the *second*. Jesus had just entered on his prophetic office, when he used the *sign* of purging the temple, of which St. John speaks: he therefore leaves the Jews to their own interpretation of that sign, saying only, *Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandize*; as though a zeal for that house had been his sole inducement to make use of it: and accordingly the disciples, as I before observed, so understood him. But, when he thought fit to employ this *significative action* a second time, of which the other Evangelists only speak, his ministry was then drawing to a conclusion. So that he is now less scrupulous of giving offence, and does all but directly interpret the sign himself, by referring his hearers to the prophecy of Isaiah, which was the proper key to it — *He taught them, saying, Is it not written, My house shall be called the house of prayer for all the nations P?* Still, there was some obscurity, which he did not think fit altogether to remove: but he had said enough to correct their former hasty con-

clusion. For we are not told by those other Evangelists, as we are by St. John, that the disciples considered what they had seen their Master do, as a pure act of *zeal* for the honour of the temple: the prophecy, without doubt, suggested something to their minds, which led them to apprehend a farther and higher purpose in that transaction.

3. Lastly, we may suppose, that the information was given in this *symbolic way*, that, when men saw the event, they might be the more strongly convinced of its being Christ's intention it should come to pass, by calling to mind the sensible and striking manner, in which it had been predicted by him.

For these, or other reasons, the method here employed by Christ to signify his intended favour to the Gentiles, might be most proper. In the mean time, as I said, this intention was not wholly to be concealed: for then the call of the Gentiles might be deemed an after-thought, and not to have been originally in his commission. Accordingly, it is intimated very frequently in our Lord's discourses to the Jews, and opened more clearly on many occasions to his Apostles; and was, in truth, so much in his view, and so constantly present to him,

that, as we now find, it was one of the *first*, and *last* things he did, to go into the temple, and, by an expressive sign, to declare his gracious purpose towards the Heathen.

We may, further, observe (so intent was the Divine Providence on gradually unveiling *the glory of this mystery* ^q, as St. Paul terms it) that the moment our blessed Lord expired on the cross, *the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom* : a sign, to some purpose, of that great event which Jesus had foretold, and which God himself held forth to the astonished Jews, as the clearest emblem of his purposed favour to the Gentiles; when the Sanctuary itself, as well as the outermost court of their temple, was thus laid open to the access, and vindicated to the use, of all nations.

Finally, in due time, this purpose was clearly and explicitly made known to Peter, in his famous vision: and thus it pleased God to reveal this adorable mystery, “The salvation of the Gentile world,” (which, though not the *immediate*, was the most important end of Christ's commission) by every mode of communication, which he had ever employed in

his intercourse with mankind ; by the *word of prophecy* — by *similitudes*, by the hand of *Jesus* — by an *extraordinary sign from heaven* — and by *Vision*.

After so minute a commentary on this famous act of *Christ's driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple*, may I be permitted to conclude, that it, now, stands clear of those difficulties, which have been usually found in it? — It was no indecent start of zeal in our Lord : it was no violent invasion of the rights of any : it was no act of civil authority, usurped by him : but a *prophetic information*, conveyed in a *prophetic form*, of an event, the most important to mankind, and to the accomplishment of his own office and ministry. It was a calm, rational, inoffensive act ; not unworthy the person of our blessed Lord ; or, rather, full of that wisdom, which adorned his character, and shone out in all his conduct and conversation.



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