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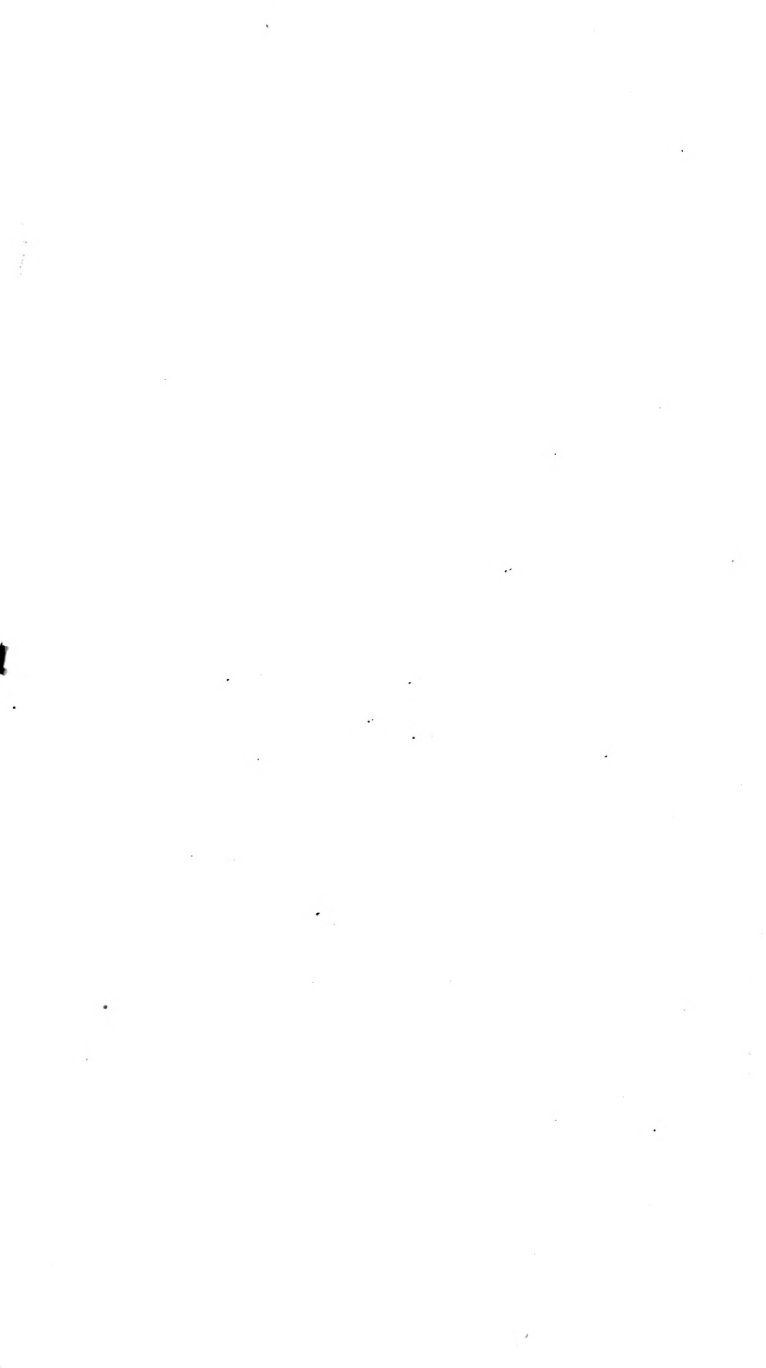
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SERMONS

Robt ON THE *Cross*

Following SUBJECTS,

V I Z.

Our breath and all our ways in the hand of GOD.	The character and blessedness of the poor in spirit.
Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.	The character and blessedness of those that mourn.
Of the nature, pleasures, and advantage of devotion.	The character and blessedness of the meek.
Of the change made in the earth by the Deluge, and its renovation after it.	The character and blessedness of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.
Religion one thing, and the one thing needful.	

By the late Rev. Mr. HENRY GROVE,
of TAUNTON.

Published from the Author's MANUSCRIPT.

V O L. I.

L O N D O N,

Printed and sold by M. FENNER, at the *Turk's*
Head in Gracechurch-Street. M D C C X L I I.



SERMONS.

BEING

TWO ADDITIONAL VOLUMES

OF THE

Posthumous Works

Of the late Reverend

Mr. HENRY GROVE,

OF TAUNTON.

Published from the Author's MANUSCRIPT.

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Printed and sold by M. FENNER, at the *Turk's-Head* in *Gracechurch-Street*.

M D C C X L I I.

T H E
C O N T E N T S of the
F I R S T V O L U M E.

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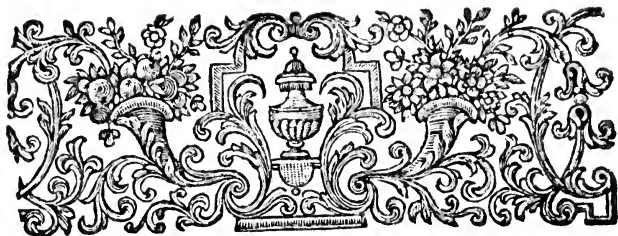
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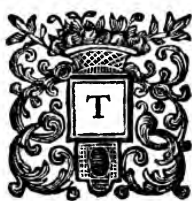
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S E R M O N



T H E

P R E F A C E.



THE favourable reception which the publick has given to the former Volumes of Mr. *Grove's* Sermons, makes it unnecessary to say any more in recommendation of these, than that they are the *genuine* Works of the same excellent Preacher, and 'tis hoped will be found not inferior to those already published. These Volumes have this peculiarly to recommend them, that the Discourses which they contain are, for the most part, on particular *Duties and Virtues* of the christian life, most useful subjects, though not the most common, or easy to be well treated. Did christians, who justly value themselves on having the best religion, consider it more as the great design of their religion, to make them the best of men in every character and relation of life, and by forming

forming them to a divine temper here, to prepare them for a divine happiness in the everlasting state; and that they could no farther, with reason, hope for the blessedness, than as their tempers were thus suited to enjoy it, christianity would, thro' their good conversation, appear to much greater advantage in the eye of the world, and they themselves be rendered much happier by it here, as well as for ever. That these most desirable ends may be greatly promoted by the following Sermons, the *Editor* heartily commends them to the reader's serious perusal, and to the divine blessing.

THO. AMORY.



T H E



S E R M O N I.

Our breath and all our ways in the
hand of G O D.

Preach'd on New-year's day.

D A N I E L V. 23.

*---The God in whose hand thy breath
is, and whose are all thy ways,
hast thou not glorified.*



I T is a very common thing for men to be ambitious of the power and greatness of this world, whether they are fit for them or no; nay generally the *less fit*, the *more fond* of them: but the instances of those who know how to use their power with

VOL. I. B *moderation,*

moderation, and who in the midst of the temptations which greatness brings with it, can preserve a due sense of their own frailty and imperfection, and of the uncertain and changeable nature of human prosperity, are exceeding rare. They whom Providence raises much above the common condition of mankind are generally apt to forget themselves, and despise those below them to that degree, as if they had changed their nature with their condition, and were no longer either fallible, or mutable, or mortal: of this we have two very remarkable examples in *Nebuchadnezzar* king of *Babylon*, and his son, or rather grandson, *Belshazzar*, against both of whom *Daniel* in the name of the most high God denounced severe judgments, and saw his threatenings accomplished. 'Tis to this *last* the words of the text are addressed, as a *reproof* of his insolence and impiety: I shall take them out of the history to which they belong, and consider how they may be made more generally useful.

THERE are two *Observations* which lie plain in the words, and well deserve our most careful attention.

I. *OUR breath and all our ways are in the hand of God.*

II. WHO-

II. WHOEVER is not moved by this consideration to *glorify God*, is without all excuse.

I. *OUR breath and all our ways are in the hand of God.* Before I enter on the explication and proof of this Proposition, I would take notice of the *meanness* of man as to his present *mortal* Being, which is intimated by the manner of expression here used, and set in opposition to the *greatness* of God. What is man, and wherein is he to be accounted of; lord of this lower creation, yet like his mute subjects in this, ^a *that his breath is in his nostrils?* To breathe is to live, but not to be able to live without breathing, is an argument that our life is of the lowest kind, and very frail and precarious. The child in the womb lives tho' it does not breathe; the lungs do not act, and yet the blood circulates, by means of a passage which nature has prepared for it, without its entering into the lungs; which shows that the air is not of such absolute necessity to the life of the body, but that if God had so pleased, the lamp of life might have been maintained without it. And why then is it so ordered, that as soon as we come into the world we must *breathe or die?* It is a sufficient answer to this question, that God has chosen this

B 2

method,

^a *Isai. ii. 22.*

method, because upon the whole it is the *wisest*; and perhaps, one thing which demonstrates the wisdom of it is, that in proportion as there are *more* things necessary to the preservation of life, and *all* those things are made to conspire for this end; the proof of a Providence which watches over the life of man is more strong and convincing, and we have more frequent remembrancers of our dependence upon God, and obligations to him. But be this as it will, it is matter of fact, that the body at present cannot continue to live without *respiration*, from whence, perhaps, it has the name of an *animal* life, the *latin* word *Anima* originally signifying *air* or *breath*. And alas, how poor a thing is such a life as this! and how very different not only from the life of the *soul*, but of the *body* too in its *glorified* state!

No two things can differ more than the life of the *soul* and of the *body* to which it is now united; the soul being a *spirit* has the *spring* of its life and activity in itself, independent of all other Beings excepting the Creator; and having no parts which can be divided one from another, it will naturally retain the same properties of *thinking* and *willing* forever: but the life of the body is as *transient* as that of the soul is *fixed*; the dangers to which it is liable both from within and from without are not to be reckoned
up:

up: of that next to *infinite* number of parts of which it consists, if any *single* part is out of order, the comfort of life is in some measure lessened, and life itself oftentimes in danger; or tho' the body itself should be in perfect health, how many *accidents* are there which may prove fatal to it? a fly or grape-stone getting into the windpipe has been the minister of death. And when then shall we learn to despise the body in comparison of the soul? shall we never be wise, never know how to rate things according to their real value?

LET me add, that this *animal* life is not only inferior to the life of the *soul*, but to the life which the *bodies* of the *just* shall be possessed of after the *resurrection*; that which was ^b *sown an animal body, shall be raised a spiritual body*, without all those frailties and imperfections which cleave to this composition of flesh and blood. And for what reason is man placed in a more imperfect state at first? why is he so much upon a *level* as to his bodily life with other creatures, when it is designed that he should be so much *above* them at last? the meaning of all this is plain; man is now upon his *trial*, and therefore labours under many infirmitities, and is beset with temptations of various kinds: let him be contented with his present lot, act

B 3

well

^b I Cor. xv, 44.

well the part assigned him, have his aims and his affections fixed upon an invisible and heavenly felicity, and with christian fortitude press thro' all the difficulties and discouragements which are thrown in his way ; and then the time of his probation being over, he shall pass out of this imperfect state, enjoy a life that he can call *his own*, and be placed in a condition as *happy* as it shall be *lasting*.

LET us now, after this short view of the *meanness* of man as to his present *mortal* Being, raise our thoughts to the *greatness*, and *supreme dominion* of God, as it is here represented ; he is that great and glorious Being *in whose hand our breath is*, and *whose are all our ways*. The meaning of this expression I shall endeavour to explain under the following particulars.

LIFE is the *gift* of God. The Providence of God *preserves* and *guards* that Life which he hath freely given us. He has an unquestionable *right* to put an end to our lives, and does it whenever he thinks *fit*. In the exercise of all our *active* powers, and much more in the *best* and *noblest* exercise of them, we depend upon God. To him we are to ascribe the *prosperous* issue of all our actions and undertakings. And finally, our condition, and all the circumstances of life through which we pass, are under his *direction* ; who is also
the

the *author* of all that comfort and happiness which our enjoyments afford us.

I. LIFE is the *gift* of God, his *free gift*; since before we had our Being we could do nothing to merit it; and his *gracious gift*, being bestowed on every one as a *favour*, and not *originally* designed as the foundation of *misery*. He cannot believe the *scripture* who doubts of God's being the author of life to all. ^c *The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.* These words of *Elibu* are so much like those in which the creation of the first man is described, that they may very well be thought to have some allusion to them. ^d *And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.* ^e *He created the heavens and stretched them out; he spread forth the earth, and giveth breath to the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.* To add no more, what words can be more full, as well as more express, than those of the Apostle *Paul* in his discourse to the *Athenians*? ^f *He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.* So that the *scripture* teaches us to regard God as the *first* and *universal* cause, the great parent and fountain of life; and *reason* does the same. For as all things which do not

B 4 move

^c Job xxxiii. 4. ^d Gen. ii. 7. ^e Isai. xlii. 5.
^f Acts xvii. 25.

move themselves must have their motion communicated from something else, till we come to a first mover ; so every Being whose life had a beginning, must derive its being and life, either *immediately*, or *remotely*, from a Being who is without all beginning of time, and has life in himself. The life of man is dependent and borrowed. It is but the other day that the oldest person among us began to exist ; and not many thousand years ago that the human race had its original. Or if we should indulge our imaginations, and go back millions of ages, yet we must at length arrive to a *first* man, and to a *first* cause or maker of that man. This *first* man then was brought into being by the *immediate* power of God. And now that life is transmitted in a continued line from father to son, it is the *gift* of God no less, *properly*, than it was at first ; tho' it be not given in so *immediate* a manner. The course of nature, in which things go on with an amazing regularity and constancy from one generation to another, was *established* by God, and he still *superintends* it, and *concurs*, by his agency, to every effect as far as there is occasion ; which, perhaps, in some things, (and particularly in the instance now before us) is much farther than some imagine ; which made the *Psalmist* say, ^ε *Thou hast*

hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. To a living body, which God has framed with the most surprising skill, he has united an intelligent soul, which is evidently the *immediate* offspring of the great Father of spirits. Nothing less than the wisdom and power of almighty God are sufficient to give being to a *rational soul*; the time and manner of whose production our earthly parents know not, and in producing which they can claim no share. In the *reciprocal* actions of the body and soul consists the life of man. And why hath God given man a *nobler* life than that of the beasts? The life of man being of a mixed kind, animal and rational, and the former only in subordination to the latter, was it with no other design than that the greater part of mankind might be the more *miserable*, without ever having the opportunity put into their hands of being happy? then must we say of *reason* that it is a *fatal* gift, an *unhappy* privilege; and that man, the bulk of the species, is of all creatures most miserable. But let us not give way to such a thought; life is a *favour*, it was *intended* as such, and as such may be *improved* by us all to the obtaining of a happiness suitable
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to the dignity and duration of the reasonable part of our nature.

2. THE Providence of God *preserves* and *guards* that life, which his *goodness* has bestowed upon us. ^h *O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. He holdeth our soul in life.* We are taught to pray that our heavenly Father, would ⁱ *give us day by day our daily bread*; that is, all things needful for the present life. There are many things without which life could not be sustained; all these things are supplied by the *hand of God*, by what *other* hand soever, and in what way soever we receive them. The fruitfulness of the earth is owing to a concurrence of causes, all which are dispos'd by God in order to produce this effect. Showers and sunshine, summer and winter, day and night, the temperature of the air, and motion of the winds, with other things which might be nam'd; all these does God ordain and guide, by which means *the earth is full of his riches; he causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; that he may bring forth food out of the earth.* All the tribes of living creatures are provided for by this great householder; *they all wait upon him, and he giveth them their food in due season: that he giveth them they gather; he openeth his hand, and they are*

^h Psal. xxxvi. 6. —lxvi. 9. ⁱ Luke xi. 3.

are filled with good. In these and other such like strains of pious eloquence does the *Psalmist* celebrate the works of God in the 104th *Psalm*. Let us farther consider, that we might have food to eat, and raiment to put on, and yet not be *nourish'd* with our food, nor warm'd with our raiment; the *commonness* of the thing may hinder our attention to it, but to those who have a right notion of the matter it will appear a most convincing proof of divine Providence, that life is maintain'd so long by such means. To separate continually from the food in our bowels the small parts fit for nourishment in infinite number, to convey them thro' the finest pipes into the blood, and thence distribute them to all parts of the body, and lodge them in their proper places for the support and repair of the animal life, evidently requires nothing less than the constant superintendence of the supreme wisdom, by which ^k *all the hairs of our head are numbred*, and can no otherwise be rationally accounted for. And if we farther reflect on the many dangers that surround us, how many things might happen which if they did would be destructive to us; and that it is not owing to our own foresight and care that they do not; must we not be sensible that they are kept off

^k Matth. x. 30.

off by an invisible hand? In that hand is our breath, and it is well for us that it is; for where else would it be lodged with so much safety? My life being in his hand is inviolable, till the hour is come which he has appointed to be the period of it; which leads me to another consideration.

3. THE *Lord* of *heaven* and *earth* has an unquestionable *right* to put an *end* to *our lives*, and does it whenever he thinks fit. ¹ *He taketh away our breath, we die and return to our dust.* His *right* thus to dispose of us is indisputable: indeed had life been made over to us as an *absolute* gift, with a promise that we should enjoy it forever, God in this case would have parted with his own right, and given us a claim to immortality, which we know he will do after the resurrection; or had a term been granted us of a certain number of years, till the number was up we should have been secure in the *faithfulness* of God against his *power*: but neither of these is our case; God reserves the disposal of us intirely in his own hand, insomuch that we are never certain, but that the present day, or hour, or minute may be our last. No man has a right to take another's life even with his consent; but God may without their consent take the lives of all men;

¹ Psal. civ. 29.

men; and yet tho' there is no need of our consent, God expects it, and we should cheerfully give it. " I acknowledge it, O Lord, to be just that thou shouldest do with thy own what thou pleasest! The Lord has given me life, and the Lord takes it away, blessed be the name of the Lord! I shall not pretend to ask, what dost thou? but only entreat thee in the most humble manner that thou wouldst not take me out of this life, till I am prepared for a better." After all, we are to remember, that tho' God acts *sovereignly* in this matter, yet he is far from acting *arbitrarily*; he has always a *reason* for what he does, whether we see that *reason* or no. We may not be judges of his proceedings, and are not in a multitude of cases; but what then? shall we therefore doubt whether they are just and right? " I will not, O Lord! give myself the liberty to hesitate a moment about a thing so plain. I hope whenever thou requirest my soul of me I shall resign it without murmuring, thankful that thou hast indulged me so long a time, and regretting nothing else but that I have made no better use of it." From what has been now observed, that in fixing the bounds of mens lives God does not act *arbitrarily*, we may infer, that there is no such thing as
a fatal

a *fatal period* of human life; or such a *decree* as lengthens, or shortens mens lives without all respect to their free actions; because this would not be agreeable to our notions of the wise Governor of the world, who must be supposed to suit his dealings with us to the difference of our conduct, whether good or bad, wise or foolish. Not that from the *length* or *shortness* of mens lives we can know what are their *real* characters. The *barren tree* may stand till it wither with age, while the tree that *bears fruit* is cut down by an untimely stroke. But still, whoever fears God, and commits himself to him, may be confident that God will do that which is *best*; so that if long life be *best* for him, and the *general* interest will allow of it, he shall enjoy it; I say if it be *best for him*, for it may not; and then God will shorten it in mercy; as on the contrary it may be in *judgment* to *wicked men*, that the days of one are *many*, and of another *few*.

4. IN the *exercise* of our *active* powers, and much more in the *best* and *noblest* exercise of them, we have our dependence upon God. To this sense is that of the Apostle^m Paul to be applied; *He is not far from any of us, for in him we live and move and have our being*. We have many *bodily* powers, of
any

^m Acts xvii. 28.

any of which God could deprive us, leaving us our lives themselves intire. Could he not strike us with a disease, which tho' it did not kill, should put us out of all capacity to help ourselves? How easily could he *wither* any part or limb of the body, as he did ⁿ *Jeroboam's* hand, when he stretched it out against the *Prophet*, so that he was not able to pull it into him again? How easily could he shut up any sense, the effect of which would be that the soul's communication with external objects that way would cease? Our Saviour made *the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak*; now it is of the mercy of God, that he does not give us more frequent instances of the *reverse* of all those miracles; making those to be blind and lame, and deaf, and dumb, who were once able to see and walk, and hear and speak. Besides our *bodily* powers we have those that are *intellectual*; and between these two there is a very remarkable connection. The members and senses of our bodies would be of little use without the *reason* of our minds to employ and guide them; and the *reason* of our minds, tho' it be not the result of the bodily *crasis* or disposition, does yet in great measure depend upon it: from hence it is that a sudden shock of the
brain

brain has been known to disorder the mind and remove the understanding quite of it's hinges; or the fire of a fever, or a violent passion, or a black and melancholy humour has had such an influence upon the imagination, that *reason* has been rendred useles by it. May we not say that there is no faculty of soul or body the regular enjoyment of which is not very precarious? which among other considerations is a very good reason, why *the wise man should not glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength*; since in a moment the *wisdom* of the one may be turned into *foolishness*, and the *strength* of the other into *weakness*.

AND if in the *ordinary* use and exercise of our active powers we depend upon God, then as to the *best* and *noblest* exercise of them much more: here it may truly be said, ° *that without him we can do nothing*; nothing *effectual* to the purposes of salvation; not that God requires of us any thing which we cannot do by that *strength* which he is ready to impart to us in one way or other, for he is not so hard a master as to expect that his servants should do *impossibilities*; but then his concurrence is needful, and shall be afforded us. If it so pleased God he could endow us with a greater degree of strength in our own faculties for
 holy

holy and spiritual actions ; and in case he did so, it would be as much of *grace* that we were able to perform our duty as it is now ; since the gift is the same in itself, the goodness of God is the same in bestowing it, in whatever way it be done. But he seems to have chosen the contrary way of dispensing his *grace* by *little and little*, as we have need ; both because it is more suitable to the present state of trial, and that we might be oftner obliged to call to mind our dependence upon his *grace* and *spirit*, and to have recourse to prayer, and other exercises of religion, in order to obtain it.

5. THE prosperous issue of all our designs and actions must be ascribed to God. ^p *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it : except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.* ^q *A man's heart deviseth his way ; but the Lord directeth his steps.* Whether his undertakings shall succeed or miscarry belongs alone to the *Most High* to determine. The *Psalmist* therefore prays, ^r *Establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.* Our designs themselves, or the methods we are set upon for bringing them to pass, may not be well laid ; or after we have designed and resolv-

^p Psal cxxvii. 1.
xc. 17.

^q Prov. xvi. 9.

^r Psal.

ed well, we may, upon some slight cause or other, alter our design, or change our method of proceeding; or while we go on with it, and make sure of the event, something or other that could not be foreseen may cross our pursuit, and disappoint our expectations; so great is the uncertainty which attends all human affairs; and all future events are wrapt up in such thick darkness, that the only thing we know beforehand, is, that every thing shall be as God pleaseth, and not as man. *Solomon* has long since observed, that among the *vainities which are under the sun*, this is one; [†] *That the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.* Ordinarily there is a *connection* between causes and effects, and they who are best qualified for any business, and apply themselves most closely to it, do oftneft carry their point; this, I say, ordinarily happens, as it is fit it should, that there might be room for human prudence and diligence, and that every one might be encouraged to cultivate and improve any gift or endowment in which he excels others: but the chain is not so firmly linked together, that we can

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† *Eccles. ix. 11.*

ever say, this or that design *cannot fail*, it is *impossible* the event should be otherwise than we count upon, Providence itself *cannot* hinder it: alas! they must have very little *experience*, as well as *religion*, who can talk at this rate. If we should suppose a ship in the same condition as that in which *Paul* sailed to *Rome*, tost up and down by tempests, *neither sun nor stars appearing for many days together*; as well might the pilot of such a vessel pretend, by his extraordinary skill, to guide it safe thro' all dangers of the wild ocean, till it was arrived at the destined haven; as any mortal man (be he never so great a politician, or so prudent a manager) can engage for the success of all his enterprizes, or with certainty of any one of them: for *he knows not what shall be, for who can tell him when it shall be?* alas; *thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

6. OUR condition, and all the circumstances of life thro' which we pass, are of God's chusing; and he alone is the author of all the comfort and happiness which life affords us. Life may be a blessing or a curse, a state of enjoyment or of suffering, as God is pleased to order it; as *God*, I say, orders it, not as *chance* and *fortune*; *for affliction riseth not out of the dust*, nor are we in a

C 2

higher

‡ Prov. xxvii. 1.

‡ Job v. 6.

higher or lower place, just as it falls out by the accidental shuffling of events; but there is one above us who assigns every man his condition, and appointeth him his lot. As God chose their inheritance for the *Israelites*, the whole disposal of the lots being from him, so the earth is given to the children of men, and divided among them by Providence; tho' it be not done exactly in the same manner as the land of *Canaan* was portioned out. It is much, if in the course of a few years we do not meet with a great many changes; and whence do these changes proceed? we may think of this and that cause, but the *first* and *principal* is *God*, who ordains a variety and subordination in the conditions of several men, that their behaviour might be tried one towards another; and brings about changes in the life of the same man, that every man might learn to fear before him. It is remarked concerning the wicked, that ^w *because they have no changes therefore they fear not God*; having no considerable alterations for a long time together, they are ready to conclude, that Providence has nothing to do in human affairs, or, at least, they do not make any reflections upon it. Thus it is when men have an established health and prosperity, and no evil occurrence falls in to humble and mortify them; they forget

get that God is the author of their blessings; the consequence of which is, that with all their health and prosperity they are not the most happy men; for that ^x *a man enjoy the good of all his labour is the gift of God.* Happiness does not necessarily arise out of any set of enjoyments whatsoever, but depends upon the *temper* of our minds, and the *notion* we have of ourselves, and of our condition; as both these depend upon a secret influence of divine Providence. Hast thou a comfortable enjoyment of the good things of life? is thy Being a pleasure to thee? canst thou look round thee with delight, and dost thou feel thyself agreeably affected within? all this comfort and happiness flows from the fountain of all good.

Having thus proved the first Proposition, *That our breath and all our ways are in the hand of God,* I am

II. To shew you that whoever is not moved by this consideration to *glorify the God above him*, is without all excuse. To *glorify God* is piously to acknowledge his sovereign, his wise, his gracious Providence, to reflect with all thankfulness of heart upon the instances of God's watchful care over us in times past, humbly to resign ourselves to his conduct and disposal for all future

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time,

time, and to frame our whole demeanour as becomes those who believe and consider, that *their breath and all their ways are in the hand of God.*

I. To glorify God is piously to acknowledge his sovereign, his wise, and his gracious Providence. It is the glory of God that his *kingdom ruleth over all*, and that he orders and governs all things in the best manner; and as God declares his glory in the works of Providence, so we glorify him by *acknowledging* that there is a Providence, and that all the dispensations of it are wise, and just, and good. It is next to impossible to separate between *Creation* and *Providence*, so as not to believe the latter while we hold the former: but whether this be possible or no, it is not sufficient, if we own that God made the world, unless we also believe, and are not ashamed to confess our belief, that he exercises a continual Providence over the work of his own hands; for otherwise we rob him of all that glory which results from the display of his perfections in upholding this complicated frame of things, preserving its regularity and beauty, and conducting all the affairs of it to the accomplishment of the best ends. Nor is it enough that we are persuaded of a *general* Providence, which maintains the established course and laws of nature (according

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ing to the account of the *Pſalmiſt*, ^y *Forever, O Lord, thy word is ſettled in heaven; thy faithfulneſs is unto all generations: thou haſt eſtabliſhed the earth, and it abideth: they continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy ſervants.*) But we muſt likewiſe be ſenſible of God's *particular Providence*, extending to every individual perſon and event, ſo that there is none ſo inconfiderable as not to have a ſhare in his notice and regard: not only the human race, but the individuals of that race; not only ſome perſons and things of greater importance, but the meaneſt perſon, and the meaneſt affair belonging to that perſon, has its place in the ſcheme of Providence. As *Daniel* here ſays to a great prince, that *his breath was in the hand of God*, and *all his ways* were ſubject to his direction and controul; the ſame might have been ſaid with equal truth of the loweſt of his ſubjects. One man is not *too high* to be dependent upon God; nor any man *too low* to be regarded by him.

2. To *glorify God* is to reflect with all thankfulneſs of heart upon the repeated inſtances of his watchful care over us in times paſt. ^z *Let every thing that has breath praiſe the Lord.* It is he who hath prolonged our breath to this moment; the ſlender thread

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is not yet broken, because it *is in his hand*; he has added one year to another, and his goodness has crowned every year. The *Jewish* year ended in *Autumn*, when they kept a solemn feast by way of thanksgiving to God, who had blest the earth with increase, and given them an opportunity to gather in the fruits of it. My friends, have we not had a plentiful year? I might have asked, when was the time that we wanted what was necessary and convenient for us? hath not God directed our way in this journey of life, and prospered it? or if we have had our crosses and disappointments, was it not needful that we should have them? and is it not our own fault if we have not profited by them? We should endeavour to affect our hearts with a grateful sense of God's goodness to us. What could we have done if God had not been about our path, and discharged the kind office of a guide and guardian to us? To think that we have been carried through so many dangers, and have received so many tokens of God's merciful regard to us, should awaken in us the warmest sentiments of love, and zeal, and gratitude.

3. To *glorify God*, is to place our trust in his Providence, and humbly to resign ourselves to his conduct and disposal for all our future time. And, indeed, if we have a
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due sense of the wisdom and goodness of his Providence, we shall certainly take this course, we shall trust God with our all, and intreat him to do whatsoever shall seem good in his sight. “ All my concerns are in thy
“ hand, and there would I have them ; if
“ thou hadst not charged thyself with the
“ care of them, I should wish for nothing
“ more than that thou wouldest do it ;
“ that thou wouldest take me and all my
“ affairs under thy management and disposal.” We are all of us ready to say so much as this comes to ; but this self-resignation is, I fear, too often in words, more than in deed and in truth. Why else are we uneasy, and out of humour, when God does this or that in the way of his Providence, if it be not as we expected or desired ? this is not to *glorify God* ; but to be able to say from our hearts *the will of the Lord be done* : so I pray and so I should pray from a firm persuasion that *his will* is always *best*. We should not doubt, if we do that which is right in the sight of God, but he will do that which is most for our real interest, and final advantage, tho’ it may not be that which is most agreeable to our thoughts and wishes.

4. To *glorify God*, is to frame our whole demeanour as becometh those who believe, and consider that their *breath is in his hand*,
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and *that his are all their ways* ; that is, our chief care must be to walk so as to please God, we must carefully perform the will of his precepts, as well as humbly submit to his providential will : we must live in obedience to all his commands, and in all our actions seek his glory ; which if we do, we shall lead a holy, and a religious life ; this being the only life by which we can reasonably think to honour God, and become intitled to his favour. What is the relation we stand in to God ? is it not that of his *servants* and *dependants* ? and how shall we act suitably to this relation, unless we study how to discharge the whole of our duty ? more particularly we must remember the obligations we are under to worship God, to pray to him, and to praise him ; no duty is to be omitted, or negligently performed : in a word, we must do every thing that is proper to testify and declare, that we are possess'd with an habitual and awful regard to God, and due sense of our dependence upon him ; and must glorify God by making ^a the light of our good conversation so shine before men, that others may be induced to glorify him.

ALL these things are meant by our *glorifying of God* ; and whoever is not moved thus to glorify him by the consideration
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^a Matth. v. 16.

that *his breath is in the hand of God*, and *that his are all our ways*, is without excuse: his ingratitude, his impiety, his folly, are all such, as nothing which can be pleaded will serve to extenuate. This is plain whether the reason of his not glorifying God be, that he questions his having such an intire dependence upon him, or that he does not regard it.

I. SUPPOSING a man does not *glorify God* because he would be thought to doubt of his having such an intire dependence upon him; no excuse can be offered on his behalf; for what can be said in favour of him who will go about to dispute what is most indisputable? and pretend to doubt of a thing of which he may be certain? of this nature is the present truth, *that man is dependent upon God, and infinitely obliged to him*; the truth of this Proposition is so evident, that no one who is not of a very bad disposition of mind can call it in question: and when it is only out of enmity to the truth that we oppose it, especially a truth of this importance, upon which the whole of religion depends; as our opposition cannot but be highly displeasing to God, so we must expect that he will sooner or later manifest his displeasure. If there are any who acknowledge one part of this Proposition but not the other, who own that *we*
depend

depend upon God, but not that we are *obliged to him*, his only design in all his dealings with us being to shew his *power*, not to exercise his *goodness*; what apprehensions must such men have of the blessed God? Before they can entertain such dishonourable thoughts of God as these, they must give the lie to the natural sense and conviction of their own minds, as well as contradict the common notions and universal belief of mankind.

2. SUPPOSING a man not to deny or dispute his *dependence* upon the power of God, and *obligations* to his goodness; but that he does *not glorify him* for want of attending to these things, this also is inexcusable. Shall we be surrounded by the hand of God, sustained and protected by it, and supplied from it, and seldom or never have a thought of all this? not be able to deny our obligations, and yet slight them, and take no care to fulfil them? this I doubt is generally the case. Ask of any, whether they believe there is a Providence, which disposes of the lives of men, and of all the events with which they are filled up, and they will readily say, *yes*; and yet they do not act as if they did believe it, for then they would *glorify God*. The reason of this is, that they are intent upon nothing else but gratifying their senses, and worldly inclinations;

tions ; they are engrossed by present things, these command their passions and their passions them ; and so they have little or no regard to the God who made, and continually preserves and governs them.

BUT will any one *apologize* for such a conduct ? I should think even those will not who are guilty of it. For what can I say for myself, *if I forget God, and lightly esteem the rock of my salvation ?* such a disregard to the author of our Beings, and of all our mercies, is inexcuseable ; and being inexcuseable itself, cannot excuse all that long train of sinful actions which flows from it.

LET us now briefly *apply* this Doctrine.

I. Is our *breath in the hand of God*, who may take it as soon, and in what manner he pleases, and without giving us any warning of it ? let us then frequently consider, and wisely improve this important truth.

^b *There is no man that has power over the spirit to retain the spirit ; neither has he power in the day of death ; and there is no discharge in that war.* We have no power over our own spirits to retain them when they are summoned away ; let us therefore apply ourselves to the care of our spirits, or souls, before they take their flight from these earthly tenements ; for if once they are on the wing

^b Eccles. viii. 8.

wing there is no calling them back again ; nor can they themselves return if they would never so fain. It therefore behoves the soul to mind it's own interest and concerns while it is in the body, as well as those of its partner, and much more ; since if it does not mind them in the body, it will be too late to begin to think of them when out of it. Have we no power in the day of death to adjourn that awful day ? O let us then, from this day forward, make it the business of every day of our lives to prepare for the last ! Is there no discharge in that war, but must we encounter with this dreadful enemy ? O then let us take care to arm ourselves for the battle, that tho' we must die, we may overcome in dying ! Life consists of a small number of years ; perhaps, the greater part of them is already past ; perhaps, we have not one more before us ; this which we have now begun may be the last, it is very much if it does not prove so to some of us ; and there is not one of us can be sure it shall not prove so to him. Let us therefore live while we may live, I mean, in the best sense of that word ; that is, let us live to God, and for Eternity ; and then as we shall live more comfortably, so we shall have reason to die more contentedly.

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2. ARE all *our ways* under the divine direction? all our actions or designs subject to his over-ruling Providence? then let us *commit* all our ways to him, avoiding the two extremes, of *boasting ourselves of to-morrow*, and of *thoughtfulness* about it. Our right way lies between these two extremes, and is easily hit if we sincerely desire to find it: we should do as travellers, who, if they pursue their journey in the night, and in dangerous ways, take a guide with them: we may have such a guide as is infallible. *No man knoweth what is good for man, the few days that he spendeth as a shadow*; but that which no man knoweth either in respect to himself, or any other man, God knows with regard to us all; and the good he knows he can bestow, and avert all the evil. This then is a short rule for being wise and happy, *to trust in the Lord, and do good*. We may reasonably suppose, that *future* time will in this be like the *past*; that we shall meet with a great many unforeseen events, and that all of them will not be pleasing; but tho' not acceptable upon their own account, yet let them be welcome as they come from God. Every *good* man is in that condition, which every *wise* man should desire to be in; having infinite goodness to concern itself about him, infinite wisdom to chuse

32 *Our breath and all our ways, &c.* VOL. I.
chuse for him, and infinite power to remove every thing which stands in the way of his happiness. Be it therefore our sincere desire, and earnest endeavour, to be good ; to be good, because the thing itself is desirable ; and to be good, in order to be happy : in this case, whether we wake or sleep, whether we are going out or coming in, framing a design or executing it, in health or sickness, in peace or trouble, Providence will watch over us, and having led us safe through the most intricate and dangerous ways, will make our *end to be peace.*



S E R-



S E R M O N II.

Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.

MATT. vi. 34.

Therefore take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

IN these words our blessed Saviour sums up his discourse against a *sollicitous* care about the things of this life; of which he had been shewing his disciples both the *sinfulness* and *folly* in some foregoing verses. He who had freely given them what was more valuable (as *life is more than meat, and the body than raiment*) would not deny them what was less so; and yet necessary to the enjoyment of the former — The God and Father of the universe would not surely for-

34 *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* VOL. I.
get and neglect his own *offspring*; he had not done it with regard to creatures of a much inferior rank, and therefore could not be supposed to overlook them, who were much better, and more considerable than the other. 'Would all their care and anxiety profit them any thing? would it make any addition to their lives, or to their happiness? no more than it would to their stature.—Had their bountiful Creator *cloathed the flowers of the field* with such exquisite beauty, that no art of man could compare with it; and would he leave that *noble creature* unfurnished, for whose sake principally he seems to have adorned and beautified external nature? —In them who had the *knowledge* of the *true God*, and of the *true happiness* of man, it would be most inexcusable of any to be full of uneasy thoughts about the events of this *momentary* life, and how they should procure the enjoyments of it: it was enough for the *Gentiles* to be taken up with the care of these things, who had not those clear notions of the Providence of God, nor that covenant relation to, and interest in him, which they had.—That *their heavenly Father* knew *them* to have need of *these things*, and in what degree, was alone sufficient to satisfy them that they should want nothing really needful and convenient for them.—Their chief business and concern
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ought to be to *seek the kingdom of God* which was now come unto them, and *the righteousness thereof*; to attend to those proposals which the gospel made them of future and eternal blessings, not doubting but that all other things should be superadded to the promise and hope of eternal life, ^a *which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, &c.* Having the prospect of an everlasting life, and of everlasting happiness in that life, you have no reason to be so extremely concerned about the futurities of a life so short and so inconsiderable as this, whatever they should happen to be.

EVERY one knows that the words *to day*, and *to morrow*, are not always taken in their strict sense for such an exact portion of time; but are frequently used to signify the time *present* and *to come*. Instances of this are to be met with in the sacred scriptures, as well as in other authors. ^b *And it shall be when thy son asketh thee to morrow* (for so it is in the *Hebrew*) i. e. *hereafter*, saying, *what is this?* then thou shalt say unto him, *&c.* ^c *Boast not thyself of to morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* But then tho' the expression of *to morrow* is not to be restrained to the day next following, yet it

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^a Rom. vi. 23.
xxvii. 1.

^b Exod. xiii. 14.

^c Prov.

36 *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* VOL. I.
 seems to speak but of a short time in comparison with, and in respect of some longer duration; see particularly *Joshua* xxii. 18. *And it will be, that seeing ye rebel to day against the Lord, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation; i. e. he will very speedily show his displeasure against us for it.* And thus *Isai.* xxii. 13. *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we shall die; i. e. we shall die very soon: and therefore by to morrow in the text, we are to understand future time, with the events of it in this world; to express the short duration, and the small importance of which to man, who is designed for immortality, the term to morrow is employed, which properly denotes no more than the space of a single day.* Our whole life upon earth, set against *eternity*, is to be regarded but as *a day*; nay, has not the proportion of a single day, to all the days of which the longest life is composed.—And perhaps, another ground of this mode of expression may be the *uncertainty*, as well as the *shortness* of human life. Tho' we should live a thousand years twice told, and much more to the extremest point of the present term, we should have reason to say,
^d *Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.* But alas! the time to come is so totally concealed from us, that we are
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^d Gen. xlvii. 9.

not sure we shall out-live *to morrow*; and may safely conclude, that before *to morrow*, not to say the *present day*, is gone, thousands now living in one part or other of the world, will be numbered among the dead: and therefore, on account both of the *shortness* and *uncertainty* of life, there is a peculiar emphasis in this expression of *to morrow*, when it stands for all the time which is to come, or may be to come on this side eternity, together with the various occurrences which are to fill it up.

IN treating these words I shall,

I. LAY down some Propositions which may be of use to give us a clear and regular view of this subject.

II. MORE particularly state or explain the thing here forbidden, which is *taking thought for the morrow*.

III. ENQUIRE into the reasons of this prohibition; and

IV. CONSIDER the course which that *wisdom which is from above* directs us to take in reference to futurity.

I. I AM to lay down some Propositions which may be of use to give us a clear and regular view of this subject. The mind of man is strangely unconfined in its thoughts and operations—is actuated with a desire of

immortality—has a natural propension or curiosity to look into the future events of this life—and by its own prudence and care is capable of making some provision for the more comfortable and useful passing of the time allotted us here below.

I. THE mind of man is strangely unconfined in its thoughts and operations.—The present moment does not bound its views, no, nor the present life, nor any determinate space of time whatsoever. The body is shut up within narrow limits, and the soul enclosed in this little body, and yet so vast are the capacities of this soul, that by virtue of its thoughts it can spread itself abroad over the whole creation, and travel into the regions of infinity: Herein the great preheminance of man above other creatures is clearly discerned; they appear not to have any notion of the distinction of time into *past*, *present*, and *to come*; the *present* sensation takes up all their attention; and tho' they have instincts by which they are prompted to a great many actions, which respect the future preservation and maintenance of themselves and their young; yet it seems to be without their knowing any thing of the matter, being intirely determined by the impressions made upon their senses; they cannot look backward or forward, reflect, and consider, and compare things

things together : but the prospect of the human soul is in a sort *unlimited* ; it has powers and faculties which other creatures want ; and the faculties peculiar to itself are much more excellent than those which it enjoys in common with them ; particularly, this faculty of *looking before it*, or extending its thoughts into futurity ; by this it becomes a *faint image* of the Deity himself : I call it a *faint image*, because the soul has no foresight of things future, properly speaking, or command over them as God has ; who, in respect of this, and all other his perfections, is not only *incomparable*, but *incomprehensible*. 'Tis however an honour to the human nature that it has any characters, how imperfect soever, of the divine excellencies stamped upon it. The mind cannot see what will be, but it can think of what may be, or is likely to be ; it can converse with things future, tho' not in that perfect manner which God does ; and this alone is proof sufficient that God has made man for a nobler end than other creatures, and for a more lasting felicity.

2. THE mind of man is actuated with a desire of immortality. Having an idea or notion of an endless life, it cannot but wish that it's own may be so ; and this desire of immortality, considered with all its circumstances, at the same time that it shows the *excellence* of the soul, which is the subject

of it, plainly enough indicates that the soul is *immortal*. Why else is it so dissatisfied with temporary things? why, as often as it meditates on the end of this life, and but suspects that the same may be the period of its own being, does it recoil at the thought? if the soul has no other state of existence but in the body, and perishes with that, why do it's desires so unavoidably overflow these bounds? why should it be so strongly possess'd of the hope of immortality, if it has no relation to a future state, and no interest in it? It is remarkable, that those who are least thoughtful about *to morrow*, are most concerned for eternity; the more indifferent they grow to this animal bodily life, the more does their desires increase of an immortal life employed in the exercises of knowledge, and virtue, and devotion. Surely then, as the thoughts and desires of the mind reach beyond all the limits of time, so shall its existence too. Therefore is all the time to come of the present life represented by this *diminutive* expression of *to morrow*; because the soul is now but in the beginning of its existence, and in respect of those everlasting ages which are reserved for it, will be but *a day or two old*, when it passes out of this world into another.

3. THE mind has a natural propension or curiosity to look into the future events of
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this life. —The most proper object of its thoughts and concern is, indeed, that eternal life which is to follow after this, and for this every one who is wise will be most solicitous; but, however, it is not possible for the soul to divest itself of all regard to the present life, and the condition of its being, while that continues, nor is it expected that it should. The present life has its value, and that value very considerable too, as subordinate and introductory to a future state; and were our concern about the events of this life chiefly in this view of them, it would be very laudable within a *certain degree*, and very *pardonable* when it did a *little* exceed: for 'tis fit that a man should have some concern upon his spirit about the changes and events of this mortal life, when he considers the influence which these outward things have upon his *spiritual* state, and the influence of that upon his *eternal* one. Nor can it be wondered, if, under an apprehension of the infinite importance of salvation, he should rather go too far in his solicitude about every thing relating to it, tho' never so remotely. But alas! 'tis very seldom that men trouble themselves about future time in this sense. Without attending to the connection which the events of this life may have with their condition hereafter, they spend many thoughts about those events,

events, as they immediately affect the present life; and 'tis natural enough to do so; for the soul of man being a restless, active principle, and not easily ingross'd by the *present* time, must be oftentimes thinking of what is *past*, or *to come*. What is *past* is more generally overlooked, because it is regarded as something which is no longer our's, and but little pertaining to our happiness; and as for the time *to come*, for one reason or other, but few love to meditate much on that part of it which is not to commence till after death. The distance of the eternal world lessens it to their sight, and they are the less fond of imploying their minds about it, for fear they should find themselves obliged to forego those present pleasures, of which they are so enamoured; so that turning their thoughts more than they should from the life to come, they are, as it were, forced to make excursions into future time, forming suppositions, schemes, and purposes, and entertaining hopes and fears about what is to happen to them while they are in this world.—And as these thoughts about future time are *natural*, so 'tis not impossible for them to be *innocent*; for

4. The mind of man, by its prudence and care, is capable of making some provision for the more comfortable and useful passing the time allotted us here below.—

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There is what we may call a *human* as well as a *divine* Providence. And so far is it from being a thing criminal to do all we can to contrive and order things for the best, to the end we may be as happy ourselves, and do as much service to others as our abilities, and the circumstances we are in, will allow of; so far is this from being unlawful, and forbidden, that it is our *undoubted duty*. We are not to understand our *Saviour's* words in the utmost rigour, as if we were to *take no thought at all for to morrow*; for how then should the necessities of life be supplied, and the several acts and professions be managed and carried on? Cares, of one kind or other, are our portion in this life; nor are any of the children of men to be entirely exempted from them.—As to the good things of this life, we can do something, under the direction and blessing of Providence, to procure them; and what we *can* do, the Creator and Governor of the world expects we *should* do; and justly makes it the condition of his favourable concurrence with our designs. The wisdom of God will not admit of his doing that in a *miraculous* way, which may be done by the ordinary powers of nature. Hath he given us reason? it was with a design that we should use it. Are we capable of contributing to our own happiness, and that of others, by those ac-
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 tive powers which he has bestowed upon us? he does then expect that we employ these powers in the best manner we are able. 'Tis true, ^e *It is not in man who walketh to direct his steps*; that is, he is not so well qualified to be his own guide, as not to need a higher direction; he is liable to be mistaken, but he must not therefore shut his eyes, and think to hit his way blindfold. All his own wisdom and care will be of little avail in many cases and emergencies, *unassisted* by the wisdom and care of a higher Being; and after all, he can neither *ascertain* nor *foresee* the event; which is the ground of that observation of the wise man, ^f *That the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.* i. e. things do not always fall out according to the probability of *second* causes; which is no proof that therefore *second* causes are of no value and signification; since 'tis enough to shew the preference of wisdom to folly, of foresight to carelessness, of an active diligence to a slothful indolence; that they ordinarily produce the effects designed by them, and render life much happier than it would else be. The Apostle saith, ^g *He that careth not for his own, and especially*

^e Jer. x. 23.

^f Eccl. ix. 11.

^g 1 Tim. v. 8.

SER. II. *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* 45
especially for those of his own house, has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.
 And tho' our blessed Lord tells his disciples,
^h *Labour not for the meat that perisheth;*
 'tis plain his meaning is only *comparative*,
 that they should not labour for these dying
 enjoyments with that concern and applica-
 tion of mind, as for that *good which endu-
 reth to everlasting life.* The *most thinking*
 man, provided he thinks in a right method,
 is the *most prudent*; and the *most prudent*
 (if other things be answerable) the *most use-
 ful.* And then as to the evils of life, to which
 we are liable in this mortal state, ⁱ *Solomon*
 observes, that *a prudent man foreseeth the
 evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass
 on, and are punished.* To escape without
 suffering any of the infelicities and troubles
 of life, is not to be hoped for; but certain-
 ly the man who looks before him, and pon-
 ders his steps, in the ordinary course of things
 meets the fewest. How many misfortunes
 and disappointments, which oftentimes prove
 the most severe afflictions, might have been
 prevented by timely foresight? And for this
 reason, our divine Master cannot be sup-
 posed to condemn all thought about *the mor-
 row*, the good and the evil things of it; since,
 by a prudent thought and moderate care,
 we may contribute, in some measure, to
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^h John vi. 27. ⁱ Prov. xxii. 3.

our enjoyment of the good things we desire, and avoiding the evils from which we would fly. Nay, to think not only for ourselves and families, but for the publick, not only for the present generation, but for posterity, may be very commendable, on condition our thoughts do not lie as a load upon our minds, and stop short of action; but ingage us to do something or other (if it were only to commend their case to God in prayer) which may be likely to have an advantageous influence, greater or less, more direct or remote, upon the welfare of those about whom we are sollicitous. Such a thoughtfulness as this, argues a *largeness* and *generosity* of mind, and ought, by all means, to be cherished, not discountenanced and suppressed. 'Tis no part of the christian character to be a *lover of one's self*, so as to be wrapt up in a regard to our private interest, not caring how others fare, not even the church of God itself, so all go well with our own dear persons. The words of *H Ezekiab* indeed look this way, when after the prophet *Isaiab* had foretold the calamities which would come upon his kingdom and family, he saith, ^k *Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken : for there shall be peace and truth in my days.* But he does not mean, that he reckoned himself to have

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^k 2 Kings xx. 19.

no concern in what should befall his family, and the church of God, after he was dead and gone; and was as well pleased with the peace he enjoyed, tho' he knew it was to die with him, as if he had been to transmit the same happy condition to those who came after him; no, but he was sensible of the justice of God's proceedings, and with a pious gratitude takes notice of the goodness to him, which was mixed with the severity intended against that sinful nation, of which he was the head and governor, and his own family in particular. The *Prophet* pronounces a *woe* against those ¹ *who were at ease in Zion*, who gave themselves up to their pleasures, without suffering a thought about the publick interest of the true religion, and the professors of it, to interrupt them; not at all *grieved for the affliction of Joseph*, and putting far away the evil day.—But then 'tis very easy, and a thing hardly to be avoided without great care, to be guilty of *excess* in taking thought for ourselves or others. And this brings me

II. To explain, in some particulars, the thing here forbidden by our Saviour, *taking thought for the morrow*. The original words *μη μεριμνητε* might, perhaps, have better been translated *be not solicitous*: it signifies
a care

¹ Amos vi. 1.

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 a care which exceeds due bounds. So we read of *the cares of this life*, i. e. such cares as the things of this life too often give occasion to ; cares that *overcharge the heart* ; too strong and intense for the heart to bear, as well as greater than the object and occasion will warrant. The word used by ^m St. *Luke* in a place parallel to the text, is ⁿ *be not of doubtful mind*, $\mu\eta\ \mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omega\pi\iota\zeta\epsilon\alpha\delta\epsilon$, let not your minds be perpetually hovering and in suspense, fluctuating and unquiet, carried hither and thither as *meteors* are in the air, having no fixedness in themselves. I shall endeavour to describe and represent, in as plain a manner as I can, the state of mind which our blessed Lord in these words would have us guard against. Then are we guilty of this forbidden *thoughtfulness for the morrow*, when the mind is too full of these thoughts—when they are attended with a restless anxiety and sollicitude—when the mind is hindered from paying that regard to Providence, in reference to future events, which it ought—forgets what is past—loses the present—and too much neglects the things of its everlasting peace.

I. THE mind is too full of those thoughts about hereafter. 'Tis always trading, as I may say, in this foreign country, and conversing with the fictitious objects with which the
 the

^m Luke xxi. 34.

ⁿ Luke xii. 29.

the imagination, ever fruitful of strange spectres and apparitions, supplies it; hardly thinking of any thing else, at least the main stream of its thoughts run this way. Now certainly this is *over-doing* the matter, and can answer no end, or no good one. When the soul is perpetually abroad, transporting itself into distant time, and almost intirely taken up with the things which are supposed to happen in it; when these are the thoughts which the man last parts with at lying down, and which meet and salute him first at his waking out of sleep, and scarce leave him all the day, such a multitude of thoughts about futurity can never be justified: a person is never the nearer his aim for them; instead of being useful, and promoting his designs, by their very number they distract him, and perplex and entangle one another. We may think *too much*, as well as *too little* of a thing, to think of it to any good purpose. The mind tires itself with its own thoughts and imaginations, grows dull and stupid, is at a loss what to chuse and resolve, oftentimes prefers the worse to the better, and has little or no spirit left to execute its designs: such is the natural effect of continual thoughtfulness about *to morrow*; instead of reaping any advantage from so many thoughts about these things, the mind is oppress'd by

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the very multitude of them, and hindred from acting so regularly and wisely as it would else do.

2. THEN is our *thoughtfulness for the morrow* unlawful, when it is attended with a perpetual anxiety and sollicitude of mind. A person in this temper, not only *° walketh in a vain show*, deceived by the imaginations of his own brain, but likewise *disquieteth himself in vain*: a thousand things come into his fancy, which he transforms into an army of enemies; his soul is restless and cast down within him, overwhelmed with sadness, or perplexed with doubt, or haunted with continual terror and affrightment. And the ground of all this inward disturbance is an apprehension that things will not be as he would have them: either, in *general*, that something or other, he knows not what, will fall out to make him unhappy; or that he shall be unfortunate in this or that particular respect.— Sometimes he can hardly tell what it is he fears, only he is inclined to fear the worst; like a timorous traveller overtaken by the night, who trembles every step he takes, and imagines dangers where there are none. 'Tis very certain, in the course of human life, we know not how to order our steps because of darkness; there's a thick cloud
between

SER. II. *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* 51
between us and futurity, which no eye can penetrate : and hence some persons take occasion to terrify themselves beyond measure, with the thoughts of what may lie concealed behind this cloud. They cannot say, but the events which they foresee not, may be merciful and joyous ; but they will not make such a supposition. No, happiness will never be their lot ; nothing is laid up in store for them, but misfortunes of some kind or other. But why do they think so ? is there any thing in present circumstances upon which they found their conjecture ? any signs and forerunners of the evil day ? that's no matter, whether they have any reason for it or not, they have determined with themselves, that the *future* will be the most uncomfortable part of their lives — At other times the fancy runs all upon some *particular* event, which, perhaps, they earnestly wish may come to pass, and therefore conclude will not ; or earnestly desire should not, and therefore persuade themselves will happen : their way still is to give the cause against themselves ; not the merits of it, as deserving to be crossed in their desires and pursuits, (they have usually a better opinion of themselves than this comes to) but the decision of it, which they take it for granted will be to their prejudice : and thus they run into an

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extreme quite opposite to that of *boasting of to morrow*. The *boaster* is over-sanguine in his hopes and prospects; from wishing that any thing may be, he immediately proceeds to hope that it will; and from hope to assurance. Hath he designed this or that? he makes sure of the issue; he has laid things so, that he cannot be disappointed; he has hit upon an infallible method, and without thinking how many unforeseen accidents may intervene to baffle him in his projects (if nothing else, yet death, which may break off all his purposes at once) he goes on with the same confidence, as if he had life, and all other things, at his command. Such is the error of those who *boast themselves of to morrow*. While they who are immoderately *thoughtful for to morrow*, instead of indulging and nourishing up their *hopes* more than they should, give a loose to their *fears*; and *fear*, in some tempers especially, is a passion, which if not laid under the restraints of reason and religion, will set no bounds to itself: not being directed and governed as it ought to be; but, on the contrary, left without all controul, into what a state of servitude does it bring the soul? with what anxiety does it rack the breast? so that the man passeth his life in frightful dreams: he either fears where no fear is, or his fear offends in the degree:

SER. II. *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* 53

degree: he is alarmed at every little disorder, as if he was struck with a mortal distemper; at every little loss or disappointment, as if it was the sure presage of some fore calamity. The reason of this is, that he loves this life, and sets his heart upon the enjoyments of it abundantly more than he should; and as the consequence of that, has an immoderate aversion to whatever would deprive him of things which he loves so excessively; and being of an abject and fearful spirit, those things to which he is averse he is thoughtful about; full of care how to prevent, and of fear, lest after all he should not be able to prevent them. This then is the *second* instance, the *thoughtfulness for the morrow*, forbidden by our Saviour, is attended with a perpetual restlessness and anxiety of mind.

3. IT may be farther known by this mark, that it hinders us from paying that regard to divine Providence, in reference to *future* events, which we ought to pay. The mind plunged in thought, and swallowed up of care, in a manner forgets that Providence on which all things depend, and by which they are all directed to the very best issue. We forget that ^P *our heavenly father knoweth what those things are of which we stand in need; and that not a hair*

E 3 of

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of our head can fall to the ground without his permission. We forget that ^q *his kingdom ruleth over all*, and that under his guidance and protection, we are as safe and happy as if we had all knowledge, and all power; or if we do not quite forget this, we act as if we did, and 'tis plain we do not consider it. Our thoughts are busied about other things, and hence it is that we perceive not the hand of God conducting the whole, tho' visible enough to an eye of faith. We do not ^r *commit our way to God, and put our trust in him*, desirous that he should do what he sees to be best, and satisfied that he will. We do not in ^s *every thing, by humble prayer and supplication, make known our requests unto God*, and leave them, and ourselves with him, having no care upon our minds in comparison with the care of pleasing him, and securing his presence and blessing: no; the persons designed by our Saviour are so much taken up with the thought of future events, as to overlook the *duties* they owe to divine Providence, and the *comforts* which a consideration of it would afford them in a way of well-doing. ^t *They are afraid of evil tidings, because their hearts are not fixed, trusting in God.* And does this describe the state of
our

^q Pfal. ciii. 19. ^r Pfal. xxxvii. 5. ^s Phil.
iv. 6. ^t Pfal. cxii. 7.

our minds at any time? intent upon pursuing our aim, and solicitous lest we should not attain it? have we our thoughts taken off from God, and his government and disposal of all persons and things? is this either not at all regarded, or of no efficacy to compose our spirits, and teach us to carry it with a wise indifference with respect to future events? In this case, 'tis manifest that we are guilty of the fault here forbidden by our Saviour.

4. WE may be sure that is a forbidden *thoughtfulness for the morrow*, which makes us neglect the past, and lose the present time, and too much neglect the things of our everlasting peace.

I. WHEN we forget the past. What is past must not be considered after the same manner with things which have never been. Both our own ways, and the ways of God are to be remembered by us; *our sins* and *his mercies*; the former, in order to our humiliation, and godly sorrow and repentance; the latter, in order to excite our thankfulness to God, and to encourage our trust in him for the future. But when the future, with its imaginary occurrences, fills our minds, what room is there for recollecting the real transactions of time past? 'Tis very necessary that we should ask ourselves, at proper times, *what we have done*; and examine the

register, which, if we are wise, we keep of the dealings of God with us, and the more remarkable dispensations of his Providence in the world, and in the church. How else can we make a tolerable progress in the duties of the christian life? he who lives without reflection, cannot live as he ought; he can neither give God the praise of that goodness which has followed him all his days, and seasonably interposed for his help and deliverance; nor make a right use of his errors and miscarriages, for the teaching him more humility and watchfulness for the time to come. This will be the case where a man seldom or never reflects; as it cannot be expected he should accustom himself to serious and close reflection, who is incessantly prying into the hidden recesses of futurity.

2. WE are *over-thoughtful* about the future when we lose the present. It is the common fate of the present time, tho' most *important*, to be most *neglected*. What are the mercies I enjoy at present, my present advantages and opportunities? what is my present duty? what are the events of the present time? finally, what is the best way to make myself as happy as I can be for the present? these things are little heeded by most persons; and by none less, than by those whose heads and hearts are crowded with

with cares and fears about *to morrow*.—How should such have a due sense of God's mercies to them? like persons who are amusing themselves with something at a great distance from them, and take no notice of the objects which are nearest; so do they fare. God *passeth by them* in the tokens of his favour, and *they see him not*; surrounds them with his presence and protection, and they observe him not: the greatest benefits are received with little or no acknowledgement, and the bounties of Providence, and the riches of divine Grace, as it were cast away upon them.—Many advantages and opportunities occur, but not being attended to, pass unimproved. And must not this be a *criminal* thoughtfulness for *the morrow* which hath such an ill effect? all the instructions and helps with which the circumstances of these persons furnish them, are in vain, for want of being regarded. Mercies are to them no mercies, and advantages no advantages: they are present, and at hand, and that is enough to disparage them. Not what they *are*, or have *now*, but what they *shall be*, or have *hereafter*, employs their enquiries; as if what is future could concern us any other way than upon supposition that it will once be present; since any good or evil that will never be present, is nothing to us. And is it not strange then, that while we are so solicitous

licitous about what will, or rather, may be present some time or other hereafter, we should be so utterly regardless of what is actually present? yet such is the usual folly of mankind, that they despise their present advantages and opportunities, and, without vouchsafing them a single thought, or no more than they cannot help, are hurried away, by the activity of their tempers, into remote prospects.—There is also what may be called the *duty of the day*; but who are they that apply themselves to consider and discharge it? alas! too few; and for this reason, among others, that they have not leisure for it, their thoughts being engaged by other things, and such as do not belong to them. What is the duty *now* incumbent upon me? how shall I redeem, and fill up the *present* time? there are duties annexed to the condition and circumstances I am in, and the relations subsisting between me and God, and between me and my fellow-creatures: my principal care ought to be to perform them, and to perform them well; to which end, 'tis highly expedient that I should have my thoughts about me, and be able, in some good measure, to command the motions of my own mind, without being carried to and fro by a giddy imagination. Were people more intent upon a faithful, diligent

ligent discharge of the duties before them, as they would have *less time*, so *less inclination* too for meddling out of their sphere. And on the other hand, when they gratify this foolish humour of enquiring into what is to come, and trouble and disquiet themselves about it, they can be supposed to think but little of their present duty, and have but little heart and disposition for the performance of it; they either totally neglect their duty, or perform it in the most slight and careless manner. Under this head also are they included, whom the apprehension of future evils and inconveniencies *discourage* and *hinder* from the practice of *present* duty. Thus faulty would the *Apostles* have been, if their apprehensions of future want and sufferings had deterred them from preaching the gospel of Christ; and thus guilty also are they, whom imaginary fears of *future* want hinder from being charitable and beneficent, according to their present abilities.—What are the events of the present time? let them be what they will, the man whose heart is devoured with careful thoughts about *to morrow*, is not in a condition to remark and improve them: however worthy of observation, and what good use soever may be made of them, they are treated as trifles, in comparison of those which their
imagi-

imaginations have provided for them hereafter. And is not this most unjustifiable folly? if we do not improve *present* events, are we likely to make a right application of *future*? no, but these too being the matter of our care, and the object of our thoughts, only or chiefly while they are *future*, will be useless when they come to be *present*. This is one characteristic or token of that *thoughtfulness for to morrow* which the text condemns, it renders us less careful to improve present events. Not that we are indifferent what these events are, and no way affected with those which are most unpleasing and grievous: no, we can complain fast enough, and have our feeling, when we seem to have lost our sight, or discerning faculty, in a moral sense: but I need not say that fretfulness and impatience under afflictive events is not the way to profit by them; I shall only observe, that none are more liable to this impatient behaviour under afflictions, than those who are addicted to a vicious curiosity about the future; as their minds, being tired out with ranging up and down in future time, are not so well capable of supporting any trouble or calamity, so they are vexed with any present suffering, because it hinders them from employing their thoughts as they use to do. To which we
may

SE R. II. *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* 61.
may add, that they have not those consolatory arguments present to their minds for a time of trial, which are necessary to enable them to behave with christian patience and calmness under it.—How shall we enjoy the present? how be as happy as our present circumstances will admit? this is a very important question with every wise man. 'Tis prudent advice ^a *to enjoy the good of all our labours*, and to pass our days as agreeably as is consistent with the rules of our holy religion: and I will be bold to say, that our religion is an enemy to no true and reasonable joy; it by no means obliges us to renounce the innocent comforts of life, and to banish all gladness from our hearts; they greatly injure religion who so represent it. But if religion be not inconsistent with our happiness, there is *a thoughtfulness for the morrow*, which is: “ Hereafter I will sit
“ down and enjoy myself, and the good
“ things which God has given me, if events
“ correspond to my expectations, which I
“ fear they will not.” And why not immediately? why should I suffer myself to be robbed of any part of that happiness and contentment which God has put it into my power to enjoy? why part with present peace and satisfaction, when life is so short,
and

^a Eccles. v. 18.

and I shall never know what happiness and self-enjoyment means, if I let the present season always escape me? The conduct of the covetous man, under the dreadful apprehension of want and poverty, is a lively representation of the folly of all those who take this forbidden *thought for the morrow*. The miser, lest he should live to want what is necessary and convenient, condemns himself to a condition as miserable as that of which he is so much afraid; for he could suffer no more than the want of conveniences, if he was too poor to procure them; and he wants these, when he is very well able to procure them. So the man eaten out with any other sort of care and fear about the time to come, is by that means deprived of the comfort and pleasure which the present moment offers him.—This is the *second* instance under the *fourth* head; our *thought about the morrow* is then *excessive*, when it is the occasion of our losing the present time, not observing the mercies, nor improving the opportunities and events, nor discharging the duties, nor enjoying the comfort belonging to it.

3. OUT of an immoderate *thoughtfulness for the morrow*, or the future part of this life, persons neglect the things of their everlasting peace; or at best are much less
mindful

SER. II. *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* 63
mindful of them than they ought to be.—
Future time is so much upon our thoughts,
that *eternity* can hardly find any admision
there. Did men *seek first the kingdom of hea-*
ven, and had they *their treasure and their*
hearts above, so as, comparatively speaking,
to have no other care, they would be un-
der little temptation to run into the error
against which our Saviour cautions us. But,
unhappily, their minds are pre-ingaged, and
prepossessed by a sollicitude for this short life,
and the possible events of it; by which
means they behave with regard to their
everlasting state, as if there was no such
thing. Let men look into futurity if they
will, provided they do not stop short, and
confine their prospects to this present tran-
sitORY life. Here they could not easily be
guilty of excess. The thing is of infinite
importance to them, and the more they
thought of the next life, and the more
care they took to qualify themselves for it,
the better would they live now, more com-
fortably in themselves, and more usefully
to others: whereas *anxiety for the morrow,*
by lessening their concern for eternity, is
an unspeakable prejudice to them, makes
them act contrary to the command of their
Saviour, and to the reason and nature of
things, so as to appear in the guise and
character

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character of the men of this world, more
than like the disciples of Christ.

III. THE next thing in order is to in-
quire into the reasons of this prohibition,
and this I shall do in my next discourse.



S E R-



S E R M O N III.

REASONS against immoderate
thoughtfulness for the morrow.

MATT. vi. 34.

Therefore take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

IN treating these words I

I. LAID down the following Propositions in order to give you a clearer and larger view of the subject.—The mind of man is strangely unconfined in it's thoughts and operations—is actuated with a desire of immortality—has a natural propension or curiosity to look into the future events of this

VOL. I. F life

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life—and, by its prudence and care, is capable of making some provision for the more comfortable and useful passing of the time allotted us here below. Having considered these Propositions, I

II. PROCEEDED to explain, in some particulars, the *fault* here forbidden by our Saviour. Then are we guilty of this forbidden *thoughtfulness for the morrow*, when the mind is too full of these thoughts—when they are attended with a restless anxiety and sollicitude—when the mind is hindered from paying that regard to Providence, in reference to future events, which it ought—forgets what is past—loses the present—and too much neglects the things of its everlasting peace.

IT remains, that in pursuance of the method proposed

III. I INQUIRE into the reasons of this prohibition, and

IV. CONSIDER that course, which the *wisdom from above* directs us to take in reference to futurity: of each of these in their order. Let us now therefore

III. INQUIRE into the reasons of this prohibition. Why would not our blessed Saviour have his followers take any *thought for the morrow*, in the sense before explained?

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ed? he himself immediately subjoins *two* reasons of this in the text, and others may be collected from the verses preceeding, and from the whole current of scripture, as well as from the consideration of the thing itself. I would take leave to observe by the way, that our divine Master, not only in giving this particular precept, but with regard to many other precepts contained in this excellent sermon of his from the mount, (to go no farther) adds one or more considerations to show the *reasonableness* of his laws; that is, the intrinsic good or evil, the amiable and beneficial, or odious and hurtful nature of the things commanded or forbidden by him. And surely then, it can be no way improper in the *ministers* of the gospel, no disservice to our holy religion, no reproach to the author of it, but a mark of honour and respect to both, to enlarge upon these *reasons* which Christ, perhaps, has little more than mentioned; or to offer others, if they are of weight and importance, and likely to set the truth in a clearer light, and to strengthen the conviction of their duty in the minds of our hearers.

LET us then briefly consider the reasons of this prohibition; in doing which I shall take particular notice of those *two* which the text suggests to us; That *the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself;*

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and that *sufficient for every day is the evil thereof.*

I. THIS forbidden *thoughtfulness for the morrow* is a direct affront to God, discovering, if not a total want of faith, yet the great weakness of it. Our Saviour therefore reproaches the persons guilty of this sin with the smallness of their faith; *O ye of little faith!* ver. 30. And certainly their religious belief must be very imperfect, who are overrun with cares about the things of this life, *what they shall eat and drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed; and what shall be on the morrow.* What shall be on the morrow? why, what God pleases; for he governs the world, and, of his wife and good pleasure, either *orders*, or, for the bringing about the designs of his Providence, *permits* every thing which comes to pass in it. But now the language of these anxious thoughts about future events is, does *God know*, and *regard*, and *direct* human affairs? we seem to disbelieve, or not believe so firmly as we should the divine Providence, or not to have very worthy thoughts of it, or not to place our trust and confidence in it; all which things are dishonourable to God. — Without all reasonable doubt, there is a Providence which takes care of man, and this care is proportionably greater than of other things, as man surpasses them in worth and dignity,

SE R. III. *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* 69

dignity, as our Saviour argues in a few verses before the text. Is God our Maker? it then follows that he is our Preserver; Creation and Providence being inseparably linked together; and therefore we may conclude, that if God has made this body, and given us this life, he will provide for supporting both, on condition we do our part. God has made provision for inferior creatures, and will not therefore neglect those who are more excellent. Do we stedfastly believe this, and seriously consider it, when we act after much the same manner as we might be supposed to do, if the world was without an Overseer, and Guardian, and Governor?—Or while we acknowledge the universal Providence of God, can our apprehensions of it be so worthy and honourable as they ought to be, when we make no discovery of such apprehensions; but rather the contrary, in the manner of our being affected with the changes which do, or may befall us in the present life; do we believe the Providence of God to be most wise, powerful, and good? in this case we do not behave as if we did; for if there be an all-wise Providence, then things are and will be managed in the best manner they can be, infinitely better than we poor short-sighted creatures could pretend to manage them, if we were to have the direction: and why then does not this

fatisfy us? the higher notions we have of the wisdom of God, and the lower our notions are of our own wisdom, must we not be less apt to lean to our own, and more inclined to acquiesce with a perfect resignation of soul in that wisdom which is supreme and infinite? If divine Providence be most powerful and good, then, amidst the greatest uncertainty of future events, 'tis most certain that it is not because he is unable or unwilling to bestow the good we desire, or to prevent the evil we fear, that God does not bestow the one, or prevent the other, but because it is not expedient; and consequently, that if it be expedient, he will order things so as we ourselves shall wish. Let us ^a *delight ourselves in the Lord, and he will give us the desires of our hearts*; with this only proviso, that what we desire is really for our good: for he is kind to all, and most of all then to those who love him, and put their trust in him.—But alas! 'tis too plain a sight that we do not ^b *trust in the Lord with all our hearts*, as often as we are devoured with careful thoughts about future events: and what is this but a high offence and indignity to that God who so often commands, invites, and encourages us in his word to trust in him? does he command, and shall not we obey? does

^a Psa. xxxvii. 4.^b Prov. iii. 5.

does he invite, and shall we refuse his invitation? does he encourage us to trust in him, and shall we not be thankful for it as a very great advantage, and readily do what he encourages us to do? But it may be we are afraid we have no interest in God, no title to the care and direction of his Providence; why so? do we live in a course of sin and rebellion against him? if this be the case, 'tis certain we have very little ground of confidence towards God; but as this is our own inexcusable fault, that we are in such a state of enmity against God, and estrangement from him, it can be no excuse for the neglect of other duties, which suppose us to be in a state of friendship with him: on the contrary, the neglect of those duties, which is the consequence of a state of sin, only tends to aggravate the guilt of such a state.

2. THIS immoderate *thoughtfulness for the morrow* is, in a peculiar manner, unbecoming the professors of the gospel, who have the knowledge of the true God, and of the true happiness of man, and the infallible way to it. ^c *After these things, saith our blessed Master, do the Gentiles seek; the Gentiles who do not belong to the church of God, and are, by consequence, destitute of the privileges of those who live within*

the bounds of this sacred inclosure.—God is our Father, our heavenly Father, so he is here called, and under this name and title we are, in this chapter, directed to pray to him. ^d *Our Father, who art in heaven. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.* And cannot children be secure under the tuition of an indulgent Father, that he will not be wanting to them in any thing he can do for them, and apprehends to conduce to their real welfare and happiness? now God is our *Father*, which speaks affection; our *heavenly Father*, which signifies power and dominion. Our *Father* is *almighty*, and *all-sufficient*, *knoweth all things*, and *can do all things*.—The particular Providence of God over good men is set in a clearer light by the gospel, which teaches us, that ^e *the very hairs of our heads are all numbred*; and that ^f *not one of them shall perish*; i. e. not the least of their concerns are overlooked by God, nor will he suffer any, even the least evil (absolutely and finally such) to befall them in the way of their duty. And what then have they to fear?—The gospel has made the clearest discovery of an everlasting world, and of a state of consummate happiness reserved for good men there. The gospel state now,
and

^d Matth. vi. 9, 32.

^e Matth. x. 30.

^f Luke

xxi. 18.

SER. III. *Of thoughtfulness for to morrow.* 73

and the state of glory hereafter, are both called by the common name of the *kingdom of heaven*, to signify that one of them is only an introduction to, and preparation for the other: and when our Saviour tells his disciples, that if [§] *they seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all other things shall be added to them*; he does, in effect, mind them, that all other things were but mere trifles in point of real weight and value, when compared to those spiritual and eternal blessings with which God has blest us, and is ready still further to bless us in Jesus Christ; and therefore, that it cannot be supposed they should be withheld from the true disciples of Christ, by that overflowing bounty and goodness which bestows a kingdom, a glorious, and everlasting kingdom upon them. They therefore disgrace their christian profession who are extremely solicitous about any thing in this life; 'tis not really worth it; the things are not of importance sufficient to justify it, not in themselves considered, and much less when taken together with heavenly and eternal things. Now the scandal which any temper or action brings to their profession, its absolute inconsistency with the special privileges and enjoyments of the gospel, is a very good reason why all christians, who regard

§ Matt. vi. 33.

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gard the honour of their religion, should carefully avoid it, and will be judged and confest to be so by all such.

3. ANOTHER* ground of the prohibition is the utter unprofitableness of this anxious sollicitude about future times and events. Our Saviour therefore asks, ver. 27. *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?* intimating that events are no more subject to our command, or foresight, than it is in our choice to be of what stature we please. All that is above a *prudent* care, all anxiety and inquietude of mind, can have no influence at all, or no good influence upon the train of events. Let us have a thousand thoughts running in our heads, and turn things on every side, to what purpose is all this inward hurry? can it affect the outward course of things, or alter the decrees of Providence, which, after all, determines the issue? or with all our prying can we look into the womb of futurity, and know what will come up in the order of occurrences? There is certainly such a thing as a dependence of events one upon another, and upon the actions of mankind. From such a thing's being done or left undone a certain event follows, and from that another, by a sort of chain, which God has in his hand, and of which he does not ordinarily see fit to interrupt and break the links;

links ; so that if we could certainly foresee the issue of every action, both immediate and remote, we might by that means, give a different turn to things in many instances : but we have no such gift of foresight as this ; the mind of man does not seem capable of having this knowledge inherent in itself, and God does not see fit to communicate it to us in the way of extraordinary revelation. And forasmuch as this is the case, 'tis in vain to strive against the nature of things, and the will of God, since the utmost efforts of our minds will not avail any thing, nor all our care mend the matter.

4. ANOTHER reason of this prohibition may be taken from the mischievous influence of the thing forbidden. I have already shown you, that excessive thought and care about future time hinders the regular discharge of our duty, with regard to the past and present time, and our everlasting state ; it must therefore be sinful in itself, and extremely prejudicial to us, and upon that account is forbidden us. Whatever promotes the performance of our duty, is itself a duty ; whatever is inconsistent with it, or indisposes for it, is a fault. This, I doubt, is not so much considered as it should be. We are not only to view things and actions in themselves, but in their relation to other things

things and actions; so that if this or that thing (as *thoughtfulness* for instance) were supposed to be innocent as to its absolute nature, yet, at the same time, supposing it to have a manifest tendency to disable us for the duties incumbent on us, or to divert us from them, under this relative consideration of it, it would become criminal. There is one remarkably bad effect of anxious enquiry into the events of things, which I barely hinted before; *i. e.* declining to do our duty out of fear of the consequences which may attend it: we suppress the truth, abandon a good cause, or grow cold in it, and put on disguises; we dare not follow conscience fully, and act up to the laws of friendship and religion; stooping to do mean and dishonourable, if not criminal things; and all, because we are suspicious of our suffering some inconveniency for it, not considering, that we should resolve to adhere to the cause of truth and religion, and to keep a good conscience, in defiance of the most discouraging prospects in this world; since the prospect which the man of integrity has on the other side the grave, is always animating, and the more so, the greater hardships he undergoes for his steadfastness in that which is good in the present life.

5. *T H E* *morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.* This is *one* of the *two*

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reasons mentioned by our Saviour in the text, the meaning of which is not very obvious. It may signify, that without any anxiety of ours, let us only be found in the way of our duty, provision will be made for *the morrow* by a higher hand; in allusion, perhaps, to the command which the ^h *Israelites* had in the wilderness, when they gathered *Manna*, *not to leave any of it till the morning*; in which case it bred worms, and stunk; but to trust the Providence of God for the supply of the next day, he having promis'd them that they should not want. Now, tho' the parallel does not run so exactly, that we are not to lay up any thing in store to ourselves against the time to come, yet so far it holds good, that dismissing all distracting cares about futurity, we are to trust Providence with the event, as they did; and since God has given us his word, that ⁱ *he will care for us*, and, as it were, *take thought for the things of to morrow*, it is a very solid reason why we should *be careful for nothing*, in the sense here intended by our Saviour.

OR, by *the morrow taking thought for the things of itself*, may be understood, that future time will have enough to employ our thoughts and passions when it comes, and such things too, as we cannot before-hand imagine; and therefore we should have patience

^h Exod. xvii. 19, 20. ⁱ 1 Pet. v. 7.

tience to stay till we see what events are ordained for us, as they come forward in their proper course, taking this for our comfort in the mean while, that tho' *the morrow* shall have its cares, yet they shall be such as every prudent and good man shall be well able to stand under.

6. THE last ground of the prohibition I shall mention, is, *that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Why therefore should I increase the load of the *present* day, by taking this solicitous thought about *the morrow*? this, at best, is antedating evils and calamities, and crowding more into the present time, than falls to its share. We may thank ourselves for the bitterness of our cup, if we put ingredients into it which God never designed should be there. God would not have us make ourselves miserable, and add to the unavoidable troubles of life; these he will enable us to bear, and so direct, as that they shall turn to our great advantage in the end; but he has made us no such promise in respect of those cares and troubles which are of our own creating; and therefore we should take heed how we multiply our sufferings without necessity, and, as it were, hunt up and down in future time for imaginary misfortunes; for such they are as to the present time, tho' they should come to pass, since they can have no reality till they

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they exist ; and, perhaps, may be imaginary in this sense also, that they may never have any being. With a great deal of reason are the cares of this world compared by our Saviour to ^k *thorns*, not only upon the account there mentioned, that *they spring up, and choke the word of God that it becometh unfruitful*, but likewise because of the torture to which they put the mind. A thorn in the flesh gives exquisite pain, which would be increas'd beyond all sufferance if the whole body was stuck with them ; and should we suppose a person in such a condition, he would be too fit an emblem of one whose soul is full of cares and fears about the present life, which prick him to the heart, and create him unspeakable trouble and anguish.

HAVING therefore had this prohibition of our Saviour explained, of *taking no thought for the morrow*, and seen some of the reasons of it, which must convince every considering person, that our duty and interest, our pleasing God, and being pleased with ourselves, are equally concerned herein ; let us, my friends, resolve to be more upon our guard against this common error, and to act, in this matter, as becometh reasonable creatures, and the disciples of Jesus Christ ; which brings me to the last thing in order,

IV. To

^k Matt. xiii. 22.

IV. To consider the course which the *wisdom that is from above* directs us to take in reference to futurity.—Here let me mention the following particulars, which I do not pretend to be all that may be named, but these I hope may be sufficient (thro' the grace of God exciting us to, and blessing our serious consideration) to confirm us in our good resolutions, and, in some measure, to answer the end designed by them.

I. LET us begin with governing well our passions and affections, not permitting them to settle upon improper objects, or to run to an immoderate height. 'Tis no wonder when our affections are misplaced, and violent, when we make a great many things essential to our quiet, and necessary parts of our happiness, which are not so; 'tis no wonder if with our passions our cares too increase, and we are troubled beyond measure, and without end, about those things which are the objects of our dotage; whether we shall have them or not, whether they shall be continued to us or not. One immoderate passion is fruitful of others; immoderate love to the enjoyments of this life, of whatever kind they be, produce immoderate fear, lest we should miss of them, and lose them; and immoderate cares when warding against the dreaded calamity: whereas,

whereas, did our hearts beat with that temperate and equal motion they ought towards those things, as things we may be without, and which in some cases, may be even hurtful to us, we should be much better able to leave it to Providence to determine as it saw best, not solicitous before the event, nor discontented, or inconsolable afterwards.

2. LET us not neglect the gift of *natural* prudence which is in us; and farther, let us labour to improve and add to it by *acquired*. There are principles of prudence with which all persons of common capacity are furnished, and as it is not impossible for them to cultivate them, and, by frequent reflection and consideration, to become possessors of a habit of prudence in some good degree; as this is not impossible to be done, so 'tis every man's duty and interest to do it, that he may discharge his whole duty in a more steady, useful manner, and pass life with more credit, and with more tranquillity. The exercise of prudence will have these *two* or *three* good effects, among others; that we shall not trouble ourselves about *unlikely* things, where things are *likely* to happen; shall use the best methods for the accomplishment of our desires; and finally, that we shall know better how to make allowance for the *uncertainty* of all

human events; which *three* rules well observed, would cut off the occasion of a great part of that uneasiness under which the generality of mankind perpetually labour.—If we are prudent, we shall not trouble ourselves about things very *unlikely* to happen; we shall not form projects and designs which have little or no foundation; we shall not meddle with things too high for us; shall not, on the one hand, flatter, or, on the other, fright ourselves with the probability of events which are not at all probable. And how much would the good observation of this single rule reduce our cares?—And farther, if prudent, where there is likelihood of an event, we shall order the means conducting to the accomplishment of our desire in the most regular manner, and pursue them with constancy and calmness; not expecting to reap if we do not sow, nor to succeed when we do not take the right method for it. Our disappointments will sit the lighter upon us, not being the effect of our own inexcusable negligence and folly.—And, which shews yet more plainly the great usefulness of this virtue of prudence, it will teach us to make allowance for the *uncertainty* of all human things. Is the event uncertain? the prudent man considers it, and therefore does not depend upon it. The uncertain nature of these

these things makes him value them the less, and not indulge to excess, either his hopes or his fears about them. Such would be the use of prudence, joined with piety, which is a sufficient reason and encouragement for exercising, and by exercise, improving it; I say *prudence* joined with *piety*, for

3. We should by humble prayer, and a religious trust, commit ourselves, and all our concernments into the hand of God. We should entreat him to take the charge of us, and ours, and of all for whom we are concerned; and so to order and dispose of them as shall seem meet to his infinite wisdom, joined with equal goodness. This is the Apostle *Paul's* direction, ¹ *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your request known unto God: μηδεν μεριμνατε, be thoughtful for nothing.* So that prayer is an universal remedy, a remedy against all solicitous cares. Be *solicitously* careful for nothing, or *thoughtful* for nothing. Being intent upon doing my duty, I should leave events with God, to whom they belong. Did we piously look to God in prayer, ^m *casting all our care upon him* (the same word again, as for *taking thought*, in the text) *who careth for us*; did we labour to possess our minds with a distincter apprehension,

G 2

hension,

¹ Phil. iv. 6.^m 1 Pet. v. 7.

hension, and firmer belief of his good Providence, and to bring our wills into a more intire conformity and resignation to all its determinations, we should, at once, ease ourselves of the chief temptations to *thoughtfulness for the morrow* : being able to say from the heart, *thy will be done*, we should, without impatience or disturbance, wait the unfolding of events, knowing that whatever they happened to be, they would be according to the will of God. To add no more,

4. LET us, in some sense, reduce our *many* cares into *one* ; even this, the care of *pleasing God*, and finishing the work which he has given us to do. This should give law to every other care ; and then all our other cares, being subordinated to this, would not so much disquiet us. “ How shall I
 “ acquit myself well in the sight of God,
 “ so as to obtain his approbation and favour?
 “ how shall I glorify God ? how redeem
 “ my time, and fill it up to the best ad-
 “ vantage ? how improve the talents com-
 “ mitted to my trust in such a manner, that
 “ I may have confidence before my Lord
 “ at his coming ? how adorn the gospel,
 “ keep myself unspotted from the world,
 “ and, in all the relations and circumstances
 “ of life, maintain a character for piety, cha-
 “ rity, disinterestedness, and integrity ? how
 “ may I pass life most usefully, and meet
 “ death

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“ death most safely and comfortably? ”

Having my mind and heart possess'd with such thoughts as these, every other thought inconsistent with these would be excluded; and, for the joy that was set before me, I should so regard temporal things, as to be easy and satisfied, whatever, thro' the wise appointment of God, either did, or might happen to me in this world.





S E R M O N IV.

Of the nature, pleasures, and advantage of devotion.

P S A L M lxxiii. 28.

*It is good for me to draw near to
God.*

THE people of *Israel*, to whom the *Psalmist* belong'd, was surrounded with idolaters; this is the reason that we meet with so many passages which have relation to idolatry in the book of *Psalms*. The words of the text are of this kind; for, in opposition to the worshippers of idols, or false gods, of whom he saith in the former verse, *Lo, they that are far from thee shall perish; thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee*; the *Psalmist* declares for himself, *It is good for me to draw near to God.* “ It is my resolution to continue steadfast in the worship and service of the true
“ God,

“ God, the Maker of the universe, who
 “ hath chosen us to be his peculiar people ;
 “ and, in doing this, I reckon I most ef-
 “ fectually consult my own happiness,
 “ both present and future, temporal and e-
 “ ternal.” Taking the words out of this
 view, as opposing the worship of the true
 God to that of idols, I shall treat of them
 in a greater latitude, as recommending the
 practice of piety and devotion ; accordingly
 I shall make the following observation the
 subject of *two* Discourses, *That a devout ap-
 proach to God in the duties and exercises of
 divine worship is attended with great pleasure
 and advantage to the soul.*—This Proposition
 I shall endeavour to prove and illustrate by
 applying myself,

I. TO the consideration of devotion in
 general, and

II. OF the particular duties of it, *viz.*
 prayer, singing the praises of God, reading
 and hearing his word, meditation, and the
 holy communion.

I. I SHALL endeavour to illustrate and
 prove the truth of this Proposition, *That a
 devout approach to God in the duties and ex-
 ercises of divine worship, is attended with great
 pleasure and advantage to the soul,* by confi-

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dering it in relation to devotion in general :
and here I would

I. EXPLAIN the nature of this devout approach to God in the duties of his worship, and

II. REPRESENT the pleasure and advantage of it.

I. I SHALL explain the nature of this devout approach to God in the duties of his worship ; and this I shall do in some particulars. It implies the knowledge of God ; a supreme love and affection to him ; that we place ourselves as in his immediate presence ; and finally, that we perform every duty we engage in with a view of thereby glorifying God, of obtaining his favour, and of walking worthy of him at all other times.

I. THE knowledge of God is presupposed to our devoutly approaching him in the duties of his worship. For how can we converse with, how can we honour, how can we delight in a Being whom we do not know, or of whom we have very confused, or, which is worse, false apprehensions ? if we have none, or very little knowledge of God, we shall worship God just as we do some other actions, because we are accustomed to it, or in compliance with the fashion, or to serve some secular purpose ; we shall

shall perform the external part of the action, without having any notion of the nature and end of it; much after the same manner as the greater part of the *Jews*, in *Isaiab's* time, attended upon the worship of God; of whom the Prophet saith with some indignation, ^a *He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb as if he cut off a dogs neck: he that offereth an oblation as if he offered swine's blood.* We shall spoil the duties we perform, so as not barely to lose the benefit of them, but to turn them into an abomination, especially if our notions of God are false and dishonourable, as we may suppose those of that people were, whom the *Prophet* reproves. They thought, ^b *that God was altogether such a one as themselves*, to be pleased with pomp, and show, and complement; or like the gods of the *heathen*, who regarded not the hearts or manners of their worshippers. And indeed, one of these is generally followed with the other, that is, ignorance with error, not knowing God, with having false conceptions of him; for 'tis seldom that persons rest in a bare negative. The belief of a God, a Being above them, to whose power they are subject, is natural to the minds of men; and believing such a Being to exist, they are willing to have some notion of him, and usually

^a *Isai. lxvi. 3.*^b *Psal. l. 21.*

usually take up with that which will give them least disturbance in the pursuit of their lusts. Would we draw near to God, we must have other and better ideas of him. It greatly concerns us therefore to acquaint ourselves with God, seriously and impartially to use our ^c *reason* in forming worthy conceptions of the divine excellencies, as discovered in the works and word of God; and to season our minds with such thoughts and apprehensions, as will at once represent God to us in the most awful, and in the most amiable and ingaging light; not only as possessed of ^d *almighty power*, and *supreme dominion*, but of *infinite wisdom*, and *equal goodness*; not only as *abundant in mercy*, of *tender compassions*, and *ready to forgive*, but as *righteous in all his ways*, and *holy in all his works*; as a ^e *spirit who will be served in spirit and in truth*, with *clean hands* and a *pure heart*; as a ^f *lover of mankind*, but a greater lover of *holiness*; and, indeed, as expressing his love to his reasonable creatures, by making them capable of holiness, and obliging them to aspire after it. God must appear clothed in all his perfections, so as to deserve our adoration, our obedience, our delight, and hope, and imitation.

2. To

^c Acts xvii. 24—8. ^d Dan. iv. 34, 5. Psal. cxlv. 6—9, 17. cxlvii. 3—6. ^e John iv. 24. Psal. xxiv. 4. ^f Tit. iii. 4. Isai. xxvii. 11.

2. To the knowledge must be added the love of God, a sincere, a prevailing, a supreme affection to him, in order to our approaching him in a devout and proper manner. Love is devotion, the essence, and the perfection of it; and in proportion, as our love is greater, our devotion is more intense. *Habitual* devotion is nothing else but the habit of divine love; as *actual* devotion consists in the actual and explicit exercises of this heavenly affection. The union and conversation of intelligent Beings, such as God, and the soul of man are, must be suitable to the nature of those Beings; that is, of a moral and spiritual kind, or by knowledge and love, by the understanding, and the heart. The soul which loves God is near to him, and he nearest who loves him most. The soul is attracted towards the supreme Being by its affections, these are the immediate springs of its motion, these lend it force and wings to fly. If we have not the love of God in our hearts, we shall think ourselves happy enough at a distance from him; yea, then happiest, when we are most undisturbed by the thought of any such Being, and least awed by his presence and authority; and shall lie grovelling on the earth unable to get out of the sphere of its attraction: but if love to God be the ruling affection of our souls, the consequence

sequence will be that we shall never think ourselves nigh enough to him; love will bring us near to him, and be perpetually prompting us to draw still nearer. The meaning of which is, the greater our love, the more ardent will our wishes and endeavours be that it were still greater; we shall feed and cherish the heavenly flame, heedfully avoid whatsoever tends to damp it, and approve and delight in ourselves, in the same proportion as we delight in God.

3. WHEN we *draw near to God*, we place ourselves as in his immediate presence. — There is no such thing as a *local* distance between God and any of his creatures, for he is every where present: this is an essential perfection of his nature; and we might as well exclude him from *all* places as from *any* one. But what if God surrounds me with his presence, as long as I do not think of him as present with me, it is in that respect the same as if he was absent from me. The presence of God has its proper effects upon us by the mediation of our thoughts; then we stand in awe of him, and pay him the homage due to his supreme excellencies; then our souls ascend to him, and long for him, and pour out their desires before him; when we consider him as near to us, as penetrating our very Beings, sustaining all their powers and faculties, and

acquainted with every motion of our minds: for the presence of God is not like that of an unintelligent Being, which is so present with other things as not to know it; or like the presence of a blind and deaf man in company, which is no more to him than if he was in a remote solitude. *Omnipresence* in God is connected with *Omniscience*; being every where, he beholds what is done every where; being present with the mind, he knows perfectly well all its thoughts, and desires, and affections. This the devout soul apprehends and believes, and accordingly summons itself to appear before God; stands as a sacrifice at his altar, or as a person to be tried before his tribunal, or falls prostrate as a suppliant before his throne. Nor is this all; the devout worshipper not only considers himself as in the presence of God, but as in his *special* and *more immediate* presence. Something more is implied in the presence of God with good men, than with those of another character; and with good men themselves, when they draw near to him in the solemnities of his worship, than at other times. Indeed there is no time or place in which God is not [§] *nigh to them who fear him; he compasseth their path, and their lying down, and is acquainted with all their ways*: he is present with them as their
guide,

§ Psal. cxlv. 18, 19. cxxxix. 3.

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guide, and guardian, and helper; and as there is no time when they may not raise their minds to God in occasional ejaculations, they do by such thoughts make him present with them in a still more proper sense: but then do they *draw near to God* in a peculiar and distinguishing sense, when they approach him in the duties of worship, retreat from all the cares, and amusements, and pleasures of life, banish every other object from their minds, and give themselves intirely to the exercises of devotion; they now regard these as their proper, their only business, and remember that God alone is he with whom they have now to do. We have no such visible symbol or token of the divine presence in our assemblies, or other places, and times of devotion, as there was ordinarily in the *Jewish* sanctuary; but however, God is *peculiarly*, tho' not *visibly* present wheresoever he is devoutly worshipped; and his devout worshippers do consider themselves as in this *peculiar* and *immediate* presence, in which they are to behave after another manner than they are allowed to do in their common conversation, confining the attention of their minds intirely to the work they are about: and herein does chiefly consist the special nature of this presence, that we are employed in the immediate service of God,
and

and wait upon him with a suitable solemnity and seriousness of spirit.

4. *Drawing near to God*, or devoutly approaching him in the duties of his worship, implies, that we perform every duty with an aim to glorify God thereby; a desire to obtain his favour and acceptance; and a resolution to walk worthy of God; and the freedom of intercourse we have with him at other times.

I. THE devout worshipper performs every duty with an aim thereby to glorify God: this is what the Lord spake by *Moses*, saying, ^h *I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.* The primary intention of all worship is doing something to the honour of God; such are our obligations to this best of Beings, that ⁱ *whether we eat or drink, or whatever else we do, we are commanded to do all to his glory*; and as this holds in all our actions, so more especially in those of a religious nature. In the common actions of life we glorify God by a general dedication of ourselves, and all we do, to his glory; never doing any thing inconsistent with the glory of God; and as we have opportunity and ability for it, acting in a way more directly suitable to our character of reasonable creatures and christians: but our religious
actions

^h Levit. x. 3.

ⁱ I Cor. x. 31.

actions are, in their own nature, more immediately referred to God, and we are so to refer them, considering God both as their immediate *object* and *end*; and by all we do, designing to magnify his name, to express our submissive regard to his authority, and wishing he may be honoured and served more worthily by us, and by all intelligent Beings in all parts of the creation.

2. THEN do we *draw near to God*, when we perform every duty with a desire to obtain his favour; ^k *his favour in which there is life, and his loving kindness which is better than life.* We do not only say, but think so; and this is our principal inducement with regard to ourselves in coming before God, that which enlivens our devotions, and makes us prefer the hours of religious converse with our Maker before all other, that we hope for his acceptance in what we do. “ May I but please God, and find favour
 “ in his sight, and I am satisfied. *Lord, lift*
 “ *up the light of thy countenance upon me!*
 “ I desire no greater, no other reward for
 “ serving God, but God himself. Here is
 “ the sum, the terminating point of my
 “ wishes, that I may so worship God, as to
 “ have his approbation and love. The thing
 “ I am solicitous for is not to please men,
 “ but God: ^l *this one thing have I desired*
 “ *of*

^k Pfal. xxx. 5.

^l Pfal. xxvii. 4.

“ of the Lord, and that will I seek after ;
 “ and I shall esteem myself a thousand times
 “ happier than those whom they call the
 “ darlings of fortune, the favourites of the
 “ most powerful princes, those who pur-
 “ sue honours, and riches, and pleasures of
 “ the world with the greatest ardour and
 “ success, if I may but have my desire in
 “ this one thing crowned with enjoy-
 “ ment.”

3. WE *draw nigh to God* in any duty, when we perform that duty with a resolution to walk worthy of God, and the freedom of intercourse we have with him, at other times. 'Tis a very great honour this, that God will be approached by us ; and by approaching him in religious duties, we lay ourselves under the strictest obligations to frame our whole lives by the principles of religion and virtue ; for only by so doing shall we act suitably to our privileges and our obligations. And is this what we sincerely and firmly purpose in discharging the duties of devotion, to ingage ourselves here- by to the more active, the more faithful, and the more constant performance of all the duties incumbent upon us in the course of our lives ? do we *draw near to God* in acts of devotion, to the intent we may be able to keep near to him in our general conversation ? and do we resolve that we will ?

that we will endeavour to live over every duty, if the expression may be allowed ; and hope and fear, rejoice and grieve, converse and act, and manage all the affairs of life, as those whose ^m *fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?* then may we be truly said to *draw near to God*. So should we *draw near to God* in the duties of every *Sabbath*, for this is the day of our solemn assemblies ; and when we partake of the *Lord's-Supper*, there is an additional reason for our care, lest while we appear one to the other to *draw near to God*, our hearts be far from him ; and instead of making our condition better, we make it worse than it was before. Have we the knowledge of this mystery of God in Christ ? *i. e.* of the revelation which God has made of himself in the gospel, and of the method he has taken for the restoring mankind to his image and favour, to holiness and happiness ? do we understand the nature and design of divine worship in general, and of the several parts of it, particularly of the holy institution, the *Lord's-Supper* ? do we know and consider the intent of it to be a solemn and affecting remembrance of Christ, especially as dying for us, in order to engage us to imitate him, to obey him, and to put our trust in him ? do we feel our hearts
burn

burn within us with the power of divine love ; love to God, and love to our Saviour, while we are celebrating the love of both in these sacred memorials of it? do we set ourselves as in the *immediate presence* of God, and at the *Table* of our Lord ; and by a lively faith represent to ourselves an unseen Redeemer seated on the throne of his glory, and encircled with hosts of angels? is it our sincere aim to give honour to God, and to the Lamb, by eating bread and drinking wine in obedience to the command, and out of a grateful regard to the memory of our once dying, but now ever-living Lord? is it our earnest desire that the love of God, and of Jesus, may be shed abroad in our hearts, that we may have some good assurance of our being ⁿ *accepted in the beloved* ; the thought of which gives us more satisfaction than any other prospect or enjoyment can do? and do we renew our resolutions of behaving at all times as the disciples of Christ, and those who ^o *through him have access by one Spirit to the Father*? not to dishonour our christian profession by an irregular and earthly conversation, but to adorn it by the practice of every virtue, and to give the world an example what manner of persons they are who are really acquainted with Christ, with the virtues of his life, the spi-

H 2

rit

ⁿ Ephes. i. 6.

^o Ephes. ii. 18.

rit and genius of his religion, and the quickening influences of his love? and suitable to our resolutions, when our hearts are enlarged by acts of devotion, are our endeavours and our conduct afterwards? we have then no reason to doubt of our *drawing near to God*; such signs, and evidences, and effects of it can never deceive us.—Having thus represented the nature of this devout approach to God in the duties of his worship, the next thing I have to do, is

II. To show the pleasure and advantage of it. This may be easily apprehended, if we consider the Being to whom we draw near; the ^P promise of God, that *if we draw nigh to him he will draw nigh to us*, and bless us; that devotion is one of the best exercises of the noblest powers of our natures; and finally, that these powers are hereby gradually raised to their perfection, and so prepared for the delightful performance of their proper functions, as occasion offers.

I. LET us consider the Being to whom we *draw near* in the exercises of devotion. We *draw near to God*; a name which includes in it every thing that is great and excellent, and moreover expresses his peculiar relation to us.

I. WE *draw near to God*, the most excellent of all Beings; the most excellent, because

because he is the *first*, and, consequently, independent of all others; and if he depends not upon any other for his Being, his Perfection, or Blessedness, then he must have a fulness of all this in himself. His glory, being originally and entirely from himself, and every perfection belonging to him, must be infinite; for what could limit him? This infinitely great and glorious Being do we worship, to him we *draw near*, with him we converse, and must there not be something highly exalting and animating in a free intercourse with such a Being? such is the greatness of the object, and its transcendent beauty and excellence must give no little pleasure to a mind capable of discerning it, and rightly disposed to receive the pleasure which such an object is fitted to communicate. Man is a social Being, he naturally loves society, and flies solitude; perfect solitude is frightful to him. God, who best knew his own creature, said ^a *It is not good for man to be alone.* And for the same reason that society is necessary to happiness, and many advantages result from it, the noblest society to those who are fitted for it, must afford the noblest delight, and the greatest and most numerous advantages. And what other Being is there whom we can compare with God, or even liken to him? pro-

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vided

^a Genes. ii. 18.

vided therefore there be any possibility of communication between this sovereign Being and the soul of man, the soul having an original capacity for this communication, and by the renovation of the faculties being prepared and qualified for it, must have a satisfaction in it far transcending any of the delights of sense : and forasmuch as the soul is intelligent, what should hinder its communication with the Deity, as an object tho' infinitely above it, yet, in other respects, wonderfully suited to it ? I say, what should hinder this, when the faculties of the soul are in their right order ? in the same proportion as the soul gradually recovers its primitive rectitude, must it not receive an increasing pleasure from the intercourse ? especially when we consider

2. THAT there is the relation of *Creator* and *creature* between God and the soul of man ; nay, not merely of *Creator* and *creature*, but of *parent* and *offspring*. And are we not warranted to conclude, that he who is the original of intelligent Beings is their center too ? that the fountain of their existence is also the fountain of their blessedness ? and does not every thing naturally tend to its center, and rest there ? such a tendency is there in the soul of man towards God. Its actual direction may be to created good, being turned aside by erroneous notions

tions in the mind, or by the violent inclinations of the animal and fleshly part; but still there is an internal weight, by which, if all impediments were removed, the soul would be immediately and incessantly carried towards God as its chief good; and under all the impediments that can be supposed, and when the soul seems to have no inclination but to other objects, this *natural gravitation* towards the center of its Being will cause a perpetual restlessness within, and prevent its being ever truly happy, till it returns to God from whom it wandered: and no sooner has it done this, and is entered into a devotional acquaintance with God, which it endeavours to maintain by the regular performance of the duties of divine worship, but it has a satisfaction and pleasure which assure it of its being now got into the right way.

2. THERE must be great pleasure and advantage in a devout approach to God, because he has promised, that *he will draw nigh to them, who draw nigh to him.* This is the express language of scripture; and we can never think that the thing here promised is a matter of trifling importance; or that God has promised any thing which he will not perform. There is something in the very idea of *God's being near to us*, which fills the mind with joy and confi-

dence ; for what less can be implied herein, than, in general, that the Almighty has taken us into a state of friendship with himself, and that he will bless us with the effects and testimonies of that friendship? and our biggest wishes surely cannot extend farther than this. The favour of an Almighty, Omnipresent Being is no small privilege. He who is Almighty is ^r *able to do for us above all that we can ask or think* ; and his being *near* to us may satisfy us, that whatever he is able to do, in order to make us happy, he will do, in that degree and measure which is suitable to the circumstances of a state of trial now ; and perfectly, or so as to answer our highest expectations at last. Particularly these *four* things, among others, are included in *God's drawing nigh to us, Protection, Illumination, Assistance, and Consolation.*

I. THE first thing suggested by God's *drawing nigh to us* is *Protection* ; that he will take us under the *shadow of his wings*, and guard us from all danger. Near to God we cannot but be safe ; no evil can come nigh to him to whom the Lord is nigh ; for all power belongeth unto God. He can divert evil when it is just impending, and turn another way the tempest which threatens to break upon our heads. What would we desire more than to be encompass'd

^r Ephes. iii. 20.

pass'd round with the divine presence? with the *gracious* presence of God I mean; for as to his *essential* presence, it surrounds all alike. He can never be over-powered for he is Almighty; never be over-reached, for he is All-wise; never taken at unawares, for *he that keepeth Israel does never slumber or sleep.* *His eyes are ever open upon the righteous,* and his Providence continually watchful for them; so that if he suffers any thing to befall them which has the appearance of an evil (as sickness, or losses, or disappointments) it is with a design of bringing some greater good out of it.

2. ANOTHER thing intended by *God's drawing nigh to us,* is *Illumination.* God will enlighten our path in the common conduct of life, giving us that wisdom which is profitable to direct. We are invited, *if we lack wisdom to ask it of him,* and we shall not ask it in vain; he will make us wise to know the things that belong to our present, as well as future peace; make plain our way before us, and so guide us in judging, that we shall not be fatally deceived. This lower sort of *Illumination* will be greatly valued by every one who considers in what an intricate labyrinth we are engaged in our passage thro' this life, how apt to be deceived

† Psal. cxxi. 4.
i. 5.

‡ Psal. xxxiv. 15.

“ James

ceived with the appearances of things, and how prone to wander out of our way : in such circumstances, no one who has a right notion of his own case would refuse a guide ; and having such a guide as God is, one who knows every step of the way, and can give us light in the darkest seasons, who is there that will not think himself very happy ? but there is a diviner *Wisdom* and a higher *Illumination* than this ; I mean that which respects our everlasting salvation. We need no other proof than what may be drawn from *reason*, of the possibility of this ; or that God can irradiate the mind with heavenly knowledge and wisdom. The *Scriptures* are an inexhaustible treasure of sacred truth ; nor must we imagine that God will communicate to us the knowledge of any truth which is not contained therein : this is not the meaning of this *inward Illumination* ; but his shining in upon the devout soul, so as to enable it more clearly to discern those truths, and to know them for its good. The *object* is already provided in the Word of God, and the *Spirit* of God can so influence the faculty, that the *object* shall appear in a stronger and fuller light : and on condition the soul ^w *follows on to know the Lord*, earnestly desirous of farther acquaintance with God in the discoveries which
he

he hath made of himself to mankind, and while it ^x *searches the scriptures with all diligence*, humbly looking up to him for *illuminating grace*, there can be no reason to doubt that God will prosper the endeavours of such an inquiring soul, and cause a day-star to arise in the heart, the rays of which shall be extremely reviving. Can the Father of light be nigh to us in a way of favour, that immense Sun from whom all intellectual light is derived, and the soul continue in a state of darkness? it cannot be. It shall have all that *Illumination* which is necessary for it, and what it has shall be unspeakably refreshing.

3. GOD'S *drawing nigh to us* denotes *Assistance*. He will ^y *strengthen us with all might in the inner man*. Not only diffuse *light* over the mind, but infuse *life* and *vigour* into it; by which the devout christian shall be enabled to fulfil every duty, and to support every burden. Can it be that when the soul by pious breathings *draws nigh to God*, and God in return shows the pleasure he takes in such a soul by *drawing nigh to it*; can it be thought that he does not secretly recruit the strength, fortify the resolution, and aid the endeavours of a poor creature so intirely devoted to him? there can be no doubt of it. But then you are
to

^x Acts xvii. 11.

Ephes. iii. 16

to observe that this *inward strength* is imparted in a *moral* way, that is, by the mediation of the understanding, and in the use of all proper means, particularly approaching to God constantly and devoutly in the duties of divine worship, and walking holily and circumspectly afterwards. In this case, ^z *he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.* And where is the christian, how weak soever in himself, who cannot ^a *do all things thro' Christ that strengthens him?* that strengthens him by his *Word* which has a quickening, animating power in it, and by his *Spirit*? what is said of *Charity*, may, in a somewhat different sense, be said of such a person, *that he beareth all things, and endureth all things.*

4. GOD'S *drawing nigh* to the soul is attended with *Consolation*. He can make the soul ^b *to abound in hope thro' the power of the Holy Ghost*; and *fill it with joy and peace in believing*: and he encourages us to expect no less, when he promises us *to draw nigh to us*. There is a *Consolation* which accompanies every particular mentioned before, of divine *Protection*, *Illumination*, and *Assistance*; but 'tis not unlikely that the christian has more joy than *naturally* and *necessarily*

^z *Isai. xl. 29.*^a *Philip. iv. 13.*^b *Rom. xv.*

farily springs from these sources, a joy, which tho' it is founded in reason, and accompanied with light and reflection, does immediately derive its original from an *influx* of God into the mind, which is not to be denied for no other reason than because it cannot be explained; for who can distinctly explain the manner in which the soul operates upon the body, and much more of the operation of the supreme Being upon the soul? nothing more difficult than to conceive *how* this is done, nothing more easy than to comprehend, that it *must be*. That God has a power to influence the mind, and if to influence it in a way of *Illumination*, of *Consolation* too; *one* is no more impossible, or inconceivable than the *other*: but then it must be remarked, that divine *Consolations* are not blind obscure *Sensations* of soul, and may be thereby distinguished from those agreeable *Emotions*, which are the pure effects of mechanism, or the liveliness of corporeal nature. He that *rejoices in the Lord* can give a reason why he rejoices, his joy is never without a reasonable foundation; what he knows of God, and of himself, will fully justify it, tho' it is not the intire or only cause of it. — This then is the *second* consideration, showing the pleasure and advantage of devout converse with God, *viz.* his promise to *draw*
nigh

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nigh to us ; in which, among other things,
are comprehended *Protection, Illumination,*
Assistance, and *Consolation.*

3. *Devotion* is one of the best exercises of the noblest powers of our nature. The two noblest faculties belonging to our nature are the *Understanding* and the *Will* ; and both these have the divinest employment found them by devotion.

I. THE *Understanding* is the leading faculty, and that without which the other faculties would be of little use. 'Tis the *Understanding* which directs their exercise, and provides objects for them : and as to its own objects, the *Understanding* has a vast variety lying before it, among which there is one that excels all the rest, and that is the *ever-blessed God*, who lighted up this intellectual lamp within us. By contemplation the *Understanding* converses with this most glorious Being ; and can there be a nobler or more excellent act of the human soul than contemplation, when thus directed ? this act is the most perfect in its kind, tho' it be capable of being carried to greater perfection as to its degree, and will be so in a future state, when the soul shall have a more immediate sight of the supreme beauty, and a more elevated, tho' not a comprehensive knowledge of the divine perfections. At present we are not so well situated for
divine

divine Contemplation, but however, under all the disadvantages of the present state, the view which the mind has of God in *drawing nigh to him*, in whatever duty it be, yields it very great pleasure and satisfaction. You are to take notice, that I am here only speaking of the employment of the *Understanding* in every part of devotion; as to the particular duty of *Meditation*, I shall consider it afterwards. Whatever the duty be in which we *draw nigh to God*, the *Understanding* is our guide; we can do nothing without it; that must supply thoughts suitable to the occasion. Thinking in general is a wonderful operation of the mind; 'tis surprising to reflect on the communication which the soul has by this means with things invisible, as well as visible, the most distant as well as present objects: and tho' the thoughts are too often vain and fruitless, yet 'tis our own fault that they are so; nor can it be said that the thoughts as employed in devotion are of this kind. The thoughts, at proper times, may usefully converse about other things, but however useful such thoughts may be in their season, it cannot be said that they are of that use, and much less of that dignity and value, as those of the mind when devoutly approaching its Maker. The soul at such times is conscious that it acts more worthy of itself, that these are the
operations

operations for which it was chiefly made, and by which it is most ennobled: and if so, if in devotional thoughts there is a greater dignity and suitableness to the original design for which our understandings were given us, then there must be greater pleasure.

2. THE faculty next in order is the *Will*, which cannot be more worthily employed than it is in devotion. By the *Understanding* the soul has only a sight of the divine Object, by the *Will* it adheres to it; this is what the scripture means by *seeking God with the whole heart*. The *Heart* is the same as the *Will*, and where devotion is sincere is never wanting. The soul of the devout christian does not lie stupid and motionless, but springs forward to the glorious Object, chuses God as its portion, cleaves to him, and acquiesces in him. The *Will* is that band which on our part unites us to God. The chief active force of the soul lies in this faculty, and is never exerted to so excellent purpose as in devotion; when the soul with its whole strength presses towards God, and with its whole weight centers itself in him: it firmly resolves to be his, gives itself to him, and would willingly be intirely taken up by him. — Now these being the faculties exercised in devotion, and devotion being the very best exercise of these faculties, 'tis impossible

^c Psal. cxix. 2.

possible that true devotion should not be in its own nature, and in its common influence, a delightful thing, All natural action is pleasant, and as the pleasure must be suitable to the faculty where that is more excellent, so must the pleasure be ; and then consequently most excellent, where the faculties are the highest of all, and are employed in the most perfect operations.

4. BY devotion the powers of the soul are gradually raised to their perfection, and so prepared for the delightful performance of their proper functions, as occasion offers. Any faculty is naturally strengthened by proper exercise ; nor is this less true of the faculties of the soul than of those of the body. A life of sloth and inactivity enervates the body, renders it sluggish and indolent, and by degrees so indisposes it for all action, that the least labour is a burden. Like to this is the unhappy effect which want of education and instruction has upon the mind. When a person has been bred in ignorance, tho' he has really the same faculties as other men, yet in *appearance* he has not ; they are feeble and unfurnished, and of little more use to him as to the rank he bears in the creation, than if they did not belong to his nature. He that has a barely civil education, and such instruction and knowledge as relates to present things, and the more

commodious passing the present life, is far advanced above the person I have now mentioned; but 'tis *devotion* only, which adds the finishing hand, and perfects the faculties in the highest sense of all. The perfection of the faculties is in order to happiness; the chief happiness of man is that which consists in the enjoyment of God, the capacity for this enjoyment is therefore the perfection which I here intend; and as to this capacity, 'tis certain that nothing enlarges it so much as *devotion*. The *Understanding* is hereby more adapted to improvements in divine knowledge, and the *Will* feels an increasing force and vigour; the consequence of which is, that the man becomes better fitted, not only for the enjoyments of the heavenly state, when he shall be made perfect in knowledge and holiness, but for the stated ordinary duties of the christian life in this world; he goes from strength to strength; the ways of wisdom are more pleasant to him, his difficulties lessen, temptations are more easily overcome, the high-places are made plain, and the rough even, and he advances with greater speed in the way of his duty, and is able to ^d *run the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of his faith*.—These are some of the considerations which demonstrate

^d Hebr. xii. 1, 2.

strate the pleasure and advantage of *devotion* in general.

AND from the whole what are we to conclude, but that the *most devout* are the *most happy*; that in the same proportion as men *draw nearer to God*, they draw nearer to that which we are all pursuing, I mean contentment, satisfaction, and tranquility of soul? Would we be happy? the surest and shortest, I might have said the only way to this, is to be devout; to labour after a temper of mind which will qualify us for the duties of religion, and enable us to delight in them. And how is such a temper acquired? by constancy in the performance of holy duties, which, as the seasons for them come round, we should not omit upon any pretence whatsoever; and a holy regularity at other times, ordering our conversation aright, with christian prudence and care, not taking liberties unallowed by our religion, and for which we shall pay dear afterwards; practising every virtue as we have opportunity for it, and baulking no fair occasion of doing good to ourselves or others. A conduct like this will naturally beget a humble confidence towards God, and a greater disposition for the duties of piety, the consequence of both which will be, a greater delight in the performance of them; for when the mind is kept pure and free from all corrupt and in-

ordinate passions, and the conscience calm and undisturbed, the mind will have less to retard it in its ascent to God, and all those pious and heavenly affections will grow up in it which are the very life and spirit of devotion.

II. I am next to illustrate this truth of the pleasure and advantage of devotion, by a distinct consideration of the several particular duties in which the soul *draws nigh to God*; and this I shall do in a following discourse.





S E R M O N V.

Of the pleasures, and advantage
of devotion.

P S A L M lxxiii. 28.

*It is good for me to draw near to
God.*

ON these words I have made the following observation, *That a devout approach to God in the exercises of divine worship is attended with pleasure and advantage to the soul.* This Proposition I undertook to prove and illustrate by applying myself

I. To the consideration of *devotion* in general; and I have represented its nature, pleasure, and advantages.

II. To the consideration of the particular duties of it, *viz.* prayer, singing the praises of God, reading and hearing his word, meditation, and the holy communion. This

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part of my design I am now to execute,
and let us begin

I. WITH *Prayer*, herein it is good to draw nigh to God. The advantage of this duty is great upon many accounts, and exceeding obvious to any who will consider it. I shall only consider it as admirably adapted to exercise and improve those several virtues on which the credit of religion, and the pleasure and happiness of the religious do most visibly depend; such as divine love, gratitude, trust in the Providence of God under all the trials and vicissitudes of the present life, contentment, hope in the mercy of God for whatever relates to our spiritual and everlasting welfare, heavenly-mindedness, or fervent aspirations of soul after that ^a *fulness of joy which is in the presence of God, and those rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand forever more*; and finally, charity. *Divine Love* deservedly appears in the head of this sacred band; love to the Author of our Being, the center of all perfection, and fountain of all good, than which surely nothing can be more reasonable or more delightful; and tho' this flame is kindled from above, yet what more apparent than that it is done by prayer, as the chief instrumental means? that devotion
which

^a Psal. xvi. 11,

which should mingle in all our prayers, consists mightily in the exercise of this sublime affection; and in order to have our sacrifice consumed by this fire of the altar, we do in our converses with God set ourselves to contemplate his loveliness and his love, his unbounded goodness, and its numberless effects. The breath of prayer fans the holy fire, we are naturally led to love that God by whom we are allowed this freedom of access, and in whose presence we find such sweet contentment and rest; and as in other cases, so here the friendship between the Creator and the creature is increased with the increase of their acquaintance. “ O
 “ Love, thou offspring of heaven! why is
 “ my heart such a stranger to thee? why
 “ does it experience no more of thy quick-
 “ ning influences, thy inexpressible delight?
 “ have I not too much reason to think it is
 “ because I am not more frequent and earn-
 “ est in my prayers? did I strive more with
 “ this dull and cold heart of mine to raise and
 “ warm it, in my addresses to the supreme
 “ Being, I should soon perceive the good
 “ effects of this method, I should love God
 “ with more fervour, and serve him with
 “ more diligence.” That disposition of soul which we call gratitude, so near akin to love that it may properly enough be made a branch of it, a virtue of a most heavenly

nature as well as extraction, is greatly promoted by the same means; for tho' the duty of prayer has its name from the *petitioning* part, yet ought it to consist of *thanksgiving too*, and is very imperfect where *thanksgiving* has not ordinarily a pretty large share, in the heart at least, if not in the outward form of words. *Thanksgiving* looks back to mercies past, which it registers in the memory, and engraves in the heart; while *Prayer*, strictly so called, looks forward to mercies yet to come. Which account of *thanksgiving*, or *gratitude*, shews it to be a virtue of eminent dignity, and indispensably necessary to our pleasing God in our applications to him for mercy; since it can never be supposed he will continue to shower down his favours, when they are as rain falling on a rock, on which it makes little or no impression, or as treasure thrown into a deep gulph, where it is swallowed up and lost. The expressions of a thankful heart appear from hence to be as necessary as they are ornamental to our prayers: and *thanksgiving* increases that thankfulness from which it proceeds, the habit of *gratitude* is improved by frequent acts, and, consequently, by a devout and constant practice of prayer, in which we are so plainly invited, and so strongly obliged to acts of praise. And whereas it may be thought possible for men
to

to be *thankful* to God for his mercies, who never *pray* to him for them, this is evidently a very great mistake. Blessings not received in the way of prayer, would be look'd upon as coming in the *natural* course of things, without the particular *design* or *direction* of God; or we should not be able to avoid suspecting our title to them, and suspecting this, we should not so clearly discern the kindness and love of God in them, which is the very thing that must infuse life and spirit into our thanksgivings. — *Trust in the Providence of God* under all the trials and vicissitudes of the present life, is likewise very much indebted to the constant returns of prayer performed in the best manner we are able. This trust in God (which is nothing else than the general belief of his Providence applied and reduced into practice) is to be exercis'd in a distinct and explicit manner, when we present ourselves before the throne of divine Grace, and by being thus continually exercised, is much strengthened and improved. The various dispensations of Providence are of use to increase our trust, by the necessity they lay us under of exerting it according to the changing nature of our condition, there being none who ordinarily excel so much in this virtue, as those who have pass'd thro' the greatest diversity of outward events, and experienc'd
the

the goodness and faithfulness of God in them all; after much the same manner as those soldiers are most ready in handling their arms, who have been kept under strict discipline, and constantly exercised. But then this beneficial influence of Providence on our trust, is only when prayer goes along with it, which is one reason that where the dispensations of Providence are much the same in regard of two or more persons, the effect is so very different; one continuing as distrustful and restless as ever, while another learns to commit himself with a more intire confidence to the disposal and conduct of his heavenly Father: one of these persons lives in the neglect of prayer, or is regardless how he prays; the other is much in prayer, and carries the same regard to God, and confidence in him, which he exercises in this duty, into all the circumstances of his life, and every part of his conversation. The consequence of this is, that the man who gives himself to prayer, will be contented in the condition and circumstances allotted him whatever they are; he has often, and very sincerely begged of God to do that which is best for him, and hereby wrought himself into a humble and steadfast trust that he would grant him his request; when therefore the event declares
what

what the will of God is, he cannot but be easy under it, because he knows that it shall turn to his good, let the present appearance of things be never so unpromising. The christian who is most in prayer, will of course be most contented, he will pray himself into a quiet resigned frame, as well as obtain it in recompence of his piety and devotion. Now contentment with what we have, in a world where we cannot, and it is not fit we should have all we desire, is the nearest approach to the happiness of the heavenly state, which consists in having none but reasonable desires, and all these desires crowned with enjoyment. 'Tis farther certain, that prayer nourishes *Hope* in the mercy of God for whatever relates to our spiritual and everlasting welfare. In being called to prayer, we are called to hope; for to what end would prayer be without hope? and as we are in a special manner to pray for those things which concern the salvation of our souls, and our happiness in another life, so we must of consequence be allowed to hope for them. This hope, which is authorized and encouraged by the very command to pray, does, from the duty of prayer frequently and carefully performed, receive a continual and considerable accession of life and vigour. Our hope, it may be, at first is languid and wavering, and mingled with so
much

much fear and anxiety, as deprives us of all sensible comfort and relief from it, however, tho' small, our hope is that which prevails with us to pray and not faint; and persevering in prayer, we find that our hopes receive strength, till they come to be more rooted and abounding, so as to stay our souls, and preserve them calm and peaceful in the views of eternity.

A HEAVENLY frame of mind naturally results from the serious and constant discharge of this duty. For what else is prayer but an abstraction of the mind from present sensible objects, in order to its being turned towards those of a different and a nobler nature? the raising the soul from earthly to heavenly things? The God we serve is an invisible Being, and the chief blessings we implore at his hand have little or no relation to this visible world: hence it proceeds, that the mind in prayer gradually rises to a spirituality of temper, has other relishes and inclinations, and is to be satisfied with no happiness but one that is spiritual and divine, a happiness suited to its own nature, and to the nature and perfections of the supreme Being, whom, by continual supplications to him as the Author of its felicity, it learns to regard as the Object of it too; with ardent longings crying out,

" O Whom

“ ‘ Whom have I in heaven but thee, and
 “ there is none upon earth that I desire be-
 “ sides thee ! Thou art my portion, O Lord,
 “ as such I chuse thee ! O that I knew where
 “ to find thee, that I might come even to
 “ thy seat ! This is what I must despair of
 “ while I am here, to find thee in this clear
 “ and satisfying manner ; I therefore long
 “ for a more perfect state, in comparison
 “ of which I despise this scene of vanity,
 “ with all its empty and transitory enjoy-
 “ ments.” It is by this, among other means,
 that the soul comes to be disengaged from
 the world, to set its affections upon things
 above, and to carry higher views, and more
 generous sentiments into the management of
 common affairs, than worldly minds are ca-
 pable of forming ; thus ^d *having its conver-*
sation in heaven, where it hopes to have its
 everlasting abode. Finally, Prayer widens
 the heart, and fills it with the most diffu-
 sive *charity* or benevolence. Being used to
 pray with and for others, we unite ourselves
 to them in the bonds of the most tender
 affection, as children of the same common
 parent, and sharers in the same common
 happiness ; we love them as we love our-
 selves, *i. e. without dissimulation*, look upon
 their interest as our own, and in that view
 sincerely desire it, rejoice in it, and as we
 have

have opportunity, promote it. Now next to the *love of God*, what affection is there that more exalts and adorns our nature than the *love of mankind*, an universal and disinterested love? or how can any disposition of mind give us a nearer resemblance of the Deity? ^e *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.* Nor is this excellent affection more influential upon the happiness of others, than it is on our own; it is a most pleasing sensation, and wherever it is a guest, pays liberally for its entertainment. That we may feel the power of so amiable and so agreeable a passion, let us in our prayers as unfeignedly recommend *others* to the divine mercy as we do *ourselves*. This is one ^f condition of an acceptable prayer, that we harbour not envy, and malice, and revenge in our bosoms. Prayer will help to kill these poisonous weeds, and cultivate and improve that love which is the original growth of our nature, being planted in it by the hand of God himself. This happy plant will languish or revive with the spirit of prayer and devotion. More than this, I think, there needs not to convince any one of the great advantages and pleasure of *drawing nigh to God* in the duty of prayer; tho', if it were
needful

^e I John iv. 16.

^f Matt. vi. 14, 15.

needful, a great deal more might be mentioned*.

2. *It is good to draw nigh to God* in that part of devotion which consists in *Singing the praises of God*. The excellence and pleasure of this duty is as great as the obligation to it is plain. Pious affections do naturally vent themselves this way, and upon this is founded that apostolical direction, ^e *Is any one merry* (filled with religious joy and thankfulness) *let him sing Psalms*. The disciples of Christ were to ^h *teach and admonish one another in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs, singing with grace in their hearts unto the Lord*; or as it is in another place *making melody in their hearts unto the Lord*. One intire book of scripture, the book of *Psalms*, has its denomination from hence; the word *Psalm*, according to its *Greek* derivation, being the same as our *English* word *Song*. And can there be a nobler exercise than this, the matter of which is generally taken from the infinite Excellencies and Perfections of God, or from the wonders of Creation, Providence, and Redemption? and how well fitted is this manner of celebrating the praises of God to feed and increase that devotion which it so well expresses?

* See particularly the Author's Essay on the Rational Grounds of Prayer, annex'd to the Discourse on Secret Prayer.

^e James v. 13. ^h Colof. iii. 16. Eph. v. 19.

expresses? In the language of the devout *Psalmist*, ⁱ *the tongue is our glory* and is never so truly such, as when it conspires to show forth the glory of the great Parent and Fountain of all things. Music has a very powerful effect upon the human passions, and when it is of the religious kind, by conveying the most sublime ideas and striking thoughts in an apt and proper manner, 'tis wonderfully suited to kindle and keep alive the very best affections of the soul. “ O
 “ how have I wept, (saith St. *Austin* of him-
 “ self) how exceedingly mov'd and affected
 “ have I been at the hymns, and songs, and
 “ harmonious voices of the Church! These
 “ voices pierced my ears, the truth entered
 “ my soul, devout affections were rais'd,
 “ and tears flow'd.” The worship of heaven is represented in several places of the book of *Revelations* under this form of description, ^k *They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways thou King of saints! And again, I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Halleluiab, salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God!* The least that this can signify is, that there is something heavenly in this duty, something

ⁱ Psal. lvii. 8.

^k Revel. xv. 3, 4. xix. i.

thing fitted to elevate the mind unto a temper like that of the inhabitants of this blessed world, ¹ *who rest not day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.* * And 'tis very remarkable, that singing in the worship of God is so much the voice of nature, and a dictate of common reason, that no religion, true or false, has been without it: there was scarce any solemn service performed to their gods, either by *Greeks* or *Barbarians*, without music; music was thought to be a thing so heavenly that their gods were accounted the chief inventors of it. The soul is cheered and animated by this spiritual melody, is assisted in throwing off any load which hangs heavy upon it, and to go on with greater delight in the ways of piety.

3. WE draw nigh to God in reading and hearing his most holy word; and in this way it may be truly said to be good for us to draw nigh unto him. ^m *The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul, the testimonies of the Lord are sure making wise the simple.* ⁿ Being given by the inspiration of God, this sacred book is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; so as to make us perfect in our

¹ Revel. iv. 8.

* See *Patrick* on 1 Chr. xv.

16. ^m Psal. xix. 7.

ⁿ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

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religious capacity, and *thoroughly furnished for every good work.* The benefits of devoutly reading the word of God, and hearing the great truths of it explained, and the several duties prescribed by it enforced in the ministry of the gospel are innumerable, and of the greatest value. Do we need instruction? here we have it, access to those lively oracles is never denied us; we have not only the liberty, but a command to come and learn from hence *the deep things of God, even his whole counsel,* which is here declared to us by his only begotten Son. There is a congruity between all truth and the mind of man, the mind being made for the knowledge of truth; and if all, much more *divine* truth is the treasure of the soul; and of this truth there is no such repository as the Bible. Here a new, a most extensive scene is opened to us, and if our eyes are opened to it, and fixed upon it, we shall behold wondrous things in the book of God; God will hereby ° *give us understanding in all things.* Have we doubts in which we want satisfaction? the best way to have them removed is to apply to the word of God, this will assist us in judging of our own character or state, casting such a light upon it, that we shall easily discern what it is, if we are in earnest desirous

° 2 Tim. ii. 7.

firous to know it. The man who is conversant in the scriptures, joining herewith the impartial examination of his heart and ways, cannot well be mistaken in the judgment he passes upon himself; a comparison of his life with the law of God, with both which he is supposed to be acquainted, will soon satisfy him what his life hath been, and will farther be a happy means of resolving his doubts in the particular cases and circumstances which may occur in the progress of his life, even those which are most difficult: having this guide, and following his guide as closely as he can, he will not be so apt to mistake his way; some doubtful cases there may be, which after all his pains will remain so, but few in comparison, and even these such as will not very much disquiet his mind; for endeavouring to know his duty as it is marked out to him in the word of God, and to practise it according to the knowledge he has of it; all the doubt he has in some uncommon cases will be about the *absolute* nature of the action, not it's *relative*; what it is in *itself*, not what it is to *him*; who is sure of pleasing God while he takes that side of the question which, upon the whole, has the greatest probabilities attending it. Does he need to be quickned? is he in a dull, languid, indifferent state of soul? conversing with the word of

God read and preached is a very likely means of putting him into a more lively frame. How often is a man roused out of his indolence by the conversation of a friend? thus, by attending to the voice of God in his word, the soul is many times cured of its languors; it meets with something or other in reading a portion of scripture, or in a sermon, that strikes it of a sudden, gives a happy turn to its thoughts, and makes it more diligent and active. Finally, is the christian's soul bowed down within him? does he want comfort in affliction? ^p *The commandments of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, saith the devout King; and again, this is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word has quickned me.* Here are arguments of consolation suited to the most distressed and melancholy condition. Let the trouble be what it will, *temporal* or *spiritual*, in the course of reading or hearing the word of God, we meet with considerations fitted to relieve the mind from its sadness, and to support it under the heaviest pressures, taken from the forgiving mercy of God, the wisdom and extensiveness of his love, his knowing and doing what is best for all them that fear him, and making ^q *those light afflictions which are but for a moment to work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight*
of

^p Psal. xix. 8. cxix. 50.^q 2 Cor. iv. 17.

of glory, and to work in them a greater meetness of soul for it.

THESE are some of the advantages flowing from an intimate acquaintance with the word of God, to which we arrive by giving ourselves to the study of it, and attending to those things which are spoken by the ministers of the gospel agreeably to this sacred standard. When we make conscience of our duty in these respects, waiting upon God, and drawing nigh to him in the means he has appointed, we justly expect his blessing, which will render the reading and hearing his word effectual to the best purposes.

4. IN *holy meditation* the soul draws nigh to God, and with very great pleasure and advantage. Meditation here is considered as a distinct exercise of the mind. There is no duty of religion but should be attended with thought and reflection, without which it will be of very little benefit to the performer; but here I suppose the christian to collect his thoughts in order to fix them as *intensely* as he can upon divine subjects. And perhaps, the pleasure and advantage of this exercise of meditation will appear in the most convincing manner, if we *exemplify* it on a few of those numberless subjects upon which it may be made to turn.

—LET the first subject about which we suppose our meditations to be employed, be *The chief end of man*, what he was designed for by his Creator, and what he himself should principally design. I find myself plac'd amidst a world of objects; but as man in paradise, till one of the same species was formed, found not a help-meet for him among all the inferior creatures, so among those numberless objects which surround me, and that diversity of pursuits in which I see men engaged relating to the present life, I find none worthy of my highest choice, that can satisfy my desires, and should terminate my views and prospects. No certainly, I was made for something else than just to provide for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. I have something else to mind than what is before me, or what I am capable of enjoying, or liable to suffer for the poor scantling of time that I am to live in this world. Yes, O my God, when I consider what thou art, and what I am myself, and what this world and state of existence is, I am convinced that I have something else to do than to please my senses, and gratify my passions, and to pursue the road that fancy and inclination would persuade me to take! I am capable of other things, of a higher life, of a nobler and more lasting felicity, and therefore, doubtless was
made

made for them. For how should I know the end for which my Creator designed me, but from the capacities which he has given me? he who created me being infinite in wisdom, cannot have furnished me with faculties so vastly disproportioned to the chief end of my Being, as 'tis evident they are to the cares, and business, and pleasures of this life; these therefore are not my principal end, because my soul is too big for them, and my desires and thoughts run over the widest vessel of created good. We conclude with the greatest certainty, that the waters of the ocean were not made for any other place than that which contains them, because, were the hollow much less deep and capacious, they must overflow and drown the world. This world, and this momentary life, can no more confine my desires, than a small cavern of the earth can be a fit receptacle for the ocean. I infer therefore, that I was made for something else.— And if I enquire what, my thoughts, if they are not darkned by ignorance, and perverted by lusts, naturally lead me to God himself, who is the first cause of my being, as the last end of it too. He *has made all things for himself*, man particularly and especially; other things are made to display the glory of God by the impresses of power, wisdom, and goodness, which they bear upon them;

man to glorify God in an active manner, by honourable thoughts and apprehensions of God, correspondent affections to him, and a life led in conformity to his will; that glorifying God after this manner in this world, he may enjoy him in the next. If I *glorify God with my body and soul which are his*, he will make me completely and eternally happy in both. I own, O God, the singular honour thou hast put upon thy creature, in forming him for so glorious an end! O may I have this end always in view, and form my whole conversation and behaviour upon this important truth, *That I was made for God!* —Let our next meditation be on the *Love of God*. *God is love*, this is his nature, of which goodness is an essential perfection, and he has loved us. But how he has loved us who will pretend to say, so as to trace his love in the variety of methods which it has taken in order to make us happy, and to describe and celebrate it in the manner it deserves? O unfathomable love which stoops so low, even from the infinite heights of the divine Majesty and Perfection, to visit us the sinful sons of men! O love without bounds, or which has no other bounds but what we set to it by our unthankfulness! Let us be grateful to God, and he will never cease to be good to us; there is nothing which his mercy will deny

us;

us; and which is more, *his mercy towards us will endure forever.* Let me consider, O my soul! that the love of God is a moral perfection, and that therefore he does not, he cannot love all alike. With a love of *benevolence* or *good-will* he embraces all, till by their frequent forfeitures of this love, and continuing obstinately to refuse the offers of it, and even to abuse it, they provoke him to withdraw it from them, and to leave them to reap the fruits of their own perverseness and folly; but his love of *complacency* is peculiar to those who resemble him. Can I delight in God as a most holy Being? is he glorious in my eyes upon the account of his holiness? do I love holiness, and esteem myself no farther than as I have it as a habit and principle residing in me? then 'tis certain that I love God, and am beloved of him. This love of *complacency* terminates first on *things*, and then on *persons*. God *loves righteousness*, and therefore loves the *righteous*; and therefore according to the measure of righteousness, or real inward holiness is the measure of this love. And is not this a very desirable thing to be the object of the divine delight? can there be a greater honour than this, or a more certain earnest of happiness? See here, O my soul, the only way to it! continue a slave to sin, to any one sin, and thou can't never be a child

child of God. Can he love thee, while thou fuffereft that to reign in thy bofom which is the moft hateful thing to him in the whole world; nay, properly fpeaking, the only hateful thing, for God hateth nothing but fin? When I think of this, I am fenfible of the folly of giving myfelf up to be fwayed by fenfual and worldly paflions, by the love of pleasure, or money, or any other earthly good; and much more by diabolical ones, fuch as envy, malice, hatred, and revenge; and all the while flattering myfelf that he *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* can look on me with pleasure *who am fold under fin*. No, before I can be an object of God's *complacential* love, I muft, in fome degree, become qualified for it; and bleffed be his name, fuch is his love of *benevolence* and *compassion*, that he will affift my fincere endeavours after holinefs, and if I *yield myfelf up to him*, will lead me on to the perfection of it!

How ufeful are thefe meditations? let us therefore purfue the fame exercife a little farther, and meditate a while on the *Happinefs of the future ftate*. Let me raife my thoughts as high, and fpread them as wide as I can, I find, after all, fuch are the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of this happinefs, as well as of the love which
procured

procured it, as to surpass my apprehension. ¹ *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them who love him.* And so far is this from being a lessening to the value of these things, that they are at present unconceivable, as to exalt our notion of their greatness and excellence. [†] *It does not yet appear what we shall be; why? because any happiness in this life falls so infinitely short of the glory which shall be revealed in the saints,* that the world we live in will not so much as furnish us with images and resemblances by which it may be shadowed out to us with any tolerable life and clearness. We cannot now raise our thoughts and conceptions to what we shall hereafter enjoy; not that we are altogether in the dark about it; thanks be to God this is not our condition, ^u *Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.* We have light enough to discover another world besides this, and to discern the objects of it so far as to be able to conclude, that all the things of this world are as *nothing*, compared with those of *eternity*. *Here my time is divided between enjoyment and suffering, there 'tis all pleasure and enjoyment; not one sigh is ever heard from that heavenly society, but everlasting*

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.
i. 10.

[†] 1 John iii. 2.

^u 2 Tim.

lasting Halleluiah. Here enjoyment itself does often disappoint us, the disappointments we meet with in a short life are without number; *there* we shall live to eternal ages, and not know a single disappointment, nothing shall fall short of our expectations, but rather every thing exceed them. So far are we from overtaking the happiness we pursue in the world (especially if we seek for it in things of this world) that we are often tempted by the baffles, and vexations, and interruptions we meet with, to question whether there is such a thing as happiness at all. And very true it is, that there is nothing deserving that name under the sun. * *Vanity of vanity, all is vanity* to him who looks not beyond the present scene. But now only draw the veil, and you see a happiness equal to your largest capacities, a happiness which will satisfy every desire, silence every complaint, and leave you nothing to wish for; no not so much as the continuance of it, because you know, without wishing for it, that it will continue forever. And when such a happiness as this courts my choice, and invites me to pursue after it, shall I suffer myself to be deluded by the empty shadow of this world? at least let me first sit down and think what I part with in giving up my hopes of heaven, before I

* Eccl. i. 2.

am guilty of such an instance of prodigality. Wasting the whole world, if I had it for my portion, and bringing myself to beggary, will not parallel this folly of turning my back upon eternal happiness, and following after lying vanities. The very hope of heaven is vastly preferable to any earthly thing. Let me have this hope, and I am happy by anticipation. For what is it I hope for in hoping for heaven? I hope for a state in which happiness, in full measure, and running over shall be given into my bosom; in which all the perfections of the divine nature shall shine out with the greatest lustre, and all contribute to our happiness, in which they will all unite; a state in which the *Understanding*, filled with divine knowledge, shall resemble a region of pure and glorious *light*; and the *Heart* with infinite transport feel the full, the overflowing influence of *divine love* quickening and transforming it; a state in which we shall be possessed of the noblest pleasures, and share them with the most excellent society, shall ^y *join with the spirits of just men made perfect*, converse with an *innumerable company of angels*, be admitted into the presence of *Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant*, and behold the face of God the *Creator and Judge of all*. O what a pleasure must the
meditation

^y Hebr. xii. 22, 3, 4.

meditation on such a happiness as this afford all those who have a well-grounded hope of it! O heavenly Father make me *to abound in this hope!* I am determin'd it shall henceforward be my principal study how to get, and enlarge, and establish it, and that there shall be nothing necessary to this end which I will neglect doing; forasmuch as this hope will more than recompence me for all the difficulties, and labours, and struggles which I can pass through in a life of the strictest virtue and piety.

THUS I have given you a few examples of the pleasure and advantage of religious *meditation*, and enlarg'd upon them, that I might set the truth I am proving in a more affecting light. After all this, will any one say, that it is not *good for us to draw nigh to God in holy meditation*, as well as in other exercises of devotion? would not such meditations, managed according to our several opportunities and abilities, (for the measure of duty is not the same to all, any more than the capacities and advantages of all are the same) yield great profit to the devout soul? raise its views, nourish its hopes, confirm its resolutions, strengthen and perfect its virtue? has it not an assimilating power so as to change the mind more and more into a temper more and more suited to the nature of those spiritual, and di-
vine,

vine, and heavenly objects, with which it is conversant? I will conclude the proof with adding,

5. *It is good to draw nigh to God in the Lord's-Supper.* It cannot be expected that I should reckon up all the advantages which accompany the devout performance of this duty, or even as many as will naturally occur to the thoughts of the worthy communicant, because what I now offer comes in only as part of another subject. I shall insist only on these *two* advantages; *viz.* its being of admirable service to awaken in our minds a lively sense of our obligations to God, and the Lamb; and to encourage our future expectations from them.

I. GREAT is the advantage arising from a devout participation of the *Lord's-Supper*, as it tends to awaken in our minds a more lively sense of our *obligations* to the love of God, and of the Lamb. Yes, ² *God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* And the same may be said of *the only begotten of the Father*, ^a *that he loved us* (us a degenerate race of creatures) *and gave himself for us a sacrifice and an offering to God of a sweet smelling savour.* The love of the Father and of the Son is the great foundation of this sacramental institution,

² John iii. 16.

^a Ephes. v. ii.

tion, which had never been but for this love. In this sacred action ^b *we show forth the death of Christ*, and in that his love, which made him willing to die for us, and the love of God which ^c *gave him up to death for us all*. And must not the remembrance of such love be delightful? can it be otherwise if we believe ourselves to have any share in it? and whose fault is it if we have not? the sincere christian, who loves God and his Saviour, cannot reasonably doubt of his being the object of redeeming love. And surely there is something in the consideration of the ^d *kindness of God to man* peculiarly fitted to raise the soul into a holy joy and triumph. Hath God in the councils of his eternal wisdom contrived my everlasting salvation; and hath the Son of God condescended to execute this gracious design, ^e *by humbling himself to death, even the death of the cross?* what a thought is here! how surprizingly agreeable! how does it overcome, and ravish the mind, and cause the soul to magnify the Lord, and all that is within us to bless his holy name! The fire does not more naturally beget heat in the body when it comes near to it, than the reflection on this wonderful love does joy and gladness of heart. The heart exults in the thought
of

^b 1 Cor. xi. 26. ^c Rom. viii. 32. ^d Tit.
iii. 4. ^e Philip. ii. 8.

of its being the object of such love. And then the sense of our *obligations* to God and the Lamb, which the remembrance of this love in the *Supper* awakens in us is as profitable, as the remembrance itself is delightful, proving a most powerful motive to gratitude and obedience in the course of the christians life. Do I consider how infinitely I am obliged to God in giving his Son to die for me, and can I do less in return than give myself to him, with a resolution to employ all my powers, and faculties, all that I have, and am, in his service, and to his glory? I cannot well forbear making this return, if duly sensible of the greatness of my obligations; and perhaps, nothing hath a greater aptitude to strengthen the conviction of our duty, than beholding the representations of Christ's death in the memorials of his body and blood, and, at the same time, reflecting why and for whom he died. There is no one who behaves as he should while at the *Lord's-Table*, but must go away from it possessed with a deep sense of his unspeakable engagements to the love of Jesus, and strongly determined to do his utmost to fulfil them, by being more active for his Saviour, and more exact and constant in keeping his commandments.

2. A devout participation of the *Lord's-Supper* is of excellent use to encourage our

future expectations from God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Hath not God withheld his Son from me, and can I question his ^f *giving me all other things*, as far as they are needful and convenient for me? will he who bestows the greater deny the less? Hereby Christ crucified for us becomes an earnest of every thing else which is truly desirable; especially of every *spiritual, good, and perfect gift*, of all necessary supplies of grace here, as well as of glory hereafter. What is there I may not expect from the goodness of God, when I have such pledges and assurances of it in my hand? if the goodness of God had not been infinite, it would not have express'd itself after this manner; and having express'd itself after this manner, I see there is nothing that can divert it from us, unworthy as we are of it, provided we do not by wilful unrepented sin resist its kind designs towards us. And certainly infinite goodness, not restrained in its exercise towards us, gives all the scope to our hopes and wishes that we can desire. Every want shall be supplied from the riches of that goodness, which flows out towards us in the blood of Jesus. After he has purchased us, and redemption for us at such an invaluable price, he will not suffer the whole design to prove abortive and ineffectual, thro'

^f Rom. viii. 32.

thro' a defect of means and helps in order to our obtaining the salvation procured for us. No, our own sincere endeavours being suppos'd, the death of Christ which we commemorate in his *Supper*, is our security that we shall not want for any needful assistance in working out our salvation, that he who has begun a good work in us will perfect it; that he will pity and help our infirmities, *and make us more than conquerors thro' him who has loved us.* And thus by looking backward in this ordinance to the death of Christ, together with the principle from which it proceeded, and the design which it was intended to serve, we are taught to look forward with greater confidence in respect of the duties and trials of future life, assur'd that he who thus entertains us at his *Table*, will never leave or forsake us.

I WILL now conclude this Subject with a short Application.

I. How unjust is the prejudice which the carnal world have taken up against religion, as if it was a *joyless* and *melancholy* thing, of little use but to damp all the pleasure and comfort of life; whereas, indeed there are no pleasures like those of religion; nay, without religion, nothing which deserves the name of pleasure, in the esteem of a reasonable man: for as to the other plea-

fures of life, what is it dignifies them, and gives them a value but religion, mingling with and directing them in a subserviency to higher satisfactions, and a more exalted and durable felicity hereafter; of which when a man has a well grounded hope, he can venture *to rejoice in that portion of good which God giveth him under the sun.* Only reflect a little, how far the condition of those who are strangers to the pleasures of devotion is from bearing a comparison with theirs who are acquainted with them. The enjoyments of the world do not yield half the sweetness to the former of these, that they do to the latter; and then how often are they to seek for pleasure? how often a burden to themselves? and how sad and darksome is their prospect? while the pious man has other sources of pleasure quite unknown to them; he delights to retire from the world to meet with God; he has another world to converse with when tired with this, and by conversing with that world, is put in a way to use and enjoy this to greater advantage. Wherefore,

2. LET us no longer be disobedient to the heavenly voice, but frequently and delightfully *draw nigh to God* in every way of his appointment. Let us not live estranged from God? let us intreat him that the Holy Spirit may kindle the sacred fire in our hearts,
and

and let us carefully tend it, diligently practise all those means by which it may be kept perpetually burning, and be so far from seeking excuses for the neglect of any duty, private or public, as to think with ourselves how we may with the least interruption, and with the greatest benefit perform every one of them. Can we reasonably hope to make life so easy and happy to ourselves in any other way as this? shall we not by this means *walk with God*, and in the *light of his countenance*? shall we not have more peace in our own bosoms, and more confidence in the mercy of God? this will be somewhat of an essay towards the life of heaven; and if we do not in some measure live the life of heaven here upon earth, I do not see what great ground we can have to expect that we shall hereafter enter upon it, or how we can be qualified for it. Let us then, my friends, for the future make religion a *business*, regard the spirit of devotion as that which should run thro' our whole lives, and indirectly influence our most common actions; and the exercises of devotion as a part of our daily employment, and what we should embrace every convenient opportunity of performing. Let us not live in the omission of *secret prayer* morning and evening; let not *family religion* be neglected; let us not absent ourselves from the *House*

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of God, or from the Table of the Lord; and let us endeavour to live so at all times, so holily and unblameably, and to have those pious affections possessing our hearts, that we may be fitted in every duty to *draw nigh to God*, and reap the advantage of every religious performance in the following part of our conduct. Then shall we pass the time of our sojourning here more comfortably to ourselves, more usefully to others, and more to the glory of God, than we should otherwise do, and shall attain to greater assurance of passing when we leave this world into the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and happiness everlasting.





S E R M O N VI.

Of the change made in the earth by the Deluge, and its renovation after it.

G E N. viii. 21, 22.

— *And the Lord said in his heart I will not, again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

MAN was created happy, but abode not long in his first estate: through the subtlety and malice of the devil, the great enemy of God and man, he was drawn to transgress the divine command, and for this transgression was driven out of *Paradise*

And tho' this alone would have been a melancholy change, to be sent forth from the garden of *Eden* (a place abounding with all manner of delights, and favoured with the peculiar presence of God) to *till the ground from whence he was taken*, without any hopes of being again restored to his original state, yet this was not all; what follows was still worse, his new habitation was ^a *curf-ed for his sake*, and he himself condemned to toil, and pain, and sorrow, without any prospect of rest till death should bring it him. However God's first blessing upon the parents of our race (*to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth*) was not revoked; therefore sprang there of these two *as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable*. But, alas! with the numbers of mankind their vices too increased, till at length their ^b *wickedness was grown so great upon the earth*, that it is said, *It repented the Lord that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart*. The expression is *figurative* and can only mean, that God acted after the same manner as men are wont to do when they heartily repent of a thing, (which is to undo it again as far as they are able) that is, he destroyed man whom he had created from the face of the earth; both man and beast,
and

^a Gen. iii. 17.^b Gen. vi. 5, 6.

and creeping things, and the fowls of the air; of the many millions of men which we may suppose to have been then upon the earth, sparing only *Noah* and his family, (for which this reason is given, that *he was righteous before God in that generation*) and ordering some of every kind of beasts and fowls to be preserved, as a new stock from which the earth after the Deluge might again be supplied with inhabitants. The waters being retired, and the earth dry enough for the creatures who were in the ark to go forth upon it, the first thing *Noah* does is to ^c *build an altar to the Lord, and to offer thereon burnt-offerings of every clean beast and fowl.* This act of piety was so acceptable to God, that it is said, *he smelled a sweet savour, or a savour of rest,* which you will easily apprehend is a *metaphorical* expression, signifying his being exceedingly pleas'd, not with the blood or wreeking streams of the sacrifice (for what delight can these afford to a pure spirit as God is?) but with the devotion of the offerer, those humble prayers and grateful praises which ascended from a pious heart, these are the sacrifices which God will never despise, and which come up before him even into the holiest of all. Hereupon the *Lord said in his heart,* that

is,

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is, immediately determined, *I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake ; &c.*

THE words leads us to consider these *two* things,

I. GOD'S renewing the face of the earth after the Deluge, and making it fit to be inhabited as before. This is plainly implied in the words.

II. HIS decree or purpose to preserve the earth in the state into which he now put it, as long as the earth itself should continue. This the words expressly declare.

I. LET us briefly consider what is plainly implied in the words, *viz.* God's renewing the face of the earth after the Deluge, and making it fit to be again inhabited. The promise *that while the earth remain'd, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, day and night should not cease*, doth clearly suppose this, that there should be a regular succession of the seasons, and every season should have its respective uses and advantages, so that the earth *should be filled with the goodness of the Lord, and satisfied with the fruit of his works*: the same Almighty God who at the creation of the world said, ^d *let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind*, now at the renovation of it ^e *causing the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man to bring*

^d Gen. i. 11.

^e Psal. civ. 14.

bring forth fruit out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread that strengtheneth man's heart. God blessed Noah and his sons in like manner as he did *Adam* and *Eve*, saying, ^f *be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth*; delivering all things into their hand as lords of this lower creation; and even allowing them the use of *animal* food, which was not in the original grant to *Adam*; so that here is a new commencement of things, a kind of second birth, and God who was the Creator of man and of all the other tribes of inferior animals is now their gracious Restorer.

HERE a question offers, not indeed of very great importance, however not altogether useless, *viz. whether the earth after the flood was put into a condition as good as that it was in before the fall, or at least better than its antediluvian state?* This has been the opinion of very learned men, (particularly *Bishop Sherlock* and the late *Lord Barrington*,) who have endeavoured to prove, that the original curse on the ground was *wholly* removed *saith one, in part only saith another.* According to the *first*, we are *happy*, with regard to the world about us, as men would have been if the state of *Innocence* had continued; according to the *latter*

^f Gen. ix. 1.

latter not so happy as that, but much happier than those who lived before the Deluge. But as these opinions are not agreeable to the received belief, so the more I examine them the less reason I see to go off from the common notion, that a considerable alteration for the worse, with respect to the earth we live upon, was introduced by the fall; and the case instead of being mended by the Flood, render'd still worse upon these *two* accounts particularly, that it is *less healthful* and *less delightful*.

I. OUR earthly habitation is at present much *less healthful* than it was in the state of innocence, or even before the Flood. In the *paradisical* earth, sickness, and pain, and death were utter strangers, and would probably have so continued; but without a perpetual miracle how could this have been, if the products of the ground had not been more salubrious, and the seasons more kindly and temperate than they are now? In such a region as ours could a body of flesh and blood be proof against all the injuries to which ours are liable, so as not to feel the inclemencies of the seasons, or to suffer by the noxious exhalations, and various and sudden changes of the atmosphere? Is this a fit world for the sons of immortality to dwell in? and what shall we say to the long lives of the *antediluvian* Patriarchs? Does not this naturally

rally lead one to think, that the earth had some advantages then which it wants now? nay, does it not oblige us to conclude so? how else could they have held out so long? We will allow they were born with happier constitutions; but surely their strength was not *the strength of stones*, neither was *their flesh of brass*, that they should endure for so many hundred years, if they had not had the advantage of us from *without*, as well as from *within*. 'Tis true, the first generations of men after the Flood were much longer lived than we are; but however attained not to above half the age of their ancestors; after which the life of man shortened apace, which we have no reason to think was brought about without *second* causes. And what were these *second* causes but chiefly the *earth* and the *air*, which have a mutual influence upon one another? A change in these would gradually produce a change in the bodies of men till the original stock of native vigour with which the human race sat out was quite spent, and there was no living out a few score years without good management.

2. As the present earth is *less healthful*, so *less delightful* than in its *paradisiacal*, or even its *antediluvian* state. Health itself is one of the most delightful enjoyments of life, and the foundation of all others, which lose their

their value in the same degree as a man wants health to use and relish them. And therefore were there nothing else to make it preferable, yet in the same proportion as any place is the seat of health, it must be the seat of pleasure too. But besides this we are farther to consider, that the same things which contribute to health and long life are generally the causes or occasions of pleasure ; such as the nature of the soil, and the temperature of the air not subject to the extreams of cold or heat, of dryness or moisture. The very breathing in a good air, and living under a calm and serene sky is a refreshment, and conveys an inexpressible gladness to the heart ; the plants and flowers are more fragrant, and the fruits have a better taste and flavour. But what if there be not so great a fertility, as possibly there may not ? why even then if there be a sufficient plenty, and that of the best, so that what may seem to be wanting in a gross luxuriancy is more than made up in goodness, it cannot be said that such persons inherit less of God's earthly blessings than others. Agreeable to this is the description which an ingenious * *Author* gives of *Asia the Less* ; “ A tract of ground,” saith he, “ which for the temperature of
“ the

* *Enquiry into the life and writings of Homer.*

“ the climate and qualities of the soil may
 “ vie with any in *Europe*. It is not so fat
 “ and fruitful as the plains of *Babylon* or
 “ banks of *Nile*, but the purity and benign-
 “ nity of the air, the varieties of the fruits
 “ and fields, the beauty and number of the
 “ rivers, and the constant gales from the
 “ happy isles of the *Western Sea*, all con-
 “ spire to bring its productions of every
 “ kind to the highest perfection; they in-
 “ spire that mildness of temper and flow of
 “ fancy which favour the most extensive
 “ views, and give the finest conceptions of
 “ *nature and truth*.” Nor is there any
 reason that I can see to imagine, that the
 earth did not yield a large increase before the
 Flood, enough to supply the appetites and
 desires of that ungodly race of men even to
 luxury. The *pleasant* as well as *long* life
 of those first mortals is the most obvious and
 natural account that can be given of their
 uncommon degeneracy of manners; [‡] *living*
in pleasure they were dead while they lived;
 forgot God and themselves and a life to
 come, being wholly immersed in sensuality
 and voluptuousness; which was no sign of
 the earth’s, or the inhabitants of the earth’s
 feeling the weight of the *first* curse more
 than we do now. And if it be true (as it
 is highly probable, and the general opinion
 of

‡ 1 Tim. v. 6.

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of learned men) that *flesh was not eaten before the flood*, it must argue the fruits and vegetable productions of the earth to be much more delicious and nourishing than they are at present; since otherwise the temptation to venture upon *animal* food would have been so great, that persons unrestrained by conscience and religion would not have been able to resist it. This shows that the earth after the Flood cannot reasonably be supposed so delightful a place as before; and much more that it cannot rival the delights of *Paradise*, or those which any other part of the earth inhabited by innocent creatures would have furnished. We must have a very low notion of the *paradisical* state of the world if we think it did not exceed its present condition. What sort of a place *Paradise* was we may guess from hence, that the happiness of the next life (at least in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection) is represented under this name in *scripture*, *Luke xxiii. 43.* where in answer to the penitent thief who prayed Christ to *remember him when he was come into his kingdom*, hereby declaring his belief that he was the promised *Messiah*, our Saviour tells him, *Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* So St. ^s Paul faith of himself, that he *was caught up into Paradise*; and
in

^s 2 Cor. xii. 4.

in the *Revelations*, chap. ii. 7. there is a promise made to him that overcometh, that he should eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the *Paradise of God*. Now I believe there is no one but will allow the place here designed under the resemblance of *Paradise*, to signify a state of very great happiness; even such as has nothing like to it in our world: and consequently that *Paradise* must have been very different from any part of our earth, when it has the honour to lend its name to this blessed place. And if it be said that the common earth even then was not equal to *Paradise*; I acknowledge this to be very true. But then it cannot be supposed, that the difference was any thing nigh so great as between *Paradise* and the earth that now is, when we consider; that in case the state of innocence had continued, *Paradise* would soon have been too narrow to contain the growing numbers of mankind, who must therefore have been transplanted into other regions of the earth better fitted to receive them than the present earth is; lest the comparison between *Paradise*, their first abode, and that to which they afterwards removed, should render them less pleased with their new habitation. And perhaps, some will reckon it probable, that if *Paradise* had so vastly surpass'd the primitive earth as it does the present, God would have

inflicted no other punishment upon our first parents before the sentence of death took place, besides expulsion from thence; without *cursing the earth*, the place of their banishment; since without any such additional curse it might very well have been said to Adam, ⁱ *In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life*; (for how could he do otherwise remembering *Paradise*) *thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground*. For is not this the true state of the earth, and the lot of mankind, even now that the curse (according to this opinion) is removed? And how then was it the effect of that curse? What has been said does, I think, show it to be highly probable, that the earth now is both *less healthful* and *less delightful* than it was before the *fall*, or even before the *flood*; and consequently that no part of the original curse upon the ground was removed after the deluge.

To strengthen this reasoning, there are *two* considerations more taken from the *relation* between the *natural* and the *moral* world; or between the state of the earth and the present degenerate state of mankind; one of which will better suit the other

ⁱ Gen. iii. 17.

other according to the *old* hypothesis, than the *new*. For,

I. WE are to consider, that the world now not being the *abode of innocence* as at first, but of *guilt*, it can hardly be thought the face of external nature is exactly the same now as it was then. As soon as *sin* came into the world a *curse* followed ; and what room is there to imagine that the *curse* is removed while *sin* continues to reign ? Had the first descendants of fallen man taken warning from the punishment of the original pair, so as to have stood in awe of the righteous judgments of God, and not sinned against him ; it is not unlikely that the curse thus answering its end would have been abated, if not removed : but instead of learning righteousness and goodness from the dispensations of Providence, this first race of mortals sunk deeper and deeper into vice, till their case at length became so desperate as to call for an universal destruction. And as God without doubt foresaw what the world would prove after the flood, it would be difficult to give an account why the earth should be fitted up in the same manner, as if it had been to receive a race of innocent creatures. No, before the sentence is mitigated, and much more before it is reversed, let some trial be made how they will behave ; and if it prove to

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be a *new earth* wherein dwelleth *righteousness*, it will be then time enough for the Judge of the whole earth, in consideration of the *inhabitants* being reformed and grown better, to make the *place* of their habitation better too. But why the curse which was inflicted for sin should be taken off while sin kept its ground; or why the *effect* should cease the *cause* remaining in its full force, it will not, I doubt, be easy to give a satisfactory reason. It must be own'd, this consideration taken from the *sinfulness* of the human race will only hold against the *entire removal* of the primitive curse, not against its being *in part removed*, so as that mankind after the Flood should be in a better condition than they were before, not being so extremely and universally wicked. But there is another thing which perhaps will prove the expediency of putting the earth into a *worse* condition after the flood instead of a *better*; and that is,

2. To prevent mankind's relapsing into the same deplorable state of vice and wickedness, as that which occasioned this extraordinary act of divine vengeance. Not only *Paradise* but the *other earth* was too tempting and dangerous a place for man to live in, after his passions were fired, particularly his love of sensual pleasure, by eating of the *forbidden fruit*. The *earth* was therefore

fore *curfed*, which, all things confidered, was an instance of *mercy* as well as of *judgment*. But it looks as if the alteration the *curse* produced in the earth was not fo great, but that the temptations arifing from the delights which ftill remained were too many and too powerful for mankind eafily to conquer ; this, as I obferved before, being the moft likely account of the extreme corruption of the *antediluvian* world. God was therefore graciously pleafed to leffen this temptation which had proved fo fatal to thofe who lived before the flood ; that fo not finding any thing in this world to make us think it our *final* happinefs, we might be the fooner induced to turn our thoughts towards another world, and ferioufly and effectually to prepare for that. The *wifdom* and *goodnefs* of divine Providence in this view feem to be more confpicuous. And tho' it be no fafe way of arguing, this or that method *feems to us* wifeft and beft, therefore *it is* the very method which God has taken, becaufe we may be miftaken in our judgment ; yet when the matter of *fact* concerning the paft difpenfations of Providence, or that God has proceeded in this or another way with mankind, is made probable from other confiderations, then that fuch a way does likewife anfwer wifer ends and purpofes according to our notions

of things does reasonably strengthen the persuasion we before had of our being in the right.

BUT as you may be willing to know the arguments produced for this singular notion, of the removal of the curse after the flood, I shall briefly examine one or two of the most considerable. The principal foundation upon which this notion rests is, that passage, *Gen. v. 29.* where it is recorded, that *Lamech* having a son born to him, called his name *Noah*, saying, *this same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed.* That is, says an ingenious writer, “ This is the seed of the woman, the heir
“ of the promise, who should be the in-
“ strument destin’d by Providence to ease
“ us of our burdens. The ancient Expect-
“ tation was not that the world should be
“ delivered all at once from the whole curse
“ of the fall. *Lamech*, who so well re-
“ membered the less curse upon the ground,
“ cannot be supposed to forget the greater
“ curse upon man. *Dust thou art, and to dust*
“ *thou shalt return*: and yet from this part
“ of the curse he gives no hope of a de-
“ liverance. *Noah* was not that seed who
“ should bring life and immortality to light.
“ Of *Noah*, his father foretels, that he
“ should save them from the labour and
“ toil

“toil of their hands, *i. e.* by the removal
“of the *curse* on the *ground*.” Were
the argument here as solid as the imagina-
tion is ingenious, I should despair of being
able to answer it ; but I must own I cannot
see where the argument lies. There appears
no ground in Scripture for this pretended
expectation of deliverance from the *curse*
on the *ground*, and the *curse* on *man* at dif-
ferent times, and by different persons ; nor
can it be proved that there was any such
expectation. *Lamech* lived not to see the
happy time (if there was any such) when
the earth was to be disburthened of the curse
which fell so heavy upon it ; and how then,
speaking by a prophetic spirit, could he say,
*this same shall comfort us concerning our work
and the toil of our hands ?* Would this ex-
pression have been proper, if the thing meant
had been that *six hundred years* after, when
he, and all that generation of men should be
extinct, the earth should put on a new
face ? Do not the words plainly intimate
his hope, that as his son grew up to the
stature, and strength, and understanding of
a man, he would take off a great part of
that trouble which he now had in cultivating
the earth ? and it was natural enough for
him in the joy of his heart at the birth of
his first son, a promising child, to enter-
tain

tain such a hope as this, and to use such language, tho' no way mov'd to it by a *spirit of prophefy* — But it is farther urged, “ that the flood being over, God declares, “ *I will not again curse the ground any more* “ *for man's sake* ; from which declaration “ it appears, that as the flood was the effect of the curse denounced against the “ earth for man's sake, in the old curse “ was now executed and accomplish'd “ in the flood ; in consequence of which “ discharge from the curse a new blessing “ is immediately pronounced upon the “ earth.” To this I answer, that since God's *curfing* the ground after the *fall* can only signify his putting it into a *worse* condition than that it was in before ; it is natural to understand the declaration, that he *would not again curse the ground*, as meaning no more than this, that things should continue in the state in which he now settled them, he being determined not to blast the face of nature with a *second* curse. And in this sense the words may have their full accomplishment, tho' by means of the change which the deluge had made in the earth, it was far from being so agreeable a dwelling as before the flood, and much more before the fall in its *paradisical* state. “ But does “ not *Noah's* planting a vineyard just after “ the

“ the flood intimate the great barrenness
 “ of the ground before the flood, and the
 “ prospect he had of its greater fertility
 “ now?” Not at all, but rather the con-
 trary, since it may be supposed that the
 earth then was plentifully stock’d with vines
 and other fruit-trees; whereas now that the
 flood had laid waste every thing, and *Noah*
 found that vines did not spring up sponta-
 neously out of the earth, or that the grapes
 were not of a generous kind, there was a
 necessity of his planting vines, if he intended
 to have wine, and that truly good. “ But
 “ how comes it that no mention is made
 “ of vines before the flood, while the sa-
 “ cred historian takes such particular notice
 “ of *Noah’s* planting a vineyard after-
 “ ward?” To this it may be answer’d,
 that there was a *particular occasion* for this
particular notice at that time, *viz.* in order to
 introduce the history of *Noah’s* drunken-
 ness, which was attended with very important
 consequences; and that without this or some
 other like occasion, there would have been
 no more said about vineyards after the flood
 than before, in a history so short as that of
Genesis, which comprehends the account of
 two thousand years (for so long and some-
 what longer was it from the *creation* to the
 time of *Abraham*) in the space of a few
 pages. Nor does *Noah’s* drunkenness ne-
 cessarily

cessarily argue his being ignorant of the nature of wine ; since another reason may be given of it, his not being so much upon his guard as he ought to have been, or not so well able to bear the strength of the liquor : as either of these might proceed from his having been probably for several years without the use of wine. The joy of the first vintage, the first after the world's *restoration*, was the greater upon this account, and tempted the *Patriarch* to drink more largely than he had ever done before ; when for want of being accustomed to it for some time, or perhaps through bodily weakness, he was not qualified to drink so much.

LET us make two reflections on what has been offered :

I. SEE here the kind concern which God has express'd for our *souls*, in so ordering things by his wise providence, that the earth should be *less delightful* than it had been, that it might be the *less insnaring*. The *soul* being the principal part of Man the happiness of the *soul* is chiefly to be minded, and the dangers to which 'tis liable are chiefly to be guarded against. Now the *soul* is by nothing so much endangered as by the passions and appetites of the body, when they are awakned and inflamed by sensual indulgencies and delights. These draw the soul off from minding its own happiness, and are too
often

often mistaken for it. So that we have reason to be thankful that our temptations are no greater on this side. It is really happy for mankind that they are doomed to labour and travel, and that their pleasures here have a great many disagreeable mixtures. Were it not for this, how soon would the soul be melted down into a life of sense? We see how it is now with those who live at their ease, and have opportunities of gratifying the flesh with its affections and lusts. Like ^k *Solomon, whatsoever their eyes desire they keep not from them, and withhold not their heart from any joy.* They give themselves up to an indolent and voluptuous life. This is too generally the character of men of wealth and fortune; and upon this account they have a great deal of reason to be reconciled to their condition whose circumstances will not allow them to take those full intoxicating draughts of pleasure which some do. God is kinder to them herein than they commonly apprehend. Let us take the hint, or rather let us follow so plain an admonition, and reflect, that this world is not our home, nor the earth our portion, unless we chuse it for such to the neglect of a heavenly country. And let this reflection cure us of our fondness for this life and the things of it, and ingage us ^l *by patient*

^k Eccles. ii. 10. ^l Rom. ii. 7.

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*patient continuance in well doing to seek for
glory and honour and immortality.*

2. LET us observe with thankfulness that God has not neglected making any necessary provision for our *bodies*. ^m *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world, and all that dwell therein.* The earth even now has its *fulness*, sufficient to answer the *real needs* of all mankind, and under the management of temperance and industry to supply them with every sort of conveniences too. God gives us as much as suits the present frame of our nature, which he knows perfectly well, and a state of probation for another life. Let us gratefully acknowledge his gifts, and use them with a wise sobriety and generous liberality according as God shall enable us, and then we shall not want any thing necessary to our real happiness, but certainly enjoy that portion which God sees to be best for us, and find ⁿ *all things* (prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, pleasure and pain, success and disappointment) *to work together for our good* in the last and most important result. I would not be understood by any thing I have before said, to assert, that the *antediluvians* had the better of us in every thing, even as to the *present* life. In the serenity of the air, the equality of the seasons,

^m Psal. xxiv. 1.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 28.

sons, and the nobler, more wholesome and better concocted juices yielded by the fruits of the earth, it is very probable they excelled us. But then if we consider the great *improvements* which have been made in the several arts and professions of life since that time, particularly as to *clothing* the body, *building* of houses, and *cultivating* the land, all which tend very much to the more comfortable accommodation of human life, we shall be sensible that the difference is not so great between them and us, as to present enjoyment, as it may on first sight appear. The *scripture* history indeed will not suffer us to think, that the lives of the first men were so unprovided upon all these accounts as some *heathen* authors have represented them, and not without reason, if their notion were true; that men, and other animals sprung at first out of the earth, as it were by *chance*, without the care or interest of *Providence* in their production or conservation. No wonder if such friendless beings, destitute of all those helps and conveniencies in the midst of which we are brought forth into the world, did many of them perish with hunger and cold, and by numberless unavoidable accidents. But from the *° sacred records* we know, that mankind were never in such a forlorn condition as this, that they
were

were the charge of Providence from the very beginning ; and that not only the necessary arts of life, but such as are subservient to pleasure were not unknown before the flood. However still there is no reason to think, that they equalled us in respect of many things, which are considerable helps to the passing life both more securely and more commodiously. Let us not therefore be unthankful for the advantages we enjoy under the care of divine Providence, influencing and blessing the endeavours and inventions of mankind ; at the same time remembering, that all these things are of small importance, in comparison with those which regard our everlasting state, as to which our condition is unspeakably better than theirs who lived in the first ages of the world, or in any time before our Saviour, or who live now where the gospel is unknown.

LET this suffice for the first observation on the text. The

II^d. PROPOSITION, The decree or purpose of God to preserve the earth in the state into which he put it after the flood, as long as the earth itself should endure, I shall consider in the next discourse.



S E R M O N VII.

Of God's covenant with *Noah* after
the flood.

G E N. viii. 21, 22.

— *And the Lord said in his heart I will not, again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

IN a preceding discourse I observ'd that the words led us to consider these *two* things:

I. GOD'S renewing the face of the earth after the deluge, and making it fit to be inhabited as before: this is plainly implied

implied in the words—on this I have discoursed; and,

II. HIS decree or purpose to preserve the earth in the state into which he now put it, as long as the earth itself should continue.—Of this I am now to treat. And it may be proper to consider the several parts of this decree in the order in which they are placed in the text.

I. THE *first* thing determined is, *I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake.* This I apprehend refers to the first curse on the ground, for the disobedience of man in eating the *forbidden fruit*. Within the period or time of the old world there were two remarkable and universal changes which happen'd to the earth, both by way of judgment; the former, the curse brought upon it by the sin of *Adam*; the latter, the utter desolation by the flood, occasioned by the monstrous wickedness of the antediluvian race, when *God smote every living thing*. Now it was decreed that in the new world, which had its beginning from the flood, the vengeance of heaven should never be display'd after this manner: God would neither *curse the ground* as he did immediately after the fall, nor *destroy every living thing upon it* as he did at the time of the deluge. And there is this farther reason for thinking that

that the deluge is not referred to in the first part of the decree, when *God saith that he will not any more curse the ground*; that the deluge is never express'd after this manner: whereas almost the very same words are to be met with in the sentence pronounced for the first sin, *a cursed is the ground for thy sake*: to which how exactly doth the text answer, *I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake?* A plain indication that one of these relates to the other. The first curse consisted in the earth's being render'd less fit for the use of man than it was before; by which means at the same time that there was an *abatement* in his *pleasure*, his *labour* was *increas'd*, chiefly by the necessity he was now under of being at endless trouble in freeing the earth from those thorns and thistles, and probably other weeds and noxious plants, which from this time sprung up in such abundance. This would frequently oblige him to *eat bread in the sweat of his face*, in which there was really a *secret* blessing mingled with the curse, and is so still; there being none who have generally more health, and of consequence a truer enjoyment of life than those, who either necessarily or voluntarily employ themselves in some bodily labour even to *sweating*. No better friend to health than labour and exercise, nor more

useful preservative against those vices which too commonly grow out of ease and idleness. This is reason enough for permitting the first curse upon the ground to continue. But then there is assurance given us that no *further* curse shall be inflicted. The earth's *second* period begins with a blessing as the *first* did, tho' it does not begin so happily; to make amends for which it shall be secure from being cursed as the first was. We may very well say that God delighteth not in cursing, but contrary-wise in blessing. This is the most natural exercise of infinite Goodness. We indeed read of ^b *mens being cursed in the city and in the field, in their basket and in their store; the fruit of their body, the fruit of their land, the increase of their kine, and the flocks of their sheep, in their coming in and their going out.* But then as these are curses relating only to *particular* persons, not to *all* mankind, to some small parts of the earth not to all; so it is only when men *refuse to hearken to the voice of the Lord their God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes* which he has made known to them in his word, and by the voice of their own consciences; when instead of remembering God to honour and obey him, they go on multiplying their transgressions against him; 'tis only in this case that all these

‡ Deut. xxviii. 15—19.

these curses come upon them. Otherwise as God will not curse the earth in general, so nor the portion of particular persons. For tho' the good man may not always prosper in temporals, even when he is most observant of his duty, tho' *his house may not be so with God* as he could wish, and the earth may with-hold its increase; yet, take notice, none of these things to him are in the nature of a *curse*, being no arguments of the displeasure of God against him, nor intended so properly to *punish* sin as to *prevent* it, and to *try* and *improve* his virtues. Indeed as to all those who have an interest in the *second Adam* by a living faith and love unfeigned, we may be allowed to say, that they are not only safe from any additional curse while they continue in their uprightness, but are in some sense entirely discharged from the original curse inflicted for the sin of the *first Adam*; I mean from the *malignity* of that curse, tho' not from the *external* effects of it. *They are blessed of God*, and in consequence of that *all things are blessed to them*. Tho' their portion is not in itself so comfortable, as it would have been in the *paradisiacal* earth, yet it has no curse, no evil appendage annexed to it. Their covenant right to it, and the enjoyment which *through the gift of God* they

have of it, makes it better than an abode in *Paradise* could have been without the *special* favour of the Almighty. In the greatest straits they have not barely a sufficiency, but can say that ^d *all things are theirs, because they are Christ's, and Christ is God's*. And, which is yet more reviving to think of, they know there is a state remaining for the people of God, ^e *when there shall be no more curse*, i. e. when every unhappy consequence of the fall shall cease; when the curse upon man, by which he lost immortality, and that upon his outward enjoyments and possessions, by means whereof less comfort and happiness is to be extracted from them, shall be removed together; and both he himself, and his condition, shall be made as perfect as they can be, and so continue for ever. Which, by the way, seems to overthrow that fancy of a *learned man* mentioned before, that these *two* curses, one upon *man*, the other upon the *ground*, were to be removed at *different* times, and by *different* persons; since it is only of the next world, when all the righteous shall put on immortality, that it is said, *there shall be no more curse*. Whatever effect the first curse had shall then be done away, and not till then. Now indeed we are sure that *God will not again curse the ground any more* ;
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^d 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.^e Revel. xxii. 3.

by which is meant, that there shall be no *new* curse, not that the earth shall be as delightful and commodious an abode as it was before the fall; this cannot be expected. And no great matter tho' it cannot, since we have the prospect of a state so much exceeding in happiness even that of innocence itself; this latter falling as far short of it as innocence does of perfection.—So much for the first part of the words, *The decree of God not to curse the ground any more for man's sake.*

2. IT is added next, *for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* It is very strange doctrine which has been built upon this passage of Scripture, compared with another which sounds somewhat like it, concerning the *sovereignty* of God; as if (instead of being the *sovereignty* of a most wise, and holy, and gracious Being, who does indeed [†] *whatsoever he pleases in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth here below*; but whom nothing pleases or can please, excepting that which infinite *wisdom* approves, and is consonant to infinite *holiness and goodness*) it consisted in God's acting without all regard to the nature and reason of things, making the very same thing to be a reason for his doing an action, and for his not doing it; not because

† Dan. iv. 35.

the circumstances are different, but because he will. God's bringing a flood upon the earth, by which the whole world was very nigh destroy'd, and this not many hundred years after it was created, was so astonishing an event, that the *sacred* historian thought proper to give the reason of it; *viz.* [§] that *the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Now because there is some resemblance between these words and those in the text, *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth,* which according to our translation is assign'd as the ground of God's determining to curse the earth no more, a *certain author* hastily concludes, that 'tis the glory of God to act as an *absolute* sovereign, ordering things in the course of his Providence after this or a contrary manner, not because his *wisdom*, or *justice*, or *goodness* direct to it as best, but merely because he shall show his *irresistible power* herein, of which the case before us is, he thinks, an instance; the *wickedness* of man being the reason of his drowning the earth, and of his purposing not to punish it any more after the same manner, only because he was minded it should be so. It must be own'd here is some difficulty, but none as I apprehend

§ Gen. vi. 5.

prehend that is insuperable, or that we had not much better leave in its full force, than have recourse to such a solution. For if God proceeded in this matter by *absolute sovereignty*, the *wickedness* of man was not the real cause of the flood, but *mere will and pleasure*, contrary to the express declaration of scripture: and if it be said, that making the *wickedness* of man a reason for not cursing the ground after the flood might be to show his *sovereignty*, tho' the former was the effect of vindictive justice, the answer is easy; that the *wickedness* of man would not then be the true reason, but the *sovereignty* of God notwithstanding that *wickedness*, and that therefore one as well as the other is to be resolved into the *wisdom* of God as the supreme Governour of the world; that wisdom which never proceeds but upon the best reasons, whether we are capable of judging of the goodness of these reasons or no. This then would be answer sufficient; to which we may add *two* observations which quite overturn the foundation of this notable reasoning. The *first* is, that the *hebrew* particule which we translate *for*, is sometimes rendred *although*, and ought to have been so rendred here, if the before-mentioned absurdity was no other way to be avoided. *Although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* This

shall not hinder me from doing them good, nor alter the thoughts of mercy which I have purposed towards them. The *other* observation is, that these two passages, when carefully examined, are not so very much alike as they are commonly thought to be. Let us briefly compare them. EVERY *imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil* CONTINUALLY. So it is describ'd in the vith of *Genesis*; *The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*; so it is in the text. And don't you upon the bare hearing these two passages readily discern a difference? In the former 'tis *every imagination*, in the latter the word *every* is omitted; in the former it is *only evil*, in the latter without the word *only*; in the former it is added, *continually*, which is not in the latter. In the latter passage there is one expression which is not in the former, and that is *from his youth* or earliest life; but this concurs with the rest, to shew the different meaning of the two passages; *one* of which speaks of the *great wickedness* of mankind before the flood, their *habitual corruption*, and this grown to such an enormous height thro' long custom in sinning, that their case was become desperate and incurable, which was the reason of God's extirpating the whole race with the exception of eight persons; the *other* mentions only the
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the *early proneness* there is in mankind to go astray, without any of those aggravating terms which are used in the first case. This being premised, I shall now proceed to a more distinct consideration of the connection which these words, *for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, have with the other parts of the text. They may either relate only to the preceding words, *I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake*, or to those also which follow. I shall consider them in their relation to the former part of the verse, to which I am inclined to think they peculiarly refer, coming in immediately after, and thereby separating between *God's cursing the ground*, and *smiting every living thing*. God cursed the ground at first for *Adam's sake*; here it is said, that he would not any more curse it for *man's sake*; the reason of which is added, *for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*. As much as to say, "Allowance is
 " to be made for the *present* weakness and
 " disorder of human nature, and those
 " strong inclinations and desires after *sen-
 " sual* good, by which men are very early
 " tempted to forget God and transgress his
 " commandments." This reason for God's *not cursing* the ground after the *flood*, seems to be secretly opposed to the reason of his *cursing* it after the *fall*. God cursed the
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earth for *Adam's* sake, because tho' he was created with a ripeness and rectitude in all his faculties, and placed in a garden of delights, he yet disobeyed a plain and easy command of his maker and benefactor : This greatly aggravated the guilt of his first transgression. His nature was *perfectly* sound, his affections regular, and consequently his judgment unperverted. So that for him not to hearken to the voice of God out of whose hands he so lately came, and in such a state of moral soundness, was utterly inexcusable. But, alas! the constitution we are born with, and the circumstances in which we are bred and educated, are far from being so advantageous; our passions get loose and range after a variety of objects, fixing where they ought not, and growing headstrong and impetuous before we have strength of reason to direct and govern them; to which may be added the many bad examples with which we are continually surrounded from the very first dawn of reason : so that it is no wonder if *the imagination of our heart is evil from our youth*, that is, if our affections are very soon engaged by present sensible things; and, mistaking these for our felicity, we too commonly neglect the pursuit of that which is truly such. God ^h *who knoweth our frame and remembreth that we are but dust* in other respects besides that of our *mortality*, who is acquainted

^h Psa. ciii. 14.

acquainted with all our infirmities, the imperfection of our reasonable powers, the strength of our passions, the numerousness and violence of temptations; has compassion upon us, and is ready to make all the gracious abatements which we need and our case will bear. This he shews in his readiness to forgive us all our sins upon our sincere repentance, kindly offering us his assistance to enable us to do all that he requires of us, and rewarding our sincere tho' very imperfect obedience with eternal life. The original of all this is his gracious goodness, which pities the frailties of mankind. And the same tender compassion we discover in these words, *I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* I will consider man as he is in his present low estate, and expect no more from him than in this state, with all the disadvantages of it, he is able to perform. This is so far from being an argument for continuing in sin, that it is one of the most powerful motives which can be to engage every one of an ingenuous mind to hate sin, and to love God and his duty, that he may walk worthy of so much goodness. Who that reflects and considers things as he ought, but must resolve to deny himself and cross his irregular appetites, whatever pains it may cost him
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to do so, when God is so very ready to overlook and forgive those failings to which he is liable, by means of those appetites, to give him strength to counter-act them, and will so gloriously recompence his resistance of and victories over them?

3. THE next clause to be considered is, *neither will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done*, meaning by the flood; when, according to the relation of that matter in the sacred history, ⁱ *all flesh that moved upon the earth, fowl and cattle, and beast, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man; all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was on the dry land died: every living substance was destroyed from the earth, and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark, by whom the earth was to be again replenish'd.* And that there might be no apprehension of a second flood, God not only *determined within himself never more to smite every living thing in that manner,* but ^k *established his covenant with Noah and his seed after him, and with every living creature that was with him, that all flesh should not be cut off any more by the waters of a flood, setting his bow in the cloud for a token of the covenant between him and the earth: that as often as they saw this bow,*

ⁱ Gen. vii. 21.—

^k Gen. ix. 9.—

below, they might call to remembrance God's solemn promise and irreverfible decree not to lay wafte the earth with fuch a fweeping judgment any more. He might by inundations, or partial deluges, deftroy the inhabitants of particular places and countries; this he might judge neceffary in his providential government of the world: but this would not be *fmiting every living thing* as in the flood, On the contrary, the lives deftroyed on fuch extraordinary occafions would bear no proportion to the great body of mankind, the lofs fuftain'd would hardly be fenfible. It is farther certain, that every thing which has breath muft in a longer or fhorter time refign that breath and die, *time* and *death* are *universal conquerors*; but then their conquefts are *gradual*, fo as to be lefs difcernible. As one generation paffeth away, another cometh and filleth up their room, in much the fame manner as it is in the ranks of a battle, by which means the number of men upon the earth is kept intire, and rather increafed than leffened. Whereas in the univerfal deluge the breath of every living thing was extinguifhed at once, root and branch, parents and children, old and young, not only fome of each fort but all, were together carried away into eternity without diftinction, without any exception more than of eight perfons. But no fuch over-flowing
fcourge

scourge shall pass thro' the earth any more. The Lord stay'd his hand, and said *it is enough*. One such desolation is enough for an example of the *dependence* of all things upon God, and as an *earnest* of the final punishment of all ungodly impenitent sinners.

I. THAT *one* deluge in which God smote every living thing is example sufficient, to those who rightly consider it, of the *dependence* of all things upon him as his creatures, and the objects of his constant providential care. There is no room for setting up blind and unconscious *nature* as a proper cause or principle of things, independent of the will and over-ruling agency of a wise and all-powerful Deity. There is what we call the natural course and order of things, but this was not settled at first, nor is it still continued by *nature* itself (which is a mere name taken apart from the things themselves) but *by God*. *Nature* cannot alter its own course; *nature* could not cover the earth with the waters of a flood, much less remove them again. All the powers of *natural* causes are not equal to this effect; which is alike * *unquestionable* from the monuments of it still remaining, and *unaccountable* without having recourse to the
miracu-

* See Ray's *Phyfic. Theol. Disc. D. 2. and Revelat. Examined. Diff. 11—14.*

miraculous interposition of a supreme Being, who having made the world by his almighty power, and by the same power still preserving it, can when he pleases, destroy it, and then repair and renew it again. Nay were it not for his universal Providence sustaining and enlivening the whole frame of nature, there would be no such thing as a living creature upon the earth, but all would be one dead, unanimated, unshapen mass. ^l *He giveth to all life and breath and all things*; it is not to *nature*, but to his *visitation*, who is the author and preserver of nature, that they owe their continuance in life, and every thing belonging to it. ^m *The eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their food in due season: wherefore let every thing that has breath praise the Lord.*

2. THAT *one* universal deluge was sufficient as an *earnest* of the final punishment of all ungodly impenitent sinners. Notwithstanding the judgments of God which are abroad in the earth, too many will not be persuaded to learn righteousness, because they think they may escape without it. All wicked men are not punished, take them all together, the number of those who escape and even prosper in the world is much greater than of those who *remarkably* suffer; which tempts them to think, that
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^l Acts xvii. 25.

^m Psal. cxlv. 15. cl. 6.

it is not so much the effect of the *divine* displeasure, as the natural result of *second* causes that any suffer: from whence they conclude that they are safe in a course of sin; having nothing to fear either here or hereafter. But now what will they say to this instance of the impartial judgment of God, the deluge of *Noah*, when a whole world of sinners were punished with utter destruction, none escaping? And what is this but an *example* of that vengeance which shall overtake all the wicked of the earth at last, ⁿ *for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever?* Of which grand catastrophe, *Enoch* also, the seventh from Adam, and who was translated before the flood, prophesied saying, *Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly amongst them of all their ungodly deeds, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.* This prophecy of *Enoch* was partly accomplished in the deluge, but has a farther reference to a greater event prefigured by the former, even to the final overthrow of all the enemies of God, not those of one generation only as in the flood, but of all who have lived from the beginning of the world, and died as they lived; none of these, whatever prosperity might

ⁿ Jude, ver. 13, 14, 15.

might attend them while they were in the world, and how peaceably soever they might be permitted to depart out of it, are withdrawn out of the notice of God's eye, or the reach of his arm. He will fetch them all back again, their souls from the mansions of separate spirits, and their bodies from the grave, and consume them all together as one universal sacrifice to his justice. Of this the general deluge was a sure and melancholy *earnest*; and being abundantly sufficient for that purpose as a warning to those who read *too flee from the wrath to come*; there was no occasion that God upon any such account should again smite every living thing as he had done.

4. THE decree concludes with these words, *while the earth remaineth seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.* Not that any such thing as this had happened before the flood, to which time those words are by some made to look back. For, whatever irregularity be suppos'd in the seasons during that period, can it be said with tolerable propriety, that *seed-time and harvest, night and day had then ceased?* Must not the human race have ceas'd with them? But now heaven and earth being as it were, or in appearance, mingled together in the deluge, there was a kind of cessation of all

these, an interruption in the course of nature; all things were blended as in a chaos. To which may be added, that this mode of expression might be us'd with regard to the forlorn face of nature at that time; as unpromising as the earth look'd upon the retiring of the waters from it, God intended that it should again be inhabited, and that there should be a regular succession of the seasons as before. Here and there this regularity may on some occasions seem to fail, and one season to have usurp'd the place of another; by means of which, dearths and famines and other calamities may insue, in order to warn, instruct, and chastise the thoughtless and rebellious sons of men. And it is not impossible, that natural decays, as the earth grows more aged, and gradual alterations which fall out in the course of time, may in some measure affect the order of things: But all this does not invalidate the truth of what is here said, *that none of these things should cease*; perhaps not in *any* part of the earth altogether, much less in the greater part, and less still over all the earth. Here let us briefly consider two or three things which are very observable: 1. A beautiful and regular variety. 2. An amazing constancy in this regular variety. 3. An intimation that this regular constant succession of
things

things would *at last*, tho' long first, come to a period ; *while the earth remaineth*, these things were not to cease, tacitly implying that the earth should continue many ages, but not always. The time would come when the *earth itself should pass away*, and then all those things with regard to the earth must necessarily have an end.

I. ONE thing observable in the words, and which merits the most serious attention, is the beautiful and regular variety with which nature presents us in the succession of *night and day*, of *summer and winter*. All these are beautiful in their season, and proclaim aloud the wisdom of God which has dispos'd things in such order, and his superintending providence which preserves them in it. As to *day and night* there is something grateful in this vicissitude, as well as convenient in the present state. ° *Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun* ; absolutely considered, there is to be sure no comparison between light and darkness, either as to pleasure or usefulness ; nor between the light of the sun and any other light which is made, in some imperfect degree, to supply its place. But sweet as light is 'tis *much sweeter* after an interval of darkness. As pleasant as it is to behold the sun, this pleasure is increas'd by

his being absent from us every four and twenty hours. By this means too nature hath mark'd out to those who live in temperate climates proper times for labour and rest, so that *day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge*. Besides which it is to be considered, that if it was *always day* unto one half of our earthly globe, the other part must be buried in *perpetual darkness*; and so *part* only of the earth would be habitable instead of the *whole* as it is now. And why should any find fault with the alternate reign of the night? Is it not to this we owe the dews, which being rais'd by the heat of the day are condens'd and fall again in the cool of the evening and the night, to the great refreshment of the plants of the earth? And does not the same thing contribute to the better concocting and perfecting the juices of the plants, which in a perpetual sunshine would perspire too sensibly and too fast?

As to *seed-time* and *harvest*; ⁹ *thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or any other grain; but God giveth it a body as it has pleas'd him, and to every seed its own body*. And is it not surprizing to think of the transformation which the seeds of things undergo

^p Psal. xix. 2.

⁹ I Cor. xv. 37, 38.

dergo by being buried in the earth; how first *the blade springs up, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*; which is but one instance among ten thousand? What an infinite variety is there in the shapes, colours, odours, tastes, and virtues, of plants and flowers and fruits? and how much the more agreeable is each of them for this variety? What is it brings all these out of the earth in their season? doubtless the *providence* of God as the *first cause*, and *heat* as the principal and more immediate *second cause*; but the *cold* too contributes its share, by shutting in the subterranean warmth, and so gently fermenting the juices of the seeds, and preventing their pushing too hastily into the light. The *cold* too is indirectly a means of purifying the air, and invigorating the *earth* and the *bodies of men*; so that *fire and hail, snow and vapour praise the Lord*. He has set *summer* and *winter* one over against the other; and who that sees the face of the earth in winter, when all those which we call annual plants die, and the plants and trees which survive appear for the greater part of them in a withering dying state; who that sees this, were it not for his past experience which has shown him the difference, would imagine that a few months were capable of

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effecting such a change as we behold in summer? And that there is not only this variety in the seasons, but such a regular succession of one to the other, is it not a demonstrative proof of things being ordered and settled as they are by *infinite wisdom and goodness*? These things immediately depend upon the *position* of the *earth* with regard to the *sun*, and the *motion* of one round the other; and to what but a supremely *wise and almighty cause* must we ascribe it, that the earth is so plac'd and so mov'd; or the sun and other heavenly bodies made to roll round that? To make day and night, and to bring about a regular succession of these, and of the seasons of the year, so that every season may answer a several purpose, and all together conspire to the preservation and comfort of the human and every other species of living creatures, the concurrence of various causes, and particularly such an exact adjustment of the distances, situations, and motions of the sun and earth, and other great bodies of the universe is required, as can never be supposed to be *merely casual*. Things could not be better framed and disposed, if the greatest possible power under the direction of the most consummate skill had the framing and disposing of them; which every wise man will judge reason enough to believe

believe that they were *actually* fram'd and dispos'd by such a power and skill.

2. WITH this beautiful and regular variety, here is a most amazing constancy. It was decreed and promis'd, that *while the earth remained, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, heat and cold, day and night should not cease*; and accordingly *they have not ceased*, tho' 'tis now *four thousand years* ago that the earth was drown'd with a flood, and almost *six thousand* since it was first created. Is not this a great while for such a vast and complicated machine, consisting of so unconceivable a diversity of parts and motions, to go on without any stop or irregular deviations from the general laws by which it is governed? Does this look like *chance*? Does it not rather evidently discover a most wise and powerful and good Providence, which co-exists with all generations, and directs all these motions, and over-rules all the changes of time, proceeding itself by one and the same well laid and inimitable design? *For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven, thy faithfulness is unto all generations. Thou hast established the earth and it abideth, they continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy servants.* These are the *ordinances* of the most high, there-

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‡ Pfal. cxix. 89—91.

fore they *continue*; they are *his servants*, and therefore go on from age to age unwearied in the offices which he has appointed them. So that the reasoning of those scoffers mentioned by the apostle ^t *Peter*, who encourage themselves to cast off the fear of God from the *constancy* of his works, is senseless, as well as impious. *Where, say they, is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep* (or excepting that the fathers are fallen asleep, or that the inhabitants of the world are continually new) *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world.* Tho' this is not strictly true neither, since at the flood the foundations of the world were out of course, as the apostle takes notice immediately after. But is not this a very strange objection? there is *no providence*, and consequently *no judgment to come*, because there is a *settled course and method* in which things proceed one age after another. Is not this turning that very thing into an *objection* against Providence, which is the most obvious *demonstration* of it, and is so acknowledged even by *heathen* writers *? “ The *order* of the stars and their *constancy* “ through all time does neither agree with “ the notion of *nature* or *necessity*, for it is “ full of *reason*; nor of *chance* which is too “ much

^t 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

* Cicero.

“ much a friend to *variety* or change to
 “ allow of such a constancy.” Were there
 variety only it would have more the face
 of *chance*, but here is *variety with unity*, a
 variety of parts and motions with an unity
 of design, and both these crown'd with
 constancy; which compleats the argument,
 and leaves those without excuse who behold-
 ing such manifest signatures of a most wise,
 and powerful, and gracious Providence, will
 not yet be brought to acknowledge it, or
 to perform the duties which they owe it.
 The conclusion is that “ *God commanded and
 they were created; he has also established them
 for ever and ever by a decree which shall not
 pass.*”

3. THE last thing observable in the
 text is an intimation, that this regular con-
 stant succession of things will at last, tho'
long first, come to a period. *While the earth
 remaineth* these things are never to cease;
 plainly implying that the earth was to con-
 tinue many ages, but not always. The
 time would come when the earth itself
 should pass away, and then all these or-
 dinances with regard to the earth must ne-
 cessarily have an end. And accordingly it
 has been a † tradition of antient times con-
 firmed by sacred writ, that *the world is to
 perish*

“ Psal. cxlviii. 5, 6.

† *Esse quoque in Fatis, &c.* OVID.

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perish by an universal conflagration. Its first
destruction was by *water*; the *second* will be
by *fire*; after which there will be no far-
ther succession of men upon it; ^w *no marry-*
ing and being given in marriage as there
was after the flood, even though there
should be a *renovation* of the earth itself
as some have imagin'd. St. *Peter* in an-
swer to the objection of the *profane* scof-
fers before mentioned, after having taken
notice of the deluge by which God ex-
ecuted his vengeance upon the old world,
goes on to observe, that ^x *the heavens*
and the earth which are now, by the same
word are kept in store, reserved unto fire
against the day of judgment, and perdition of
ungodly men; and then in very strong and
moving language describes that awful day.
The day of the Lord will come as a thief in
the night, in which the heavens shall pass a-
way with a great noise, and the elements
shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also
and the works that are therein shall be burnt
up; from whence he infers, *seeing then*
that all these things shall be dissolved, what
manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy
conversation and godliness; looking for and
hasting to the coming of the day of God?
And indeed who can make any other use
of such a consideration who lays it to heart

as

^w Luke xx. 35.

^x 2 Pet. iii. 7.—3.

as he ought to do? Will the earth be burnt? so will *all the wicked* of the earth too. The *righteous* shall be saved from the *fire*, as righteous *Noah* was from perishing in the *water*; when ^y *the sinners in Zion shall be afraid, and fearfulness shall take hold of the hypocrites*; ^z *they shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall ever be with the Lord.* ^a *Wherefore, beloved, seeing we look for such things, let us be diligent that we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.*

LET me now conclude with a very brief *application* of this subject.

AND what has been said should engage us all to give God the glory of *this part* of his providential care and government of the world. I say *this part* of it; for the *earth* itself is but a very small part of the *material* creation; (a single grain as it were in comparison of the universe) and as we have reason to think the number of mankind in the *moral* world bears no greater proportion to *all other intelligent* beings; so what relates to this earth must, comparatively speaking, be no considerable part of the works of Providence. But how inconsiderable soever it be merely *as a part* of the intire scheme or design of Providence, of which we are very poor judges, it is *in itself* a very noble

^y Isai. xxxiii. 14. ^z 1 Theff. iv. 17. ^a 2 Pet. iii. 14.

noble and glorious display of God's infinite perfections, and as such ought to be observed and acknowledged by us, who are in a peculiar manner parties concerned. Let us adore the *wisdom* of God which has establish'd such an admirable order and disposition of things in the *natural* world, and such a connection between the *natural* and the *moral* world, or the world of mankind. The present constitution of things, with respect to the earth and its circumstances (if I may so call them) that is, the qualities of the atmosphere, and nature of the several seasons, is in *itself* wonderful. 'Tis still more wonderful as *exactly adapted* to the present circumstances of human nature, and the character and state of mankind. Man himself being mutable and imperfect, every thing about him carries the marks of the same mutability and imperfection. Things are very well suited to a state of trial; especially of beings who have lost their *innocence*, and have both many sins to answer for, and many irregular affections to be cured. We are neither treated as creatures arriv'd to their utmost *perfection*, nor as sinners past all *hope*; but in a middle way between both; alike fitted to teach us humility, and patience, and resignation on the one hand, and to encourage our faith and hope on the other; which

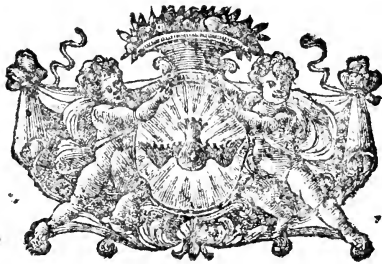
which is a plain instance of the *wisdom* of the supreme Being in the dispensations of his providence towards us. Let us also magnify the *power* of God, by our pious acknowledgments of this perfection, which he himself has so remarkably magnified in maintaining from age to age the order of the visible creation, and particularly of *this* part of it. *Matter* being in its own nature a perfectly *unactive* principle, and as composed of parts which do not hang together by any propriety inherent in themselves, 'tis impossible that such a frame and order of things should be continued without the *perpetual* superintendency and influence of the *first cause*. And while we acknowledge that *wisdom* and *power* belong to God, let us not be backward to pay him the tribute of praise which his great *goodness* to the children of men requires from us.—If these words, *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, do not peculiarly relate to the first clause of the text, *I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake*, but in common to that and the other parts of it; perhaps in that case instead of *for the imagination*, &c. the more proper translation will be, *although the imagination*, &c. as I told you the *hebrew* particle is sometimes rendred. And then these words will not be a *reason* of God's not cursing the
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the ground, and smiting every living thing, and putting an end to the orderly return of the seasons, (as they found now) but a consideration fitted to illustrate the *goodness* of God, that notwithstanding *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, he yet determines ^b *not to leave men without witness* of his kind regard to them in every age of the world, *giving them rain and sun-shine, and fruitful seasons, and filling their hearts with food and gladness*. But then we must not restrain the signification of this exception to any disorder of our nature which is *original* and *unavoidable*, for as much as we are no way answerable for this; but must understand it of those *early* departures from God, and transgressions of his law, which arise *too commonly* indeed, but *not necessarily*, out of the circumstances of our birth and education. Let us bless God who has not long since put an end to the human race, notwithstanding men so generally acting in contradiction to their reason, as soon as they come to the use of it; and when become capable of glorifying God, yet so seldom taking any care to do it. However early or universal this degeneracy may be, let us heartily endeavour to be exceptions from it; as nothing further is necessary under the

^b Acts xiv. 17.

the influences of *divine grace* to our being so, but that we *sincerely* and *constantly* endeavour it. ^c *Let us glorify God with our bodies and with our souls which are his,* and in the use and enjoyment of all those earthly blessings which in the course of his providence he bestows upon us; and then we may be sure of passing at death into a more perfect state, where there are no such *revolutions* as in the present, but one unchangeable flow of happiness to eternal ages.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 20.





S E R M O N VIII.

Religion one thing, and the one
thing needful.

LUKE X. 42.

But one thing is needful —

WHEN our blessed Lord lived and conversed here upon earth, he was not so poor and despised but he had some real friends, who had the courage to confess him before men, received and entertained him gladly at their houses, and thought themselves greatly honoured by his presence. Of this number were *Lazarus* and his *two* sisters, from whom Jesus, the *friend*, the *prophet*, the *saviour*, never failed of meeting with a most cordial welcome. And well were they rewarded, for it; for 'tis said, ^a that *Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus*. He had a more particular kindness and esteem

^a John xi. 5.

esteem for them, and what could they desire more, or how have their names more honourably recorded! The same, or the like honour have *all his saints*, for Christ is not partial, is never backward to love any *who love him* and true *goodness in sincerity*, but will inroll *their names in the Lamb's book of life*, where they will be found written at the last day under this character affix'd to them, *the lovers and the beloved of Jesus*.

IT was at *Martha's house*, and in reply to somewhat she had said, that our Lord spoke these words. For while she was busied in making provision for her guests, her sister took the opportunity, which the presence and conversation of Christ afforded her, to attend to his divine and heavenly discourses; which occasioned a *complaint* on *Martha's side*; that the whole trouble of the entertainment should be laid on her; and a *request* to our Saviour, that he would put her sister on doing her part. But no words can represent this matter so well, as those of the sacred *historian*, beginning at *ver. 38*. *Now it came to pass as they went, that he entred into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house; and she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbred about much*

erving, and came unto him and said, Lord, dost not thou care that my sister has left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her. In which answer of our Lord to *Martha's* address, we are not to suppose, that he absolutely condemns her looking after the business of the family, and being desirous to entertain her friend in a handsome manner, especially, one so highly valued and greatly revered by her as Christ was; but only her *immoderate* application to these lower concerns, and *too great* sollicitousness to have every thing done in the exactest manner; her being *cumbred with much serving*, and as our Saviour tells her, *troubled about many things*. Nor, farther, are we to conclude that *Martha* had not chosen the *good part* as well as *Mary*, but only that she did not in this particular instance act so consistently with her general choice. — *But one thing is needful*, Here abstracting from the *particular* concern which true christians have in these words, I shall consider them as *universally* instructive, and accordingly briefly treat of this observation from them, *That religion is the one thing needful*. We are not here to understand religion

ligion *objectively*, i. e. as comprehending the doctrines, rules, and promises, of which we have a summary account in our bibles; but as it is made a *personal* thing, a *character* and *possession* of our own, which we call *subjective* religion. 'Tis the same in sense as the *image* or *life* of God in the soul of man; a *prevailing* disposition to every thing that is good, expressed in a constant and uniform regularity of the external conversation. My design in handling this subject is,

I. To shew in what respects religion may properly be stiled *one thing*, And,

II. To prove that it is *the one thing needful*,

I. I AM to shew in what respects religion may be said to be *one thing*. Religion is a *complex* term, it stands for all the virtues and duties of a good life. All these *together* go to constitute what we stile *religion*. And yet though composed of such a variety of parts, it is really but *one thing*, and therein differs from *vice*, which is made up of all *inconsistencies*. Religion is *one* chiefly on the following accounts.

1. RELIGION is *one* in its *object*. All the branches and offices of religion terminate

nate in God, as so many lines in their center, which is the reason that in scripture religion is so often exprest by the *fear of the Lord; seeking and serving God; by coming unto him; and obeying his commandments.* The true ground of these and other expressions of a like kind is, that as there would be no such thing as religion, exactly speaking, if there was no God; so nothing can be judged religion, or any way belonging to it, which hath not its *immediate* or *ultimate* respect unto God. Religion is a comprehensive word, it takes in the whole duty of man, towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves. And tho' indeed, when used in the *strictest* acceptation, only *that* part of our duty which we directly owe to the Deity, passes under the name of religion; yet in a *larger* sense, righteousness and sobriety are also duties of religion, as they flow from a sincere regard to the *authority* of God commanding them, and to his *glory*, which is promoted by them. In this sense, it is necessary that *God* should be *all in all*; that he should be infinitely more than all to our souls, and that in all our actions we should seek to do his will. Without this *singleness* of aim our religion is of no value. We may be *temperate* for *our own* sakes, and *just* for the sake of *others*; but then we should be both just and temperate

perate likewise out of respect to God, to whom we owe all the powers of our nature, and all the comforts and enjoyments of our lives; and to whom therefore we should dedicate ourselves, and all our actions.

^b *Whatever we do, we should do it as unto the Lord*; so *servants* are commanded to *obey their masters*. We are to ^c *set the Lord always before us*, in the *whole* course of our conversation, and more especially then in all *offices of piety, and exercises of devotion*. And if so, what are we to think of those who are so far from having a constant regard to God, that they may please him in the general conduct of their lives, as even in the duties of divine worship to be acted and influenced by other views? For certain such persons are utter strangers to true religion.

2. RELIGION is *one thing* in its *principle*. The *parts* are various, but one and the same *life* is common to all. As many men as there are in the world, so many distinct and individuating principles of life are there, one independent of the other; but we cannot say there are *as many lives*, as there are *parts* and *members* in the *same* man. Life may appear differently according to the different functions of the parts, each *sense* having its peculiar *manner* of perception; but still the

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principle

principle of life, by which the eye sees, the ear hears, the tongue distinguishes tastes, and the whole body feels and moves, is one *indivisible* thing. And so is that *divine principle*, by which the soul lives and acts in a *spiritual* sense. It penetrates the understanding, the conscience, the will, the affections, and is diffused through the whole soul, imparting vigour and activity to every faculty. And what is this *hidden life*? 'tis something which is better *felt*, than *expressed*. That there is such a thing, no truly good man can reasonably doubt, any more than other men can make it a serious question whether they are endowed with the life of sense and reason. But to define and explain it is not so easy. It cannot be any thing distinct from the soul, and properly infused into it; but a certain *rectitude* and *vigour* best known by its effects. For when the powers of the soul are capable of exerting themselves after a holy and spiritual manner, and of conversing with the noblest objects with profit and delight; 'tis by virtue of this life, which actuates them. Then are we partakers of the life of God, and live to God. This is the *unity* of religion, it is a unity of *life* and *power*. And forasmuch as the *same* omnipresent Spirit is the original fountain of this life in all upright minds, by means of which they are inclined and actuated after the

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the same manner; hence it is that ^d *all such are one* in a sense not common to the rest of mankind, and walk together in the most indissoluble bonds. The church of Christ makes but one body, not only in a *political* sense, or as governed by *one head*; but as ^e *filled and animated by one vital spirit*. What a glorious life is this, how sublime, how extensive! This is the true *anima mundi*, or *soul* of the *world*; not like that which has been imagined to move the world of lumpish *matter*, but passing thro' the whole world of renewed sanctified *spirits*, exciting their operations, and making them capable of the most pure and seraphic delights.

3. RELIGION is *one thing* by virtue of the *connection* and *proportion* of its parts. We say the world is *one* because by the order and regularity of the parts, their mutual dependence, and the beauty of the whole frame; it shews itself to have been contrived with *one* wise and universal design. Thus any work of *art*, whether it be a curious engine, or a fine and well compacted building, is *one*; because the parts which compose it are so proportioned and adjusted, as not only to please the eye, but to answer some valuable use; as a clock to measure the time, and a house for the conveniency of habitation. The like unity and

^d John xvii. 22, 23.

^e Ephes. iv. 4.

proportion are discernable in a *religious* life; all the actions of which are link'd together, and constitute one entire and beautiful body of virtue and goodness. *Religion* exemplified in the life is as truly *one* thing, as any the greatest master-piece of *art* or *nature* can be. There is a wonderful order and harmony in a good life; each duty has its proper place, and one grace or virtue is upheld or set off by another; temperance and righteousness by piety, and piety by righteousness and temperance. There is such a connection between the virtues of the christian life, that they can never be separated, it being impossible that a man should practice *any one* virtue in *sincerity*, or upon a principle of *conscience*, who does not live in the discharge of *all*. Nay, and could they be separated, yet neither of them, without the company of the rest, would be half so lovely; godliness not without sobriety and justice, nor justice and sobriety without godliness. In the *moral world* this would be another such monstrous appearance, as a body without hands or feet in the *natural world*. But when *all* the *parts* of religion are united in their respective subordinations to each other, religion appears to its greatest advantage, and is acknowledged to be something divine.

4. RELIGION, in regard of its *scope* and *tendency*, is *one thing*. The whole scope of religion is *happiness*; and in this religion agrees with all the other methods and employments of life, each of which proposes happiness as its end. Let the *means* be what they will, the general *end* to which they are directed is *happiness*. For this the scholar, the merchant, the artizan, the labourer, are all busy; the voluptuary, the covetous, the ambitious, agree in their *common aim* with one another, and with the religious; for they would all be happy, and so would the religious man. But then in another respect the difference between *religion* and *other ways* of life, especially those which are *vicious*, is exceeding great. All the *parts* and *duties* of religion, and all who are *religious*, look towards *one* and the *same* happiness, and the happiness they aim at is the only *true* one. One religious man does not pursue *one kind* of happiness, and another a *quite different*; the design of *one* virtue is not the attainment of a *lesser* felicity, and of another a *greater*; all the virtues, and all the virtuous bending one way, even to the enjoyment of the supreme and all-sufficient Being as the *chief* good and *ultimate* portion of man. But now ask the men of the world what are their ideas of happiness, and you will hardly have the
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very *same* answer from any two of them; one placing it in *sensual* pleasures, another in *riches*, another in *honour* and *power*, with a diversity of circumstances and appendages. And if you enquire farther, you will see, that the *same* person does not confine himself to *one* object, but pursues *several*; and these by means as different as the ends for which they are chosen. O vain and restless condition of human life, where *religion* is not the *guide*! worn and distracted with a *thousand* crossing views, and cares, and interests, which finally leave a man in despair of ever accomplishing his desires. Happy they who consult *religion* in the choice of their *felicity*! they have *one* care, *one* view, *one* interest. To enjoy God is their whole concern, his *favour* is their *life*, his *loving-kindness* even *better* to them *than* *life*. So far as they can enjoy God, so far, and no farther, they are happy in this world; but their enjoyment of God now being very imperfect, compared with that which makes the happiness of the future state, with all the strength of their souls they aspire after that; certain that they shall be perfectly at rest when they shall have attained this end of their faith, and hope, and obedience, the perfection of their nature, and their felicity in the perfect and eternal fruition of the *infinite* good. So much for
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the *first* general, or in what respects *religion* is properly *one thing*.

II. I am next to *prove* that *religion* is the *one thing needful*. The word *needful* is here taken in its most absolute and unlimited sense; according to which *that alone* is needful, which cannot, in *any* case, or upon *any* consideration whatsoever be dispensed with or neglected; the want of which nothing else can supply; and which, if there should arise a competition between that and other things, so that one or other must give place, ought always to be preferred. This is the sense which the term *needful* carries in this place; denoting what is *absolutely*, i. e. *unchangeably, universally, and eternally* needful: and even in this strictest acceptance of the word *religion* is *needful*, but *nothing* else. The particular *characters* or *marks*, by which this *absolute* needfulness of religion is known and distinguished, are these following.

I. RELIGION is *absolutely needful*, because needful to the *essential* or *negative* part of *happiness*. I call that the *essential* part of happiness *without* which a man must needs be *miserable*, of whatever else he is possessed. If therefore it shall appear that religion is thus needful, it must be own'd to be *absolutely* needful; since the first
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thing needful in the apprehension of every reasonable man, and the first thing every such person will look after is, that he *be not miserable*.—But you will ask, when may any one be looked on as *miserable*? I answer, when his condition is such, that he had better *not be* at all, than continue in *such* a condition; and he will be convinced hereof himself when he comes to reflect, and apprehend the truth of his state. And is not this the case of all those who are strangers and enemies to religion? In my opinion it may easily be made appear that it is. To be without religion in the truth of it, is to be without *all love to God*, and *interest in him*; and of whomsoever this may be affirmed, we may truly say they are in such a state of soul, that were they to continue in it, it would *be good for them they had never been born*; and they would have too much reason to wish they could return to their primitive *nothing*. To have *no love to God*, whom we were *made* to love, and whom, by a thousand reasons and motives, we are *obliged* to love, must argue such a depravation of nature, such a fall from our original rectitude, such a disorder and corruption in our rational faculties, as cannot but be attended with the greatest misery; *misery* being nothing else but a *state contrary* to the *nature* which God has given us,

us, and *in* which therefore *nature* can have no rest and satisfaction. — Again, to be without *all interest in God*, which is the case of those who are destitute of religion, is the same as having *no part* in the *chief* good and happiness of man ; for the chief good and only proper happiness of man is God, the fountain and the center of his being. Now, if to be without religion is to be without God, and to be without God is to be without that happiness for which man was originally intended, then to be without religion, is indeed to be miserable. Nothing can be more evident. 'Tis very true, wicked men may not be sensible of this *now*, they may be so far from *acknowledging* their misery, as to be ready to fancy, could they eternally remain in the same condition, they should be happy enough *without* God. But this is only because they do not make any use of their reason. For did they know and consider what it is for a reasonable creature to have his mind and heart *averse* from God, and the exercise of virtue and goodness, they would see it to be a most deplorable circumstance ; and this they will be *forced* to consider one time or other. The mist will vanish from before their eyes, and then they will find themselves to be in a naked and forlorn condition indeed. And as to what they imagine, that, could they
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but make their worldly prosperity eternal, they should be eternally happy, it is a perfect mistake. For, alas! the ground of all that pleasure and amusement which carnal minds have in these things, is their *novelty*; so that in length of *time*, and much more in *eternity*, these vanities would lose all their fancied charms, and appear to be what they are, of little or no real worth: and then, awaking out of this fool's paradise, they would have a lively sense of their misery in being *estranged* from God, and *enemies to him thro' wicked works*. I may appeal to those who admire riches, or honour, or sensual pleasure, whether they have so great an opinion of these things, after they have enjoyed them for some time, as they had at first; whether the delight they afford them does not continually lessen, and consequently, whether it would not entirely vanish, were they only to enjoy them a *thousand years*, and even turn into *loathing* and *disgust*, if there was to be no *end* of enjoyment? And whenever this happened, that these false goods did no longer appear amiable in the eyes of those who had most eagerly pursued them, they would then be sensible of their want of that real, that substantial good, which they had hitherto neglected, and of their misery in wanting it, and so pine away in fruitless remorse and eternal

eternal despair. From hence it follows, that men must be miserable without religion; and, which is more, would at length be convinced of their misery, though they were to have the everlasting possession of those things which do, for some little time, divert and stifle their sense of it. And what then will it be, when they shall at once be *banned* from the *uncreated good*, and *for ever strip'd* of all other good, real and imaginary? Religion therefore is *absolutely* needful, and it is the *only* thing which is so. Other things are needful with relation to this or that particular sort and degree of happiness, not absolutely to the *essential* or *negative* part of felicity, or so as that without them we must fall into unavoidable misery, and have reason to wish that we did not exist at all. To a *worldly happiness* the possessions of the *world* are necessary, and to a *sensual happiness* the pleasures and enjoyments of *sense*; but then a person may be truly happy, who has *neither* of these two sorts of happiness, sensual or worldly. He may be happy in the *peace* and *tranquility* of his mind, in the *conscience* of doing well, in the *evidences* of *God's love*, *devout intercourses* with him, and a well-grounded *hope* and *confidence* towards him, that all things shall turn out well at last. And tho' it should be farther confessed, that in the present state, *religion*
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alone does not render a man so *completely happy*, as an *equal* degree of *religion*, join'd with a *competency* of *outward* good things, yet this will only prove that these things are *relatively needful*, or with respect to certain *degrees* of happiness, not *absolutely* so ; since the truly good man, tho' deprived of them, does not presently become miserable ; but, on the contrary, finds that satisfaction in the duties of religion, and that support from the thoughts of God, from his presence and favour, especially if eminently good, as abundantly compensate his worldly penury, and render his condition, how wretched soever in the account of others, very tolerable to himself.

THIS is the *first* character of a thing *absolutely needful* ; it is needful to the *essential* or *negative* part of happiness ; or *so* needful, that a man without it, and supposed to *continue* without it, must be *miserable*.

2. Religion is *absolutely needful*, as it is alike needful in *all ages* and *nations* of the world ; and not *relatively* to *one* age, and place, and country, which is the case as to a great many other things. The nations of the earth have their *different* languages, and customs, and habits, and rules of civil behaviour ; and all and each of these in the *same* country, are liable to endless *changes* in the course of time : the ground of which difference and vicif-

vicissitude as to all these things is, that they are not founded in the nature and reason of the things themselves, but depend on fancy, and temper, and climate, and numberless accidental circumstances. By which means it comes to pass, that those things which are decent and of good report in *one* part of the world, are not so in *another*, nor in the *same* place at all times. And as opinions and customs vary, so a wise man will change with them, and rather than incur the imputation of an *affected singularity*, which may lessen his character, and render him less useful, will, in these indifferent matters, *become all things to all men*, conforming to the notions, and usages, and rules of speaking and gesture which are received in the place where he lives. All this he will do, because *prudence* makes such a conformity needful, and *charity* too, that he may be capable of doing more good. But then he considers that these things are not needful in their own nature, but only made so by the mutable circumstances of time and place; and therefore he takes care not to confound those things, which have but an occasional and temporary expediency, with those which are of eternal obligation; things of *civil prudence* and decency, with the things of *religion*. A *right temper* of soul towards God, consisting in *fear*, and *love*,

and *gratitude*, and *adoration*, and *trust*; and towards *man*, consisting in *universal benevolence* or good will; and both these manifested in all the actions and virtues of a holy and good life, is what I mean by *religion*. Now these things are in their *nature* good and excellent, and estimable, and therefore cannot cease to be so by change of place or time. 'Tis true, men may and often have different notions as to *religion* itself, but then it is mostly with respect to the *speculative doctrines* of religion, or *modes* of divine worship, not in regard of the *parts* and *duties* of a virtuous and pious behaviour. And whatever variety, and alteration there may be in either of these, *i. e.* in religious sentiments or practices; there ought to be an agreement and uniformity as far forth as God has discovered his will to men, and they have opportunities of coming to the knowledge of it. ^f *Whereto they have attained, they should walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing*, the *edification* of themselves and others in true goodness. And however common and prevailing, or of how long standing soever any opinions or customs are in matters of religion, a man is to carry his *conformity* no farther than his *conscience* gives him leave; remembering that religion is not a thing to be moulded and fashioned after the will of man,

^f Phil. iii. 13.

man, and the humour of the times; that a *great part* of religion, indeed *all* of it which *immediately* and *evidently* regards a heavenly and devout temper of soul, and a regular and good life, is as *immutable* in its nature as *God himself*, its *author*, *object*, and *end*. And as to the *positive* part of religion, or that which owes *all* its *obligation* to God's *revealed* will, besides that there is but little of that kind belonging to *christianity*, there ought to be nothing either diminished or added without a divine warrant.—You see then how, in these respects also religion may be said to be *the one thing needful*. The rules and notions of civil *decency* may vary, and men very innocently comply with the change; but that men should *fear God* and *keep his commandments*, that they should believe as true whatsoever they have sufficient evidence of God's having revealed, that they should worship him in the manner he has directed, rely on his promises, and prefer his favour to the whole world; this is *alike needful* in the most distant times and places, and to people the most opposite and unlike one the other in all other things. However unlike in other things, in this they should all agree and center, to postpone the care of the body to that of the soul, the pleasing of men or of themselves, to the pleasing of God, and the interests of time

to those of eternity. And in this, all wise and good men. *i. e.* all the people of God, of all times, and of all nations and languages, will unite together, and not be afraid or ashamed to differ from the multitude, who go a contrary way. The church of God is not more *variable*, as to its *external state* (being sometimes *prosperous*, at other times *persecuted* and *oppressed*, sometimes of a *larger*, at other times of a *narrower extent*;) than it is *invariable* with relation to its *real* and *living members*; for, in this sense, the true church is a *succession of persons guided and influenced by one and the same divine Spirit, and linked together by one common band of faith, and hope, and charity*. And these, in whatever age or place their lot is cast, bear their joint testimony to the cause of God, *i. e.* of truth and righteousness, act by the same rules and maxims, pursue the same interest, and observe the *same* conduct towards the *world*. My meaning is, they [§] *all* of them, consider the world as a *strange* and even *hostile* country, as the place of their *pilgrimage*, as *corrupted* in its customs and manners; and therefore not to be followed but in such instances alone as do not clash with their high calling, and with the laws and institutions of their *heavenly* country. This is another *character*, by which
 reli-

§ Hebr. ii. 13.

religion is proved to be the *one thing needful*, viz. its being *alike needful* in all ages and nations of the world.

3. THAT religion is the *one thing needful*, i. e. *absolutely needful*, appears from its being *equally needful* for *all persons*, of whatever rank and denomination, or way and method of life; for *superiors*, *inferiors*, and *equals*; for the *contemplative* and the *active*: and not *relatively* to *some persons exclusive* of others, like a great many other things. 'Tis only a *principle of religion* which can effectually teach princes and subjects, parents and children, masters and servants, pastors and people, the rich and the poor, those in a higher or a lower, or an equal condition, to discharge the duties they mutually owe one another, so as to answer the great end of mens entering into society, and to make every member of the community serviceable to the whole. That every man may fill up the duties of his place and adorn it, he ought ^h to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*. There are, indeed, *peculiar* duties belonging to *each* relation and degree; but then a religious and christian temper, a regard to their common Lord, and the care of their salvation should possess *all*, from the least to the greatest. And as this *inward* part of *religion*, this *habit of piety*, and

Q 3

taste

^h Tit. ii. 10.

taste for *universal goodnefs*, would excite all to the performance of those general duties to which all are under the same obligations; such as the *worship of God* in *publick* and *private*, *sobriety* of life, *justice*, *kindness*, *truth*, and *fidelity*; so both these together (I mean an inward principle of religion, join'd with the constant observations of the general rules of christianity) would, without fail, produce a more conscientious regard to those *special* duties which arise out of the several relations in which men stand to one another. Upon supposition, other things are equal, there is no one behaves so well in every relation as the truly religious man. For such a man always acts from *conscience* and *principle*, which makes him both more *exact*, and more *even*, and *steady* in his conduct, that he may please God; by *whom* he considers himself as *plac'd* in every *particular* condition, and to *whom* he expects to *give* his final *account*. This shows religion to be the *one thing needful*, being needful for persons of *all ranks*, whither superiors, inferiors, or equals. And the same may be demonstrated with like evidence as to the *several ways* of life, which men embrace, whether, in general, the *contemplative* or the *active*; and, in the active, the different *callings* and *professions* which they chuse to follow. The necessity
of

of religion, both in the *choice* and *profecution* of all these is easily discernable. For, unless; in their first engaging in any way of life, and in their after progress in it, they propose the *glory* of God as their *end*, and the *discharge* of a good conscience as their immutable *rule*; they will be liable to perpetual errors and disappointments as to themselves, and be in danger of injuring, or at best, of being less useful, if not quite useless to others. Whereas, on the contrary, if this be their *end*, and this their *principle*, if their first enquiry be whether they are called to this or that employment by the *providence* of God, and their next care ⁱ *therein to abide with him*; they will be more diligent and successful, will be more safe from the snares and temptations that attend their employment, have more comfort and satisfaction in their own breasts, more credit among their acquaintance, and be more beneficial to all. Such will be the happy influence of religion upon the choice and prosecution of the several callings and professions to which men apply themselves. Whether they like a more studious and retired life, or appear on the stage of the world, their aim will be to glorify God, to do good to men, and advance their own salvation. Religion therefore is the *one thing needful*, be-

Q 4

cause

ⁱ I Cor. vii. 24.

cause needful for *all persons* of whatever rank and relation, and in every course of life, which other things are not. There are certain gifts, and accomplishments, and qualifications, such kinds of knowledge, such and such abilities, which are *needful* for *some*, but *insignificant* for *others*: on *these* they would be perfectly lost, and not so much as serve for ornament and show, not bringing the least addition to their reputation, while, to the *former*, they are of indispensable use. And thus, as by these different inclinations, talents, and abilities men are distinguished from each other, and fitted for various employments, so they become usefully subservient to the wise designs of providence in the present state; but are not all equally instructed and benefited as they are by religion.

4. RELIGION is the *one thing absolutely needful*, as it is needful *without any cessation or intermission* of time, and not *relatively* to this or that *particular* season. But of this, and the remaining parts of this subject, in the next discourse.



S E R M O N IX.

Religion the one thing needful.

LUKE X. 42.

But one thing is needful —

IN a former discourse on these words, I

I. SHEW'D you in what respects religion may properly be stiled *one thing*. Religion is *one* in its *object*, in its *principle*, in and by virtue of the *connection* and *proportion* of its *parts*, and finally, in its *scope* and *tendency*.

II. I PROCEEDED to prove that *religion* is the *one thing needful*. The particular character or marks by which this *absolute needfulness* of religion is known and distinguish'd, are these following.

1. RELIGION is *absolutely needful*, because needful to the essential or negative part
of

of happiness; that without which a man must needs be *miserable*, of whatever else he is possesst.

2. RELIGION is *absolutely needful* as it is alike needful in *all ages and nations* of the world.

3. RELIGION appears to be *absolutely needful* from its being equally needful to all persons, of whatever rank, denomination or way of life. These several characters I have explained and shewn to belong to religion; and I now proceed to another mark or character.

4. RELIGION is the *one thing absolutely needful*, as it is needful *without any cessation or intermission of time*; and not *relatively to this or that particular season*. ^a Solomon has observed, that *to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven*. A time for things as contrary one to the other as *weeping and laughing, keeping and casting away, speaking and being silent*; which are some of the particulars enumerated by him. And forasmuch as these things are in their kind opposite one to the other, they cannot be all in season at the same time; and when they are done out of season, they occasion a part of that vanity and vexation of which the Wise-man complains. 'Tis not beneath the notice of *prudence*,
after

^a Eccles. iii. 1.

after what manner a person may so regulate his conduct as not to offend in these smaller matters ; that his conversation may be well ordered as to the extra-essential points, and every part of his behaviour guided and tempered with discretion. But that which every man should be infinitely more careful about is something which is *always in season*, and therefore *always beautiful and necessary*. And what is that? 'Tis *religion*. A man must never lay aside his religion, but be continually cloathed with it, and carry it with him into all places and companies, he must be ^b *in the fear of the Lord all the day long*, and not so much as for a moment forget the *rule* by which he is to walk, the *word of God*; for ^c *when he goes it shall lead him, when he sleeps it shall keep him, and when he wakes it shall talk with him. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.* From all which we are not to conclude, that every *particular duty* of religion is always in season; for religion being a complex thing, made up of a great number of parts cannot be reduced into act all at once. But then *some duty or other* is still to be practised by us, and *a religious habit and temper* is never out of season. The distinction between *affirmative* and *negative* precepts may help to give us
a clearer

^b Prov. xxiii. 17.

^c Prov. vi. 22, 23.

clearer notion of this matter. *Negative* precepts, or precepts delivered in a *negative form* (such as these, ^d *be not drunk with wine wherein is excess*, ^e *thou shalt not steal*; *thou shalt not covet*; ^f *lie not one to the other*; *set not your affections on things below*: these and all other the like precepts) oblige *ad semper* as they term it, to keep them *always*, and as much at one time as at another. And the reason of this is plain, that they only command the *forbearance* of such and such sinful actions, and we can at once forbear a thousand things. But *affirmative* precepts, or those which enjoin some action, as praying, hearing, meditating, giving alms, and doing all other offices of love; these oblige us *semper*, but not *ad semper*, i. e. they *always* oblige us, but not *to always*, or to the continued performance of them, this being impossible; since a man cannot at the same time be in his closet and in the public congregation, offering sacrifice and performing an act of mercy, negotiating his earthly business and thinking only of heaven. However the religion of the *heart*, or a holy aim and regular tendency of soul must never be intermitted; and if it be not, will not only be attended with a good life, but keep us in a constant *readiness* for the duties to which

^d Ephes. v. 18.
iii. 2.

^e Exod. xx. 15, 17.

^f Colos.

which we may be occasionally called. And in this sense we may *always pray* to God and *do good* to men, and *mind heavenly things*; being *always* in a devout benevolent heavenly *disposition*, and by such a disposition prepared to embrace every opportunity of exercising the outward acts of prayer, beneficence, and divine meditation. Religion therefore is *absolutely needful*, because needful *without any cessation or intermission* of time.

5. RELIGION is *absolutely needful* as it is needful in *all conditions and changes of life*; in prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness, in peace and trouble; in each of these, and in *passing* out of *one* into the *other*, the necessity and use of religion is manifest. In a *prosperous* state wherein is included health of body and an affluence of outward good things, how impossible is it a man should do well, who throws off all regard to religion? he will neither have the *true enjoyment* of his prosperity, nor know how to make the *right use* of it. Without religion it is not possible he should *enjoy* his prosperity. By enjoying prosperity, I mean having *that satisfaction* which such a state is fitted to administer. And what is the greatest satisfaction of such a state? Is it only to gratify the senses, and the sensual or worldly inclinations, and to be free from those cares and labours which are the lot of others?

others? No certainly, this is not all; for the senses may be gratified to the full, or we may have power of so gratifying them, and the mind labour under great dissatisfaction; nay, and it must do so if the body be either gratified in what it ought not to have, which is *prodigality*; or denied what it ought to have, which is *covetousness*. The only way of our preventing both these, and observing a proper *medium*, is to listen to the voice of religion, which will teach us how to extract the good out of every enjoyment. Nor is it to any great purpose, that we are by our prosperity freed from the necessity of those cares and labours to which others are subject, if other cares as bad or worse take their room; as they certainly will if religion does not keep them out. The prosperous wicked man is perhaps exempt from the care and labour of providing a subsistence for himself and family; but then he has the care of securing and managing his abundance, he labours under a discontented mind, and the reproaches of a guilty conscience; he has a perpetual uneasiness within him which will for ever hinder the pure genuine relish of his earthly comforts. The *possession* of the world is one thing, and the *enjoyment* of it another. He only enjoys the world who enjoys the favour of God with it.

God

^g *God giveth to a man, that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy, (wisdom and knowledge to moderate the desire and fruition of creature good, and joy as the effect and reward of that moderation) but to the sinner he giveth travel to gather together, and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.* It is apparent then that he who has no religion cannot truly enjoy his prosperity: and it is even more plain that he does not know how to make the right use of it. For what should teach him this necessary part of knowledge? his *lusts* or his fancy will not. On the contrary, these being favoured by his outward circumstances will hurry him into a thousand inconveniencies, so that his prosperity shall be no other than an opportunity of doing more mischief to himself and others. And as for his *reason*, he cannot wholly give himself up to the advice and conduct of that without being religious. This is the ground of the observation, ^h *the prosperity of fools (men void of all true virtue and religion) shall destroy them.* It awakens and feeds their corruptions, diverts and stifles every good thought, strengthens the animal life, and renders their return to God by the ways of repentance and mortification more difficult.

^g Eccles. ii. 26.

^h Prov. i. 32.

difficult. That a man may be the *better* for his prosperity, and *do good* in proportion to his abilities. 'tis necessary that he be under the constant influence of the rules and principles of religion.

AND then if we consider a man in *adversity*, religion is still *needful*; needful to *support* us in such a state, and to fit us for *receiving the advantage* which may be reap'd from it. Am I *afflicted* in my body by pain and sickness, in my worldly affairs by losses and disappointments, in respect of my reputation by slanderous reports, in my nearest relations and friends by their death, or by ill steps, or unhappy accidents in their lives? From whence can I fetch *comfort*, if the fountains of consolation which religion opens to its followers be shut up to me? if I cannot take refuge in the perfections and providence of God, the unchangeable nature and inestimable blessings of the gospel covenant, and the secret approbation of my own conscience? These things are the good man's support; but the soul which is a stranger to religion must be a stranger likewise to these comforts; they belong not to him. And which makes the case yet more unhappy, as he is without *comfort* in affliction, so incapable of reaping that *benefit* from it which another does, who has his ear open to the instructions of heavenly wisdom.

wisdom. The most thorny troublesome way, the most calamitous condition, is with respect to such a one the way to happiness, and a means of preparing him for it. Which shows that religion is alike *needful* in *prosperity* and *adversity*.—And I will add, is more especially so in the *change* of life *from* one to the other; for in such a change from a state of prosperity to a state of affliction, or, on the other hand, from affliction to prosperity, there is more than ordinary danger of our falling into some fatal snare, unless *religion* prevent. When a man finds himself all on a sudden in a state of prosperity, and instead of that pain and sickness with which he was lately exercised, enjoys an uncommon measure of health and ease, how natural is it to be lifted up with it, to run into a sensual spirit and way of life, and to contract an immoderate fondness for the body and the world? when, on the contrary, he who was at ease in his body, and in his outward circumstances, comes to be afflicted in both, how natural is it to be tempted to discontent, and to repining thoughts against God and his providence? In this case there is need of patience and christian submission, as in the former of humility and moderation; but this moderation, this humility, this patience, are so many branches of *religion*, and grow out of *no* other *stock*. So

that a man is prepared or unprepared for the different states and turns of life, according as he has a principle of religion in him, or is destitute of it; and is *more* or *less* prepared as he is *more* or *less* religious. Religion therefore is *the one thing needful* in this regard likewise, (*viz.*) as it is *needful* in *all conditions* and *changes* of life, in *prosperity* and *adversity*, and in the *sudden alterations* from one state to another. Once more,

6. RELIGION is *the one thing absolutely needful*, because it is *needful to both worlds or states of existence*, the *present* and the *future*, and not *relative* to *this world only*, which may be said of abundance of other things, yea, of all other things which have no immediate connection with religion, and influence upon it. Here is the chief test of all, by which we are to judge of what is *needful*, and of the *degrees* of its necessity.

“ Is it *needful* by way of *preparation* for the
 “ world to come? And if so, how *far* does
 “ it contribute to my preparation for that
 “ world? For since there is another world
 “ besides this, (of which I am assured by
 “ the joint testimony of reason and revela-
 “ tion) and since my happiness or misery
 “ there will vastly exceed all the good things
 “ I can enjoy, or the evil things I can suf-
 “ fer in this mortal life; it must be ma-
 “ nifest to common sense, that whatsoever is
 “ needful

“ needful only for *this* life deserves not to be
 “ called needful, when compared with those
 “ things which are of absolute necessity, in
 “ order to obtain the happiness or avoid the
 “ misery of an *everlasting* state.”—Do but
 bring things to this test, and you will pre-
 sently see the infinite importance of religion
 above all other things. Are meat, and drink,
 and clothing, and habitations, reckoned a-
 mong *necessaries*? 'Tis true they are such in
 some sense, but then 'tis only in a sense re-
 strain'd to *this* life; we therefore call them
 the *necessaries of life*. Of what life? of this
bodily, this *momentary* life. But is this the
only, or the *noblest* and most *important* life
 of man? neither one nor the other.—It is
 not our *only* life, since the soul has its life as
 well as the body, and a life of an intirely
 peculiar and distinct kind; a life which does
 not break off with that of the body, but
 still runs on without any measure, except
 eternity itself. And as this life is not man's
only, so neither his *most valuable* life; the
 life of the soul, or which is the same, the
 life to come, is of inconceivably greater con-
 sequence to us (for this very reason, that it is
 a never-ending life, were there no other,) than
 the life of the body, by which we are tied
 to the world for a few years. For till you
 can find a proportion between time and eter-
 nity, between a finite and an infinite length

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of duration, you will be able to find none between this life and the next. But besides this, there is another difference to be considered, and that is the *intrinsic worth* and *excellence* of each life. This *bodily* life I enjoy in common with the *beasts* of the field, in the life to come I am a partaker with *angels*; this life has joys and pleasures, pains and sorrows, which *just* touch the *surface* but do not enter *deep* into the soul; pleasures *mixed* with pains, and pains with pleasures, hopes with fear, and fears with hope; the enjoyments or the sufferings of the following state will possess me *intirely*, *penetrate* to the very *center* of my being, and exclude every thing of a contrary kind. If I am happy, it will be without any abatement of my happiness, or fear of being deprived of it; if miserable, it will be without any allay of my misery, or hope of deliverance from that *everlasting destruction* to which I shall be doomed. Say now, whether that is not deservedly esteemed needful, which has a direct subserviency to this future everlasting life? You cannot if you would deny this. Let me therefore beg you to carry the meditation a step farther, and inquire whether *religion* be not the *very thing*, and the *only thing* which is thus needful. Suppose, what is far from being true, that sensual gratifications and worldly enjoyments are sufficient

ficient to make me happy as long as this life shall last; yet do we think, or will we venture to affirm, that we shall be ever the happier for them after this life is ended? What, “when my soul is unclothed of its
 “body? when I am in the world of spi-
 “rits! and if I retain the desires I con-
 “tracted in the body (which is possible
 “enough) yet I shall not have any one object
 “to gratify them: shall I not, on the con-
 “trary, be the more miserable, as I have
 “more indulged to my fleshly Inclinations,
 “and have enjoy’d more of what worldly
 “and voluptuous minds call happiness?”

This I think is too plain to be seriously doubted of. Let us therefore proceed to make the same inquiry concerning *religion*. What is the influence which *that* has upon my future existence? Does that *promote* or *hinder* my *everlasting* felicity? Need I return an answer to these questions, or rather do they not answer for themselves? It is not a more undoubted truth that there is a state of recompences beyond the grave, than that God has required some *qualifications*, and appointed some *means* for the obtaining and enjoying the happiness of that state. And I beseech you, what other *qualification* can you think of besides a *conformity* of *mind and heart* to the *will of God*, or the rules of *right reason*? which is no other than reli-

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gion in its *root* or *principle*. Or what other *means* besides *obeying the law* which God has given us, and *living to the glory* of his name? which includes all the practical part of religion, or the *fruits* and *effects* of religion in the *life*. Let me ⁱ *love God with all my heart, and with all my soul*, and be like him in the holy rectitude of my nature, and I cannot but be *qualified* for heaven and eternal glory: let me be *qualified* for heaven, and 'tis *impossible* I should *miss* the *enjoyment* of it; since he who *assists* me in obtaining the qualification, will certainly *bestow* the reward for which his grace has qualified me. Let me follow the directions of the divine law, live as that enjoins me, and constantly observe all those duties of religious worship which he has instituted; and herein I shall make use of those *means* which God has appointed for the securing of eternal life. And if I *use* the *means* which God has appointed, and use them after a *right* manner, I cannot possibly miss of the *end*; forasmuch as he who has *instituted* the *means*, has the absolute *command* of the *end*, and has fixed an inseperable *connection* between the one and the other. Here then let me look back a little: religion is *needful* for *both worlds*, needful with regard to this, still more needful with respect to the next, therefore to be
pronounc'd

ⁱ Matt xxii. 37.

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pronounc'd the *one thing needful*. True it is, other things may have some influence upon my condition in the life to come; but then that is only *indirectly*, as they have an influence upon the state and practice of religion in this; and so far they are of moment to me, and no farther. Whatever importance there is in other things, they borrow it all from religion. It may be they accidentally advance or retard my progress in religion; this I should well consider, and accordingly form my judgment and estimate of these things, avoiding every thing, or afraid of every thing which may be likely to set me back in my spiritual affairs; and putting a higher value upon things as under the blessing, and by the grace and assistance of God they conspire to the growth of any good disposition, or the more vigorous, careful and constant practice of any duty: because as these things have a good or an ill influence upon the state of my soul, so the good or bad, the better or worse state of my soul has an answerable influence upon the state I shall pass into after death.

I HOPE when all these considerations are duly weighed, (as they well deserve our most serious regard) it will be own'd that I have abundantly proved my point, that *religion is the one thing needful*, being *absolutely*,

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lutely, universally, unchangeably, and everlast-
ingly needful.

LET me now beg your attention while I suitably *apply* this most important truth.

I. RELIGION being apparently the *one thing needful*, how *happy* are all they who are *truly religious*? happy in that religion which employs their care is but *one thing*, and that this one thing is the *only thing needful*. Happy they are in this, that what principally employs their care is but *one thing*; for by this means they are at *greater certainty*, and more *free* from *distracti*on than other men are. Their *certainty*, in regard of the thing they aim at, must be greater, since their immediate aim is to please God; and that they please God they are as certain, as they are of their desire and endeavour to please him: forasmuch as nothing does more please God than this desire and endeavour to please him, when *unfeigned* and *prevailing*; virtually including all the parts of obedience, which are the natural result of this desire. And is not this a singular happiness, to enjoy the *greatest certainty* in that affair which is of unspeakably the *greatest importance*? This cannot be said of those who are swallowed up of other cares, they have no such certainty to boast of; being in danger, after all their care, of missing that to which all their cares and labours

labours are levelled : not only as they may be disappointed of their end by the righteous providence of God crossing and counteracting their designs, but as the means leading to their end are uncertain ; and of the many things necessary by way of means, if they happen to overlook any one, which they may easily do, all their labour is thrown away. Another advantage of the religious man, is, that with *more certainty* he has *less distraction*. His attention is not diverted by a thousand different views and aims, nor his heart torn with the endless conflict of warring passions, nor his life made uneasy by a vast number of thwarting interests and inconsistent pursuits. He minds one thing, and, comparatively speaking, no more than one thing ; and that is, how he may discharge a good conscience, and get safe to heaven. And then it greatly adds to the happiness of the truly pious and good man ; that when he reflects, he finds the thing about which he is most careful, is the very thing which most deserves his care ; and that the more he reflects and examines things, the more convinced he is of its being so. This is a satisfaction peculiar to such a one. His reason approves his care, approves it as superior to all other cares, and never condemns it as excessive. *One thing is needful*, needful in all these respects which can render

der any thing a fit object of his serious thoughts and concern; and this one thing he has secured, and therefore can have no just ground to be uneasy, possessing all things in this one; thus securing an interest in God, the sovereign possessor, and the wise disposer of all.

2. RELIGION being *the one thing needful*, what reason have we for *thanksgiving* to God for the *everlasting gospel* and the *ministry* thereof, by which we are fully instructed in what regards this most needful and momentous thing; both *what it is*, and *how* it may be *secured*. From the gospel we learn ^k *what pure undefiled religion is*; as to the *inward* part of it, that it is made up of faith, hope, love, humility, meekness, and the whole constellation of heavenly and divine graces, which conspire to perfect the image of God in the soul; as likewise what true religion is *in the life*, consisting in the acts and exercises of all those graces and virtues, the habits of which are seated in the hidden part, *i. e.* in a ^l *sober, righteous and godly life*, or in performing those several duties towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves, which are so particularly described and commanded in the word of God, and which we shall certainly perform if we are actuated

^k James i. 27. Matt. xxii 37. Gal. v. 6, 22, 23. Rom. xiv. 17. ^l Tit. ii. 11, 12.

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actuated by those good principles, from which the outward duties should flow. As the *habits* of grace are more immediately denoted by the *image of God*, so the *acts* proceeding from those habits are more expressly meant by the *life of God*. And O! how great a privilege is it to have the knowledge of those things communicated to us as it is in the *gospel*? to be inform'd from the *mouth of God himself* of what is needful for us to *be* and *do*, that we may obtain his favour, and in his favour and presence find the happiness we are seeking after? And when we add, that besides the discovery which the gospel has made of the *nature* of true religion, or the *terms of acceptance* with God; it has also directed us *how* we may come to be possess'd of those needful qualifications, and to perform this necessary condition call'd *religion*; namely, by fervent *prayer* to God, humble *reliance* on his mercy and grace through *Jesus Christ*, and exerting our own sincere *endeavours* under the *agency* of his *holy Spirit*; when, I say, we consider this, the gospel appears to be a complete method of salvation, and as such to challenge our highest esteem, our warmest gratitude, and our most incessant praises and thanksgivings. And if we would be duly sensible of the benefit we receive as by the gospel itself, so by the *ministry* of it,
and

and of the obligations we are under to be thankful for it ; we should consider the ministry under *this* notion of it, as intended for our *instruction* in the *one thing needful*, and for the *exciting* us to mind and pursue it by laying the promises and threatenings of the gospel before us ; that we may not, on the one hand, be ignorant of our duty, or what God expects from us ; or on the other, of the final issue, of what we are to hope or fear from God, according as we perform or neglect our duty. This is the great *end* of the *ministerial office*, 'tis wholly conversant about the *one thing needful* ; and from this view of it, appears to be a most necessary and beneficial institution ; which I think is a very good reason why we should *prize* the ministry of the word, *diligently attend* upon it, and earnestly endeavour to *profit* by it.

3. RELIGION being the *one thing needful*, let us be *persuaded* to *consider* and *treat* it as such. This we must acknowledge to be altogether just, and reasonable, since if we do not treat it *as it is*, or suitably to its nature and importance, we do not treat and regard it *aright* ; and if we do not treat it aright, we must be *condemn'd* by our own *reason* and *conscience*, as not acting worthy of that nature which God has given us, nor agreeable to his design in creating us ; which

no doubt was, that we should seek and find our happiness in acting conformably to our *own* nature, and the *natures* of other things. If it be ask'd, what is implied in *treating religion as the one thing needful*; I answer, we must,

I. RESOLVE to be religious *whatever it cost us*. For, why do we resolve upon any thing, but because we apprehend that thing to be *needful* for us? So the *covetous* man resolves upon getting *riches*, as esteeming the greatest happiness of life to consist in the abundance of wealth. Why do we make one thing give place to another, but because the thing we prefer is, in our opinion, more needful than that we set aside for the sake of it? So the same covetous man sacrifices his love of ease and pleasure to his design of heaping up wealth, because he accounts it more necessary for him to be rich, than to live at his ease; and therefore, since riches are not to be had without toil and parsimony, is contented to submit to these that he may accomplish his principal desire. Now religion is the *one thing needful*, a thing of *absolute* necessity; wherefore, if we believe this (unless we will act otherwise here than we do in all other parallel cases) we ought to determine that nothing shall hinder us from being religious; reckoning, that if we should purchase

chase this *pearl of price* with *all that we have*, we should not buy it too dear. We may be tempted to forego our resolution by the prospect of the *difficulties* we must cope with, the opposition we must struggle thro', the pains, the vigilance, the self-denial, which the steady prosecution of our purpose will require; but then, we should consider, that religion is infinitely more necessary than any or all of those things which we must deny ourselves for the sake of it.

“ That there is not the same necessity for
 “ indulging my *animal* part, that there is
 “ for saving my *immortal* soul; for living
 “ in pleasure a *few* days, as for my being
 “ happy *for ever*.” God forbid therefore, we should hesitate a moment in a point so manifest, or delay any longer in a matter of such infinite importance! No; let every one say, “ I am convinced of the absolute ne-
 “ cessity of religion for this life and the
 “ next, if I desire to be happy; and be-
 “ ing thus convinc'd, I will pray to God
 “ to strengthen this conviction, and to en-
 “ able me, by his grace, to live suitably to
 “ it. I will not hearken to the importu-
 “ nities of the flesh, the enticements of sin-
 “ ful company, or the corrupt examples of
 “ the world, but renounce all these, that
 “ I may follow the calls of heavenly wis-
 “ dom,” Again,

2. IF we would *treat religion as the one thing needful*, we are obliged to pursue our religious concerns with all that *seriousness* and *zeal*, which a thing of *absolute* necessity demands from us. 'Tis ill trifling in *religion*, the nature of the thing is too sacred and awful, and the consequences too weighty to allow of it. He, who is not serious and attentive in those actions which concern the life of his *soul*, and his *eternal happiness*, when will he be so? An unguarded posture of spirit in the worship of God, flat and lifeless devotions are inexcusable. With fervour in the special duties of religion, we should join an active diligence in redeeming our time, improving our talents, governing our own passions, and doing good to others as we have opportunity. The apostle has told us, that ^m *it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing*. The only proper *object* of our *zeal* is something good, and according to the degrees of goodness in the thing, ought to be the degree of our *zeal*. Now religion being *absolutely needful*, has a kind of *infinite goodness*, for which reason our *zeal*, if directed to the promoting of true religion in ourselves and in the world, and guided by prudence in the outward expressions of it, can never be excessive. O how active should christians
be

^m Galat. iv. 18.

be in the whole of a religious course, while, besides those other powerful motives which the gospel sets before us, they consider the nature of religion as *the one thing needful*.

4. SINCE there is *but one thing needful*, and *religion is this one thing*, how great is both the *sin* and *folly* of being *immoderately careful* about *other things*, and especially about *many* such things? Our Saviour's reproof of *Martha* is grounded upon this consideration; *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful.* "As well as I love thee, and even " *because I love thee, I cannot but chide* " thee for thy thoughtless conduct, and be " angry with thee for so forgetting thy- " self, that when all these cares which re- " gard the present life, are mere trifles, if " compared with the care of the *soul*, and " the *great things which pertain to the king-* " *dom of God*; instead of acting, as becomes " a wise person, when such an opportunity " offers, thou should'st be taken off from " thy chief concern, by a multitude of mean " and needless cares." And of this gross inconsistency and indecorum, persons, who are no strangers to the power of religion, are too often guilty. And, if *they* are not wholly free from this charge, how much more faulty must those of *another character* be, whose imaginations are *perpetually* work-
ing

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ing about earthly things, and their very *hearts*
and *souls* possessed by them? That we may
not be thus careful, and troubled about ma-
ny things, there are these *two general rules*,
among others, which we should heedfully
observe; the not observing which is an ar-
gument of very egregious folly, and of too
great remains of an earthly mind. We
should so *moderate* our *application* to all our
secular affairs, as to *redeem* a reasonable por-
tion of *time* for the affairs of *religion* and
eternity. This rule concerns our *outward*
conduct. The other rule, which more im-
mediately relates to the *temper* of our *minds*,
is that we should so *moderate* our *affection* to,
and our *care* and *thoughtfulness* about the
things of the *body*, and the *world*, as neither
to *wrong* our *nobler* affections, to *unfit* our-
selves for the duties of our *high calling*, or
lose the *peace* and *quiet* of our breasts; a loss,
for which we must blame ourselves, and
which no worldly gain or advantage can
make up to us.

I. WE should so *moderate* our *application*
to all our *secular* affairs, as to *redeem* a rea-
sonable portion of our *time* for the affairs of
religion and *eternity*. This rule concerns our
outward conduct, and it is a rule founded in
the strongest reason, namely, *religion's being*
the only thing needful, yet most notoriously
violated. Is not this a contradiction of our

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practice to our *principles*? which, in the *con-*
sequence of it, is vastly worse than holding
principles which naturally clash with and
over-power one another. I confess, our
present frame and condition is such, that
the greater part of our time is unavoidably
taken up in attendance on the body and the
things relating to it; which is more espe-
cially the case of those in narrow circum-
stances: but then none, and much less such
as have a greater command of their time,
should, from their rising up, to their lying
down, be incessantly employed in the drud-
gery of the world, or in hunting after
worldly and sensual pleasure. This is to be
cumbered with *much serving* in a much worse
sense than *Martha* was, which we *need not*
be; I take leave to repeat it, that we *need*
not (I except none) be so entirely devoted
to our worldly business as to have no time
left for *prayer*, and *reading*, and *self-con-*
verse: not to mention those little intervals
in our business itself, which might be im-
proved to very good purpose by *mental ejacu-*
lations, and other inward exercises. And
for those who have time upon their hands,
they will be without excuse if they throw
it away upon serving the flesh or the world,
rather than assign a conscionable part of it
to the *one thing needful*.

2. THE next rule, which relates to the *temper* of our *minds*, is upon some accounts of greater consequence than the former, being the ground of it; for let us mind our *inward* frame, and we shall soon learn to rectify what is amiss in our *outward* conduct: now this rule is, that we so *moderate* our *affections* to, and our *care* and *thoughtfulness* about the things of the *body* and the *world*; as neither to *wrong* our *nobler* affections, to *unfit* ourselves for the duties of our *high calling*, or *lose* the *peace* and *quiet* of our bosoms.

OUR *affection* to *other* things must not be such as to *wrong* the *affection* we owe to the *nobler* objects of religion. Every thing in religion is great and excellent, the *duties* it enjoins, and the *prize* it teaches us to aspire after. Religion draws aside the veil, and points out to us ⁿ *the things above*, on which therefore, we should *set our affections* and not on things on the earth: for where should our *best affections* be placed but upon the *best objects*? And what objects like those of religion? The *blessed God*, to whom all our religion is directed, the *holy Jesus*, by whom it is sanctified and made acceptable to eternal life, and the *glories* of the *heavenly world*, which are the reward of it! Such affections as these, we should cherish, and not suffer our love to

ⁿ Coloss. iii. 2.

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the perishing riches and pleasures of the world to entrench upon them.

WE are farther to remember, that our care and thoughtfulness about the things of time, are to be so *moderated*, as not to *unfit* us for the *delightful* and *acceptable* discharge of the *duties of religion*. When we are anxiously *careful about many things*, and have our heads and hearts crowded with them; all the time we set apart for the exercises of devotion, turns to but small account. We have very little relish for them, and, of course, give little attention to them. It may be we cannot satisfy ourselves to go without prayer and reading, we therefore keep up a *round* of duties, and a *form* of religion; but, alas! so many worldly cares and thoughts have taken possession of our souls, that there is not a duty we perform but is haunted with them, and sometimes quite spoil'd: because, while we serve God with *our lips*, *our hearts are far from him*. And what can we expect from a sacrifice without a *heart*? from presenting ourselves before the Lord, when the world thrusts in with us, and while we pretend to speak to God, we are really talking aside to that?

FINALLY, we are so to *moderate our care and thoughtfulness* about *earthly things*, as not by their means, to *lose the peace and tranqui-*

traquility of our souls. God knows we are, in this sense, too often *troubled about many things*, which is one reason of our Saviour's caution to his disciples, not ^p *to take thought for the morrow, saying, what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?* We should not disquiet ourselves about things of this nature, for saith he, *your heavenly father knoweth ye have need of these things.* Let us therefore *mind the one thing needful*, and we may be confident that *He* will not be *unmindful* and *regardless* of us, as to these *lower* concerns.

“ Why should I suffer worldly cares to eat
 “ out the very heart of all my enjoyments,
 “ to pierce and wound my bosom as so
 “ many thorns? Is not the *folly* of this con-
 “ duct alike visible with the *sinfulness* of it?
 “ Shall I be a foe to my own peace, by
 “ giving admission to those fears, and per-
 “ plexities, and sollicitudes, which are
 “ plainly some of the greatest enemies to
 “ it? Did ever any man hate his own re-
 “ pose, and prefer trouble to rest? never
 “ *formally* and *intentionally*; and why then
 “ should I act as if I did? Were I so
 “ much concerned about *the one thing need-*
 “ *ful* as I ought to be, the danger would
 “ immediately cease of my being over-
 “ whelm'd with cares about things which

“ I should see to bear no more proportion
 “ to these, than a moment does to endless
 “ ages, or a single point to immensity.
 “ And once I had settled this important
 “ affair, I should need no more than to
 “ reflect on the happiness of my condition,
 “ in order to be convinc’d I had no occasion
 “ to trouble and torment myself about this
 “ and the other thing, which did not affect
 “ my interest in the favour of God, and
 “ the love of Jesus, nor could retard my
 “ progress towards the perfection of virtue
 “ and felicity. Let my *present* condition,
 “ as to *sense*, be never so wretched, and my
 “ prospects into *future time*, never so *cloudy*,
 “ why should I be so extremely cast down
 “ about it? The main thing is secured,
 “ I have good ground to be satisfied of
 “ my *sincerity* in religion; and as long as
 “ I have no reason to doubt of that, I can-
 “ not but esteem myself *safe* and *happy*;
 “ *safe* under the *protection* of my heavenly
 “ Father, and *happy* in his *care* and *dis-*
 “ *posal*, in the *smiles* of his countenance,
 “ and the *hopes* of spending eternity in his
 “ presence.”



S E R M O N X.

The character of the poor in spirit
describ'd.

MATTH. V. 3.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

IN this and the two following Chapters is contain'd our Saviour's *sermon on the mount*; so called, because when he delivered it, *he went up into a mountain*, in order to avoid the throng of people who press'd upon him, and that he might have the greater advantage of speaking to them. Here, being sat down, his *disciples came unto him*; both those who were *professedly* such, and those who had any inclination to *become* so, and for that end waited on his divine instructions. It is an obvious reflection, that as the *law* was deliver'd from a *mountain*, so

was this part of the *doctrine* of the *gospel*, but with none of those *terrible* circumstances which accompanied the former ; perhaps to signify the *mild* and *gracious* nature of the gospel dispensation. The *Son of God* comes down from *heaven* to instruct *mankind* ; and when *such* a *one* condescends to teach us, should we not be ready to learn ? Since from the dignity of the speaker, and the extraordinary manner in which he was sent, we may be sure the things he proposes are of the greatest importance. We are all by *profession* the *disciples of Christ*, and therefore obliged to listen to his voice ; for tho' he does not preach to us in *person*, as he did to the *Jews*, yet if we have faith we shall know his voice in the *word of truth*, in the *ministry* of the *gospel*, and the *operations* of the *holy Spirit*, and carefully follow him as *sheep* their *shepherd*. We shall pay the same regard to the things which Christ taught in the days of his flesh, as if we heard them immediately from his mouth ; be willing to receive the counsels of heavenly wisdom, and resolved to submit to them ; for such is the disposition and character of a *disciple* of *Jesus*.

LET us attend to our divine Master.—
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “ There are many no-
 “ tions of *blessedness* prevailing in the world,
 “ most

“ most of them very wide of the truth.
 “ But if you will hearken to me, I will
 “ tell you *wherein* true blessedness lies;
 “ even in the practice of those virtues,
 “ and being possess’d of those dispositions of
 “ mind, which I am about to recommend
 “ to you.” From hence let us observe, that
happiness is the *fruit of virtue*, not the pro-
 duct of *chance*, much less of *vice* and *wick-*
edness. To be *good* is to be *happy*; both in
 the *nature* of things and by the *promise* of
 God there is a connection between these two.
 The connection may not be so visible at pre-
 sent, but one time or other it shall be manifest
 to all. We may be as certain that ^a *it shall be*
well with the righteous in the final issue, as
 we are that there is a ^b *righteous Lord who*
loveth righteousness, and governs the world by
 the *rules* of it. ^c *Shall not the Judge of all*
the earth do right? But that the righteous
 should be *as* the wicked, this would not be
right, and fit, and becoming. Did *reason*
 give us less assurance than it does of the hap-
 piness of good men, yet we cannot doubt
 that they are blessed whom the *Son of God*
 has pronounced *blessed*. And here indeed is
 the surest hold, here we have the clearest
 and the largest prospect. We may be con-
 fident, without a revelation, that virtue and
 vice shall not fare *alike*; but that the virtues
 of

^a Isai. iii 10.^b Psal. xi. 7.^c Gen. xviii. 25.

of such imperfect creatures as we are shall be rewarded with *complete* and *everlasting* felicity, is what we can no otherwise know than from the gospel. Such a happiness the gospel offers to all; not whether they seek for it or no, or tho' they seek it in the ways of the world. A man is not born to a happy existence as he is to an inheritance; nor is happiness thrown upon any one, as the things of this world often are, while he thinks nothing of it, and is doing nothing to procure it. Yea, he may seek and not find it; which is the case of all those who seek for it in earthly enjoyments of any kind. They may be very diligent in their business; but if the end of all this diligence is to get the world, and nothing else, their diligence is not a *christian*, but a *secular* virtue; and therefore entitled to no other reward than at present attends it, consisting in the things of this world, not in true happiness or satisfaction of mind. And if even the industrious are not happy, who are *industrious only* for this world; much less are they so who plunge themselves in a life of *sensuality*, being neither wise for the next world nor for this. Men of this character would be a burden to themselves, were there nothing else to make them so, but that they cannot tell what to do with their time. How much more then when their pleasures themselves
are

are of such a nature as to beget shame and remorse of conscience, and a restless disquietude of soul?

THERE is one *general* observation more which I would make upon these beatitudes, that the *characters* here enumerated by our Saviour, with the *beatitudes* belonging to them, are *not to be separated*. Poverty of spirit, godly sorrow, meekness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, and a quiet, peaceable temper, are not marks and properties of so many *distinct* persons; one of whom possesses one of these virtues, and is therefore intitled to the blessedness annexed to it, and another another; but of the *same* man. There is no true christian but hath *all* the same graces and virtues that any other christian hath, tho' not in the same perfection. One may excel in this quality, another in that; but while he excels in one particular virtue, he is utterly destitute of none. It is true, a very pious and good man may have no foundation at all in his natural temper for the exercise of some virtues; on the contrary, his natural temper may lean quite the other way; not to a meek, and patient, and forgiving behaviour, but to angry resentments; not to mercifulness, but severity; not to the contempt of the world, but the immoderate love of it: and by this means he may not
appear

appear to others to have that virtue which he really hath. God alone, who knows upon what principles every man acts, and what conflicts and struggles he sustains, is a proper judge of the *degrees* of virtue and goodness to which any one has attained. This is not said to excuse those, all whose actions proclaim them to be strangers to humility, meekness, mercifulness, and other virtues of the christian life; but as a caution to all not to be too forward in censuring persons as intirely void of this and the other virtue, because being naturally inclined to the contrary, they do not practise those virtues with so much freedom and uniformity, or in the abundant measure as it may be some other christians do.

I NOW come directly to treat the text, in which we have two things considerable.

I. THE *character* of the *true disciples of Jesus Christ*; they are *poor in spirit*.

II. THEIR *bleſſedness*; *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*: of each in its order.

I. WE have here the *character* of a *genuine disciple of Christ*. He is *poor in spirit*; a phrase capable of these two interpretations; either, 1. That he has a *temper* of mind *sui*ted to a state of *poverty*; or, 2. That he is *humble in mind*.

I. BY

I. BY being *poor in spirit* may be meant, that a man has a *temper* of mind *suited* to a *poor* and *low* condition. For, that the word *spirit* does sometimes denote not the *spirit itself*, but a certain *disposition* or *temper* of spirit, is plain to those who read the scriptures with any care, as it is agreeable enough to the common use of the word. And if we understand the word in this sense, it will be very natural to conceive, that by being *poor in spirit* our blessed Saviour may intend a disposition of mind *adapted* to a state of *want* and *meanness*. And how may such a disposition be known? I think, without much difficulty. To be in this sense *poor in spirit*, a man must be in great measure *indifferent* to the *world*, and to all things in it. His *notions* of the world must not run high; nor his *desires* after it be eager and impatient. He must not think that the ^d *life of man*, (*i. e.* the happiness of life) *consisteth in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*; for if he does, he is badly fitted to bear the want of these things; since 'tis hardly possible that any one should be so little a lover of himself, as to be content to be unhappy, I mean so upon the whole. What I think necessary to my happiness, I cannot be very easy to want; how then does the world stand

^d Luke xii. 15.

stand in my esteem, after what manner am I affected to it? St. *John* has given us the world's inventory in a few words, *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*, i. e. pleasures, riches, honours. What are my thoughts of the *pleasures* of this world? that there is no enjoyment, no happiness without them, that life has no relish but what it receives from these pleasures? If so, I am not *poor in spirit*. I must be of another spirit, or poverty will appear a very terrible thing to me; since the poorer I am, the less I shall be able to command these pleasures. It is not for a poor man to think of living in pleasure. Pleasure is an expensive thing, and therefore to be left to men of wealth. And what value then do I put upon *wealth*, and upon those who are distinguished by it? In the language of the world, blessed are the rich and none else; do I speak the same language? 'Tis certain that riches will procure a great many other things; there are indeed few things in the world but may be purchased this way. But is it our opinion that *happiness* is in this number? alas, we must not then pretend to be the *disciples of Christ*, whose blessedness must arise out of other notions of things, and from quite different inclinations. Perhaps we are not among the *adorers*, or even the *admirers*

* I John ii. 16.

admirers of wealth for its *own sake*; but can we say the same of *praise*, and *honour*, and *outward respect*? Do we set our hearts upon these things; cannot we, not upon any terms, be easy without them? If this be the case, the title of *poor in spirit* does not belong to us, we could never be reconciled to a poor condition: the poor man's cottage lying quite out of the road of honour and greatness; and but little external respect being pay'd to the poor man himself, how *rich* soever he may be in the possessions of the mind. But how shall I be certain that I am thus indifferent to the world in my estimate of its enjoyments, and the affections of my mind to them? Were the question concerning *another* person, the only way of discovering this would be by the *outward actions*. Does a man for the sake of the world break any of God's commandments? does he violate the rules of conscience and equity, lye, and steal, and defraud? hath he made it his resolution that he ^f *will be rich* by one method or other? it is impossible to doubt of such a man's notions. As to *ourselves*, besides our actions, even the most secret of them, which are hidden from other men, we have the *sense* and *feeling* of our own minds to direct us. If we reflect upon what passes within, can we not tell which

we

^f 1 Tim. vi. 9.

we prize most, a good conscience, or the good things of this world? which of these we are most careful to secure, and can be most contented to enjoy without the other? One would think, that nothing more is necessary to a man's determining such questions, but his being faithful to his own soul. Upon the whole, I infer that a man is not to be judged of one way or the other by his *outward* condition. His condition in the *world* hath nothing to do with the state of his *soul*, or his condition in the *sight* of God. The character must always be taken from the *reigning* part of the *mind*, which does not constantly follow a man's *worldly* circumstances. A rich man shall not be condemned *because* he is *rich*, nor the poor man be absolved *because* he is *poor*. For

1. IT may so happen, that one who *abounds* in this world's goods may be *poor in spirit*, i. e. may have a spirit *suited* to a *state* of poverty. Tho' ⁵ *riches increase* he may not *set his heart upon them*; he may neither *value himself* upon the account of these external advantages, nor *undervalue* those who want them. His soul may be free and disengaged, his desires after any worldly comfort moderate, and so likewise his delight and joy in it. And for the same reason as he is *moderate* in the *enjoyment* of riches,

⁵ Psal. lxii. 10.

riches, he would be *contented* if God should *deprive* him of them; and would have been so, if they had been always *denied* him. It is true, we hear our Saviour saying, ^h *Wo unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation*; i. e. if this was the *best* that could be said of them that they were *rich*, they were but *miserable* persons; having no farther *consolation* to expect, than that which they had already received, and in which they plac'd their chief felicity. Besides which, it might be our Saviour's intention in these words, to intimate the *great danger* of a rich and prosperous *condition*, by means of the many *temptations* which attended it. As he who sails on a coast filled with rocks and shoals had need take a great deal of care if he would not be shipwreck'd, so must the rich man: and if he is thus watchful, and so preserves himself ⁱ *unspotted of the world*, which, tho' difficult, is not impossible, his riches, instead of depreciating his virtue, add to the value of it, and supply him with opportunities of exercising himself in the most God-like work, which is that of *doing good*.

2. THE man whose *condition* is *poor* may not be *poor in spirit*. He may be poor and wicked, poor and discontented; have made himself poor by his vices, or keep himself

^h Luke vi. 24.

ⁱ James i. 27.

poor by his sloth and idleness: he may envy those who are above him, and make use of unlawful means to extricate himself out of his mean and low condition. Instead of accommodating himself to the circumstances he is in, and being an example of those virtues which should adorn them, and would make *poverty* itself look *lovely*, he may carry it very indecently towards *men*, and quarrel with the *Providence* of God. Certainly when Christ says ^k *Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God*; he cannot mean such poor as these: but what is wanting in one evangelist must be supplied from another; *Blessed be ye poor*, that is, ye who are *poor in spirit*. And it is not unlikely that our Saviour uses the term *poor* to signify, that they who are *outwardly poor*, have ordinarily greater advantages to become *poor in spirit*, than those who enjoy the superfluities of life. But still 'tis not a man's *outward condition*, but the *temper* of the *mind* which renders him acceptable in the sight of God. And as to the *temper* of the *mind*, a man must not charge the *want* of any virtuous disposition, or his being under the *power* of any vitious one, upon his *circumstances* in the *world*; for let these be what they will, they do not lay him under a necessity of being a wicked man, or doing wicked things.

^k Luke vi. 20.

things. A man may *behave* as a *disciple of Christ*, and may be *really* such in any condition ; since, as every condition has its temptations of one kind or another, so there is no condition the temptations of which are insuperable. And if it be said that they are superable by the *grace* of God, but *not* else ; I answer, this is very true ; and it is no less true, that *all* may have this *grace* who ask and improve it.

LET us therefore set ourselves in earnest to practise this *contentedness* of *mind*, this *abstraction* of *heart* from worldly things. Let us ¹ *learn in whatever condition we are therewith to be content* ; not to stretch our wishes beyond what is convenient for us, and what God is pleased in the course of his Providence to bestow upon us ; but to ^m *be contented with such things as we have*, tho' it be only *food and raiment* ; nay, and to be prepar'd for a state of the greatest want and penury ; that it may appear our happiness is not the same as that of worldly minds, nor the measures by which we estimate the worth of things like theirs : that we prefer spiritual things to temporal ; and for the sake of the former are ready, at any time, to forego the latter ; to forsake all things rather than forsake our duty, or be separated from the love of God in our Saviour. The content-

T 2

ment

¹ Phil. iv. 11.^m Heb. xiii. 5.

ment and moderation here meant is a *christian grace*, the *fruit of the Spirit*, the offspring of divine and heavenly principles, not a mere *felicity of nature*. It must proceed from a mind enlightned with the knowledge of God, a deep conviction of the superior excellence of the soul above the body, a prevailing affection to the best things, and an intire resignation of ourselves to the wise appointments of Providence. If such be the *temper* of our minds, and such the *principles* upon which it is founded, we are among the *poor in spirit* who have the *kingdom of heaven* for their *portion*.

2. THIS expression of *poor in spirit* has another meaning, which, to me, seems the *principal*, and that is *humbleness of mind*. In the former sense he is *poor in spirit* who hath a mean opinion of the *world*; in this, he who has a *low* one of *himself*. Not that *humility* obliges a man to wrong the truth, or himself, by entertaining a worse opinion of himself than he really deserves. The command is only this, that *a man think not more highly of himself than he ought to think, but that he think soberly according to the proportion of those gifts with which God has intrusted him. Humility* is not built upon *falsehood*, that is peculiar to *pride*, which, in its very essence, is ignorance and mistake;

mistake; while nothing promotes humility so much as a *true* notion of one's self. Let us view ourselves in a just light, and it is impossible but we must be humble. Our good actions and our good qualities are too inconsiderable to need being lessened, as our faults, and errors, and weaknesses are (God knows, and we ourselves may easily know) too great and numerous to need our magnifying or multiplying them. Nor is a man obliged to *treat himself with contempt* in his words and actions, any more than to *undervalue* himself in his thoughts. An *affectation* of bearing hard upon one's self, and being thought blind to every thing valuable of our own, while we take care that *others* shall not *overlook* it; tho' it court the *alliance* of humility, and is sometimes mistaken for it, is much nearer akin to *pride*. Now it has very much the appearance of *affectation*, when a man says in his own *dispraise* such things, as others know, or he himself believes to be *false*. And that which betrays the affectation to every bodies notice, is the manifest uneasiness or disappointment of those persons who love most to run themselves down, when others do not *contradict* them; a plain sign that their censures of themselves are only so many baits to catch the praises of others. The same may be said of a man's *dress*, and *outward appearance*,

ance, in which there is no necessity of his being ridiculous, or mean, or slovenly, in order to prove himself *humble*; nay, an industrious care to *seem* humble by *singularity* in any of these things, is the very *guise* of pride, and usually discovers itself in hard and unchristian reflections upon others who do not follow our humour. Excess or defect in these matters is each an argument of *pride*; an example of which latter the *Moralist* gives in the people of *Lacedæmonia*, who were famous for the *plainness* of their *habits*, but not so remarkable for their *humility*. I make no doubt, but some who are truly humble may esteem it a point of conscience to speak despicably of themselves, and to forbear every thing which may set off their persons in the eye of the world; tho' it be no more than what is modest and decent, and what their condition and circumstances in life do warrant, if not require. But then this is plainly a *mistake*, which however innocent it may be as to themselves, has an *ill effect* as to their humility; which might be as great as it is now, without expressing itself after this manner, and would be much more respected by the world.

NOR, finally, does *humility* import that the humble man is *quite dead* to all *praise* and *honour*, much less that he has an *aversion* to it, and industriously declines it. To
be

be sure whoever seeketh the *praise of men* more than *that honour which cometh from God*, is altogether unacquainted with the virtue of *humility*; as he shows himself to be very defective in it, who is continually hunting after praise, and is extremely afflicted if he misses of it, and in a manner inconsolable if he falls, tho' undeservedly, under reproach and contempt. But *all* desire of a *good* name, or even of a *great* one, in some cases and situations, cannot be culpable; for then God would not have planted this desire in the mind of man. There can be no crime in what is strictly *natural*; and that a desire to be well thought and well spoken of, within proper limitations, is so, is highly probable from its being so *universal*. We are told by the *wise man*, that ° *a good name is better than precious ointment*; and by his father *David*, that † *the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance*: and is not every thing that is *good*, as *such* desirable? or should we find things commended in *scripture*, and propos'd by way of reward, if they were not at all to be aim'd at?——

But to proceed to a more *positive* description of *humility*. And here we must always remember, that *humility* is an *internal* endowment, it has its abode in the *spirit* of man, all the thoughts and motions of which are

T 4 regulated

° Eccles. vii. 1.

† Psal. cxii. 6.

regulated by it. In general, it consists in having a *proper attention* to our *real selves*, so as not to set up an *imaginary self* in the room of that which is real; a *self* which owes its being to a *deluded fancy*, not to the *creating* hand of God; and is cloth'd and adorned according to the fondness of *our* wishes, not the truth and exactness of *things*. *Humility* is not to be impos'd upon by such an empty shadow, tho' *pride* may. The *humble* man is sincerely desirous to know *himself*, is afraid of being deceived in points of less importance relating to his *natural* or *moral* character, and much more in what is *essential*. He keeps a watchful eye upon the motions of *self-love*, and the approaches of *flattery* from other men, lest they should betray him into a foolish complacency. " O
 " Thou omnipresent and omniscient Being,
 " who knowest my inmost frame, next to
 " the knowledge of *thine* adorable perfec-
 " tions teach me to know *myself*, what I am
 " by thy original gift, and what by the im-
 " provement or abuse of it! O let me not
 " deceive myself, let me not be deceived by
 " others! What I *really* am I shall at *last*
 " appear to be; nothing but reality will
 " pass in the other world, as nothing but
 " what is real can have that appearance now
 " before the all-knowing God! I am sen-
 " sible that as in other things, so in my e-
 " *steem*

“ *steem* of my own *Being*, and the *possessions*
 “ of it, I am prone to mistake. The greater
 “ the *danger*, the more shall be my *care*, that
 “ so whatever delusions I labour under of
 “ this kind, they may not be fatal or very
 “ gross; and tho’ I cannot *intirely* guard a-
 “ gainst the insinuations of *pride*, yet *humi-*
 “ *lity* may be my reigning character; and
 “ I may not only have reason upon the
 “ whole to acquit myself, but may have a
 “ good report of the truth also, and praise
 “ from God.”

THIS is a *general* account of *humility*, but
 it may be necessary to be more *particular*.
Humility then consists in the following in-
 stances of *temper* and *conduct*.

I. IN not attributing to *ourselves* any *ex-*
cellency or *good* which we *have not*. A hum-
 ble man is not rich in *fancy*, and poor in
reality; he does not fancy himself possess’d
 of any excellencies of body or mind which
 he has not; whether strength, beauty, judg-
 ment, good nature, piety, or the like. *Hu-*
mility takes the *beam* out of *his* eye, which
 made him see his own virtues and other mens
 faults *double*. We read in scripture of a man’s
 only *seeming to have* a thing, or *thinking* that
 he has it. ⁹ *Whosoever hath not, from him*
shall be taken away even that which he seem-
eth to have. He but *seemeth* to have it, and
 he

⁹ Luke viii. 18.

he shall not long have it in this *seeming* manner. So there is one ^r *who seemeth to be wise*, who must *become a fool that he may be wise*. He must strip himself of his conceited wisdom, if he would avoid that *wo* which is pronounced against ^c *those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight*. This is a very common case for a man to ^t *deceive himself*, by *thinking himself to be something when he is nothing*; something as to *christianity* in general, when he is nothing, utterly unacquainted with the *spirit* and *power* of religion; or something as to this or that particular *endowment* or instance of *usefulness* in the church of Christ, when he is a perfect stranger to it. Against these delusions of pride the *bumble* man is secur'd by an impartial study of himself, and a just estimate of his real abilities and excellencies; in forming which he will not only regard the favourable judgment of his *friends*, but make his advantage of the *censures* of his *enemies*.

2. *Humility* consists in *not overrating* any good we *possess* or *do*. It is peculiar to this virtue that it represents things as *they are* in their own diminutions and native colours; while *pride* draws every object *bigger* and more *beautiful* than the life. It not only multiplies, but magnifies our *virtues*, making them

^r 1 Cor. iii. 18.

^c Isa. v. 21.

^t Gal. vi. 3.

them greater as well as more than they truly are. Is it so that a man is not altogether *void* of sincere goodness? unless his *pride* is well subdued, he is in danger of conceiting himself more *advanced* in goodness and piety than he really is. But in proportion as *humility* prevails, the figure he makes in his own eyes shrinks, and he returns to his own proper stature, to which *pride* had made considerable additions. To prevent a wrong judgment, he not only considers his present seeming eminence in any virtue, and readiness to practise it; but considers also what peculiar *advantages* from natural constitution, from education, and from the gospel he enjoyed for acquiring this virtue; thinks how often, notwithstanding these, he hath fail'd in it; and whether his improvements, after all, are proportioned to his peculiar advantages: and if he finds they are not, he lowers his notion of himself, and places himself in rank below another, who, tho' in appearance less eminent, yet, all circumstances duly weigh'd, hath made a greater improvement in this virtue than he has done. 'Tis difficult to preserve a just medium in the judgments we form of ourselves, and avoid each extreme, of *too great severity* on the one hand, believing we have not made that progress in religion which we really have; or of *partiality* on the other, having too high

high a notion of our spiritual proficiency. Of these two extremes, the latter is the most common, and as much more *dangerous* than the former, as *pride* is worse and more to be dreaded than dejection of spirit. Hath the *humble* man acquitted himself well upon any occasion, discharg'd his duty, done another a kind office, or been serviceable in a good cause? he does not vaunt himself as if no one else had done like him; he does not think the world has so much need of him that it cannot be without him, or is so much obliged that it can never be out of his debt. It is not his way to endeavour to bring a cloud over the good actions of another, and to place his own in the most conspicuous point of view, that they may shine and glitter in the eye of the world. He is sensible that, take the matter at best, he has done *but* what he *ought* to do, and that he should have been much to blame if he had not done it, been wanting in his duty both to God and man.

3. HUMILITY consists in *not taking an inordinate delight in one's self*. The *proud* man is his own idol, to which he is perpetually offering incense; he is one of the most pleasant objects of his own contemplation, ever gazing on the dear image of himself reflected by his own imagination, and with as much self-complacency as *vain* persons behold
behold

behold their beauty in a flattering glass. The *humble* man knows how to imploy his time better than in surveying and telling over his perfections and exploits, as a *miser* does his money. The scripture indeed speaks of such a thing as " *a man's having rejoicing in himself, and not in another* ; and the Apostle *Paul* in particular, speaking of himself and the other Apostles, saith, that " *this was their rejoicing, even the testimony of a good conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity they had their conversation in the world.* This joy having a just foundation cannot be criminal, it is as reasonable as it is refreshing. But the pleasure which arises from the testimony of a well-inform'd conscience will not satisfy the *proud* man, his pleasure is of another kind ; the entertainment of an *empty* and *foolish* mind, not the satisfaction of a *sober* and *rational* one. It renders him secure and careless, and by that means exposes him to a great deal of danger. He is ready to say in the fulness of his joy, *soul take thine ease*, thou hast nothing to do but indulge thyself in the sweet amusement and pleasure, which thy spiritual attainments give thee. Whereas the *humble* man, if upon an impartial examination of his temper and conduct, he can see reason to approve himself, and is cheer'd with the joys of a good conscience ;

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‡ Gal. vi. 4.

⚭ 2 Cor. i. 12.

he is yet so sensible of his defects, and how far short he falls of the perfection of goodness, that ^x *forgetting the things which are behind he presses forward*; and instead of wasting time in pleasing contemplations on what he hath *already* acquired, he thinks it to be as nothing in comparison of what is yet *before* him, of those degrees of piety and holiness he might and ought to attain.

4. HUMILITY consists in not taking to ourselves *more* of the *praise* of any thing laudable than *belongs* to us. If we have any good in us we are to consider who wrought it; if any good has been done by us, who gave us the power to do it. ^y *What have we that we have not* (in one sense or other, either more immediately or remotely) *received? and if we have received it, why should we glory as if we had not received it?* The *humble* person looks even upon his good actions not in the nature of *merit*, but of a *debt*, or farther obligation to God for that *assistance* to which they are in a great degree to be ascribed. “ Thanks be to God by
 “ *whose grace I am what I am*, and have
 “ been enabled to do the good which I
 “ have done; without his grace I had been
 “ nothing!” Like *St. Paul*, he may be able to say, that ^z *the grace bestowed upon him has not been in vain*; that the more grace
 he

^x Phil. iii. 14. ^y I Cor. iv. 7. ^z I Cor. xv. 10.

he has received, *the more abundantly he has laboured* : but then he forgets not to add after the example of that great and humble *Apostle, yet not I* (not I alone, and in my own single strength) *but the grace of God which was with me.* And as to the interest which *other men* have in our virtues and attainments, *humility* is not unwilling to acknowledge it. He that glories in his acquisitions, as if they were all made upon his own *independent* strength and wisdom, when he has been indebted to the writings, instructions, assistances, and labours of other men, is a *proud*, not a *humble* man. Gratitude to God and man is an essential ingredient in humility ; so that in being backward to own that we have been obliged to the aids of *divine grace*, the favourable influences of God's Providence, and the *counsel* and *assistance* of our friends and others, we discover our deficiency in this excellent virtue. We have an admirable example of the contrary, and worthy to be proposed to our imitation tho' he was an heathen ; the person I mean is the *Roman Emperor and Philosopher Antoninus*, who, in his *meditations*, takes notice very ingenuously, “ that from his *grand-father* he
 “ learnt such virtues, from his *mother* such,
 “ from his *tutors* such, from several of his
 “ *friends* whom he particularly names such
 “ and such ; and, saith he, to God I stand in-
 “ debted

“ debted that I had good ancestors, good parents, a good sifter, good tutors, good friends, and, in short, all other good things.”

5. HUMILITY consists in a *lively sense* and *unfeigned acknowledgment* of our many *imperfections* and *sins*; our *natural* and our *moral* defects and disorders.

1. OF our *natural* defects; that our Being is precarious, that we were intirely dependent for it on the pleasure of God. It was but yesterday and we were not, our whole Being was from nothing. *We could not have existed without the leave of another*, does not express the *whole* truth of our case; since, without the *almighty* power of that other, *exerted* in order to our production, we could never have been. And as for our *bodies*, they were immediately ^a *taken out of the dust*; they had the same common original with the bodies of the meanest reptile. *Dust they were*, and we may add, *to dust they shall return*. As we might not have been at all, so, for our *continuance* in Being, we depend upon the will of another, who, if he pleased, could the very next moment turn us back into our first nothing. And as to this *animal* life, 'tis certain that we shall lose it in a very little while more, and in this respect may ^b *say to corruption, thou art my father; and to the worm, thou art my brother*

^a Gen. iii. 19.

^b Job xvii. 14.

ther and my sister. Numberless accidents attend the present life, the most inconsiderable of which may be sufficient to destroy life itself; and when it does not effect that, yet to lessen, if not quite take away the comfort of life. We are besieged and attack'd by a troop of diseases, with death for their leader. There are a thousand things which concur to mortify our pride, and to make us, the *children of the earth*, humble, when we reflect on our bodies; the infirmities which surround them, the pains to which they are liable, the changes which usually befall them in the course of time; from strength to weakness, from the bloom and activity of youth, to the deformities, languidness, and various complaints of age: and yet even of *these* bodies are we too often *proud*, tho' the considerations are so many and so obvious which should teach us *humility*.

BUT it may be said the *soul* is another sort of Being, both in its *original* and in its *nature* widely different from the body, being *reasonable* and the *offspring of God*, designed and *naturally fitted for immortality*. True—yet to whom do we owe this excellence of nature, and on whom does it continually depend? not to or upon ourselves, but the great *c* *Father of spirits* before whom

therefore we should be humble; since he who spake us into reason and life, can speak us into stupidity and eternal death. The *soul* also hath its *imperfections*, especially in the present state. *Comparatively* speaking, how small is the extent of its power or knowledge, shut up in the prison of a body, fetter'd with unwieldy limbs of flesh, bred up in false opinions, and in the midst of delusive appearances? We have not been long enough upon the scene to know much of it. We know little of ourselves, or of the objects about us. *Truth* is a boundless region, of which a very small part is yet discover'd by ages past, or will be discovered in ages to come; and even this little is unknown to the greater part of mankind. And if it should be thought that the temptation to *pride* is so much the greater with regard to those few who excel the rest of mankind in the accomplishments of *knowledge*; I answer, the temptation to pride may be greater, but not the reason for it; since those who know most are best able to judge of their own ignorance, and their many other defects. How very *scanty* is our *knowledge* in those very things which concern the comfort and happiness of life, what is *good* and what is *evil*? and much more how to provide the one and guard against the other? And were our knowledge greater, it would not fully answer

swer the purpose, as long as our *power* continued so *bounded*; for alas, what is it we are able to do for ourselves? And tho' we have an almighty and ever watchful Providence to which we may trust, (which to every serious and good mind is a thought that affords great satisfaction,) yet this surely is no argument for *pride*, but for *humility* and thankfulness.

2. LET us take a brief view of our *moral* defects and disorders. Our *understandings* are *dark* and *narrow*; but this is not the worst that can be said, nor so humbling as the *want of rectitude* in our *moral* capacity, the ingratitude, and other evil dispositions of our hearts, the perverseness of our wills, the misgovernment of our affections, the weakness and inconsistency of our good resolutions, the irregularities of our lives, and the defectiveness of our best actions. Is this the creature so prone to be *proud*? It is true on the one hand, if he was not thus vitious there would be less room for pride; but on the other, the more vitious he is, the more occasion he has to be humble. What a strange kind of composition is this thing we call *pride*! a *defect*, a *vice* which grows out of the imagination of our virtues and perfections; and at the same time could hardly find entrance into the soul, were it not that our imperfections and vices are so many, and our perfections

and virtues so few. We are *sinners* before God ; we have not only the guilt of many sinful actions lying upon us, but these sinful actions leave the most unhappy effects behind ; they beget evil *habits*, and by this means polute, enslave, and harden the heart ; incline it to that which is evil, and more and more incapacitate it for that which is good. And under all this guilt and disorder shall we not be *humble*? Let us only study our selves thoroughly and we shall ; for *humility* is nothing else but a *deep conviction*, and *suitable acknowledgment* to God of our follies, imperfections and sins ; of our unworthiness of the favour of God, and our liability to his displeasure and condemnation. — These *five particulars* contain a short description of *humility*. The first four are comprehended in *scripture* under the term *σωφροσύνη*, *sober-mindedness* ; for to be *sober-minded* is not to *attribute* to ourselves any *excellency* or *good* which we *have not* ; — not to *over-rate* any good which we *possess* or *do*, — not to take any *inordinate delight* in ourselves ; — nor to *assume* to ourselves *more* of the *praise* of any *laudable* quality or action than *belongs* to us. — This is *sobriety of mind*, at least, is the most direct meaning of the word. And O, how lovely is this sort of temperance, and how reproachful and odious the contrary, not less so than that *external* virtue

tue or vice to which we commonly give those names! Not to be guilty of *excesses* in the use of the *good things* of *this life*, but always to observe the rules of the exactest temperance, adds an amiableness to a man's character; and is it not the same when he is temperate in the enjoyment of the *good things* which belong to his own Being? The word used to express the *last* of these five particulars, *viz.* a *lively sense* and *unfeigned acknowledgment* to God of our many *imperfections* and *sins* is ταπεινωσασυνη, *lowliness* of mind. We are to be *vile in our own eyes*, because we have indeed made ourselves vile by sin, and we are to lie low in the dust before God.

LET me add, that *humility*, besides this sense and conviction of our imperfections and sins *absolutely* considered, seems to imply farther a sense and acknowledgment of them in a *comparative* view; *i. e.* the *humble* man thinks and owns what he is *before God*, the self-existent, most holy, and all-perfect Being. In this light he can as it were behold nothing else but God; or, if he sees himself, it is only so as to wonder at the littleness of his knowledge and virtue, and of every faculty and attainment, and the greatness of his folly and sin that he should offend against this glorious God, abuse his favours, and affect to be any thing, or

to do any thing without him. ^d “ *Lord,*
 “ *what is man that thou art mindful of him,*
 “ *or the son of man that thou visitest him!*
 “ Man, who in thy sight is but *vanity,*
 “ whatever figure he may make as to his
 “ intellectual part among thy works here
 “ below! Thou art *from everlasting,* I am
 “ but just come into Being. Thy existence
 “ is necessary and self-originated, mine is
 “ the mere effect of thy good pleasure.
 “ *Thou fillest heaven and earth* with thy pre-
 “ sence, I possess but a little portion of
 “ space. *Thou knowest all things,* I know
 “ very few, —and not one thing perfectly.
 “ *To thee all things are possible,* to me no-
 “ thing without thy concurrence. Thou
 “ art all-sufficient, my sufficiency is from
 “ thee. Thou art *glorious in holiness,* I am
 “ become vile and hateful by sin. Thou
 “ changeest not, being *without the least vari-*
 “ *ableness or shadow of turning,* I am subject
 “ to endless vicissitudes in my mind and
 “ body, and outward condition. Thou art
 “ the *blessed God,* infinitely happy in the
 “ enjoyment of thyself; the smiles of thy
 “ countenance and the communications of
 “ thy bounty being withdrawn, I am a poor
 “ wretched creature, as *miserable* as I am
 “ *sinful,* beset with evils of various kinds
 “ which oppress and send me to the dust.
 “ And

^d Psal. viii. 4.

“ And what shall I say unto thee, O Lord
 “ God, but that I am as nothing before
 “ thee? that I have the greatest reason to
 “ be humble, and shall make my sin ex-
 “ ceeding sinful if I am proud?”

LET this suffice for the description of the *temper* which constitutes *humility*; it may render the discourse more generally useful if I add a brief account of the principal *ways* in which this humble temper *expresses* itself; but this, with the blessedness of the poor in spirit, I shall leave for the next opportunity.





S E R M O N XI.

The Blessedness of the poor in spirit.

MATTH. V. 3.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

IN treating these words I propos'd,

I. To *explain* the character of the *poor in spirit*; and

II. To represent their *blessedness*; *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

I. IN explaining the character, I observed that it signified either those who have a *temper* of mind suited to a state of *poverty*; or (which I apprehend our Saviour's principal

pal meaning) *humility*. By *humility* is meant a *deep conviction* and *suitable acknowledgment* before God of our *imperfections*, *sins* and *follies*, of our great unworthiness of the favour of God, and our liability to his displeasure and condemnation. I gave you a distinct description of this temper under *five* particulars. The *humble* man does not *attribute* to *himself* any *excellence* or *good* which *he has not*—he *over-rates not* any good which he *possesses* or *does*—he takes not an *inordinate* delight in *himself*—he assumes not to *himself* more of the *praise* of any thing *laudable* than *belongs* to him—and he has a *lively sense* of his many *imperfections* and *sins*, and unfeignedly *acknowledges* them before God; and this conviction of his own meanness and sinfulness, is greatly increas'd by a *comparative view* of God the self-existent, most holy, and all-perfect Being.—As it may render the discourse more instructive, I propose now to add a view of the *principal ways* in which this temper *expresses* itself, and they are the following.

I. HUMILITY discovers itself in the *modesty* of a man's *outward appearance*. In his habit, in his house, and in the whole figure he makes; the humble man considers his age, his abilities, his character, his function; and

and will avoid whatever either of these would make indecent. He will preserve that moderation on these several articles that no one may have reason to suspect he values himself upon these foreign ornaments, or expects to be valued for them.

2. THE humble man is *modest* in his *desires* and *pursuits*, He is not vain-glorious, aims not at things beyond his strength, or above his pretensions. ^a *Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty, neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.* He prefers a *good* name before a *great*; and unless where Providence calls him forth, he seeks obscurity rather than to be publickly known. He is not eager and immoderate in his desires of honour, which, whoever is, will be apt to go out of his way for it, when the plain road does not lead to it, and suit his behaviour to the notions which they have of honour from whom he courts it; and will be impatient of repulses and disappointments; and, as often as he misses of his aim, consume and eat himself out with vexation. He who is not content with the approbation of his *own conscience*, and an *all-knowing* God, discovers it to be his chief ambition to *please men*.

3. HUMILITY shows itself in our *conversations* with, and *behaviour* towards *other men*;

^a Psal. cxxxi. 1.

men ; teaching us not to be obstinate in defending our opinions, nor forward to impose them ; not to be so abject as to flatter others, nor so vain as to love they should flatter us. *Humility* is never unattended with affability and sweetness of behaviour, equally distant from haughtiness and mean servile compliances. The humble man knows how to behave in *every relation*, and never disturbs the peace and good order of society ; is careful to ^b *render to all their due, honour to whom honour*, maintains a proper respect and submission to his superiors, an equal friendly manner with his equals, and, without any difficulty, is able to *condescend to men of low estate*. He is the same to his inferiors which he would have his superiors be to him. The humble man had rather own a fault, than make it greater by going about to justify it ; is not ashamed of being obliged to others, or to acknowledge the obligation ; wherein *humility* differs from that *false* virtue which *Aristotle* ascribes to the *magnanimous* person, “ who, he saith, is pleas’d when he can
 “ confer a benefit, and blushes to receive
 “ one.” He is not uneasy to hear others commended, does not endeavour to engross reputation to himself, but gladly admits others into a share of it, and is ready to promote their good name as far as he can do it consistently with truth.

4. IN *prosperity* the humble man is not *lifted up*. He does not *forget himself* under the smiles of Providence, or *insult others*. His mind is not subject to the changes of his outward condition. If God prospers his designs, and pours his bounties upon him, he does not imagine himself the better man for this, nor think that he is authorized to boast of the favour which is shown him.

5. IN a state of *affliction* humility preserves us from all *murmuring* and *impatience*. The *humble* man never thinks that God does him wrong, or deals too hardly with him. He accepts the punishment of his sins, and saith ^b *unto God as it is meet, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more*. Few things differ more widely than the behaviour of the *proud* and the *humble* man in *adversity*. The *proud* man can scarcely forbear openly repining against God, when he afflicts him in his body, or outward circumstances; his own ^c *foolishness perverts his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord*. He falls out with God and man; while the *humble* person gives glory to God by acknowledging the equity of all his proceedings, and makes the yoke much the more supportable by not behaving impatiently under it.—By these, and such like *marks*, is *humility* known. And thus have I consider'd the
character

^b Job xxxiv. 31.

^c Prov. xix. 3.

character of the true disciples of Christ, they are *poor in spirit*.

II. LET us now briefly consider their *blessedness*. *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. This passage is known to have *two eminent* acceptations in scripture, being either put for the *kingdom of grace*, or the *kingdom of glory*; and in both these senses it is true concerning the *poor in spirit*, that they are *blessed, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

I. *THEIRS* is the *kingdom of heaven*, as that phrase signifies the *kingdom of grace*, or the *gospel-state and dispensation*. The *poor in spirit*, those of a *contented and humble* mind, were the *best prepared* to receive the *gospel of the kingdom*; all the true subjects of this *kingdom* are of this *character*; and there is a particular *suitableness* between *such* a temper of mind and the *gospel-state and constitution*.

I. THE *poor in spirit*, or those of a *humble and contented* mind were the *best prepared* to receive the *gospel of the kingdom*. When the *kingdom of the Messiah* was first publish'd all were invited into it, but few, in comparison, were *disposed* to become members of it. This is the meaning of that expression,

pression, ^d *many are called but few are chosen.* The gospel was preach'd to all without distinction, high and low, rich and poor; but all were not in a like *preparation of mind* to embrace it. They who doated upon the power and riches of this world, they who had no notion of any happiness but what was of a worldly kind, or of any wants they had but what related to the body; they who fancied they had knowledge, and understanding, and goodness more than sufficient, but thought they could never have enough of external enjoyments; such as these were not qualified to receive the doctrine of the gospel. When they heard this *new* teacher saying, ^e *He that will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me; whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he has he cannot be my disciple;* must not the proposals he made be very unacceptable to them? They would be ready thus to reason with themselves, “to renounce the world is to renounce
 “ our happiness; and what can make us
 “ any valuable compensation for that? To
 “ submit to a life of poverty and affliction,
 “ to be hated and despised of all men for
 “ the sake of our new Lord and Master,
 “ who can bear the thought of it?” This was the reason that ^f *not many wise men after*
the

^d Matt. xxii. 14.^e Matt. xvi. 24.^f 1 Cor.

the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called, (so as to obey the call) but God was pleased to chuse the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things despised did God chuse, yea and things that were not (in comparifon) to bring to nought things that were; that no flesh should glory in his sight. Not that any, be their quality and condition in the world what it would, were shut out from the privileges of the gospel; but as it is too often seen, the outward condition corrupted the temper of the mind. It was not all their wealth, and power, and greatness, that would have hindred them from coming to Christ, or being accepted by him, if they had not been proud, and covetous, and ambitious; and where these vices reigned it was no wonder the doctrine of a humble crucified Saviour could not find admiffion. It was otherwise in respect of those who had a meanner opinion of themselves and of the world. Such as these were like the ^s merchant in the parable seeking goodly pearls; who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. So did they judge it a wise bargain to part with all that they might win Christ, and be made partakers of his unsearchable riches.

riches. ^h To them Christ crucified was not such a *stumbling-block* as he was to the generality of the world, but the *power of God and the wisdom of God*. They were not so wise in their own account, but that they were willing to grow wiser by the instructions and pattern of this divine Teacher; and joined ⁱ *in casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*. These were the persons to whom the gospel was abundantly welcome, who esteemed it a ^k *saying worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*; being sensible of their own guilt and corruption from which they were glad to be delivered at any price, tho' it was with the loss of all worldly good things, which they did not value equal to the privilege of freedom from sin, which the gospel held forth to them.

2. THE *gospel Church or Kingdom is made up of persons of this character*; at least none but such are true subjects of this Kingdom. Every one who is *poor in spirit* is a *christian indeed*; and every one who is a *christian or disciple of Christ indeed* is *poor in spirit*. These terms are *convertible*. The *kingdom of Christ* is not like the *kingdom of this world*.

^h 1 Cor. i. 23— ⁱ 2 Cor. x. 15. ^k 1 Tim. i. 15.

world. In the kingdoms of men the ambitious and aspiring are encouraged, the rich, the mighty, the honourable, carry all before them. A man is valued not so much by what he *is himself*, as by what he *has*. Men of a lowly spirit are often trampled upon, and humility is reckon'd meanness of soul. But the standard of true worth is quite different from this in the *kingdom* of the *Messiah*; here *poverty of spirit* is the surest title to honour, no good subject is a stranger to this quality, and the chief favourites are most eminently distinguish'd by it. Therefore, in answer to the disciples, ¹ *who asked him, who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* Jesus called a little child and set him in the midst of them, and said, *whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* And again, ^m *Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven.* My disciples are of a humble, unprejudic'd, teachable spirit, like that of children; they do not think themselves above being taught, nor find fault with the simplicity of the gospel. And when a spirit of ambition began to show itself among the disciples of our Lord, ⁿ *he called them to him and said, Ye know that the princes*

¹ Matt. xviii. 1.— ^m Matt. xix. 13, 14.. ⁿ Matt. xx. 25.—

of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you: but whoever will be great among you let him be your minister; and whoever will be chief among you let him be your servant. So intent was he upon convincing them that humility was one of the best marks by which men might be known for his disciples, and one of the strongest recommendations to his favour.

3. There is a *particular suitableness* between the *temper* of mind before describ'd and the *gospel-state* and *constitution*. The gospel is full of *precepts*, requiring humility and contempt of the world, and it wants not *examples* fitted to inforce its divine precepts, above all, the example of the *Son of God*; who therefore requires all to ^o *learn of him, who was meek and lowly in heart, that they may find rest to their souls*. The christian religion is the best fitted in the world to inspire humility; it shews us ourselves in the truest light, as *weak, corrupted, and guilty*; so weak, that we cannot, with success, ^p *work out our salvation*, but when *God works in us to will and to do*; so guilty, that the ^q *blood of the Son of God* must be shed to *expiate* our sins, and the greater
part

^o Matt. xi. 29.
i. 18, 19.

^p Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^q 1 Pet.

part so corrupted by evil practice, that they ^r *must be born again or they cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* To promote the same temper, our religion shews God to us in *all his glory*, as at once ^r *infinitely holy and infinitely good*; hereby designing to humble us under our pollution, which must render us unfit to approach so holy a majesty; and under a sense of our ingratitude, which is heightened beyond all measure by the consideration of that goodness and mercy against which we have offended. Our religion farther shews us *the Son of God* casting a veil upon his glory, and condescending to come down in the *form of a servant*, and *in the likeness of sinful flesh*; that so he might direct and warm us by his *example*, as well as make *atonement* for us by his *death*; that ^r *the same mind might be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus.* Who being in the form of God, did not covet to appear as a God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Here was an instance of *humiliation* indeed! *humility* is the lesson we learn from the incarnation of Christ, the circumstances of his birth and

^r John iii. 3. ^r 1 Pet. i. 16, 17. 1 John i. 5.
iv. 16. Matt. xix. 17. ^r Phil. ii. 5—Rom. viii. 13,

education, the manner in which he conversed and acted, and the death he suffered. And when we consider that ^u *through him alone, as our mediator and advocate, we have access to God*, how strongly does it teach us to be humble; since we have no hope that our prayers, our duties, our virtues, our persons will be accepted, so as to be rewarded with eternal life, but through the merits and obedience of another? So admirably adapted is the *religion* of Christ to promote the growth of *humility*; and so wonderfully suited is the temper and character of the *humble* man to this religion. Not only the *laws* of this kingdom enjoin *poverty of spirit*, but we see it *exemplified* in him who is made *lord* and *head* of it, who was of a contented as well as of a humble mind, and ^w *though rich made himself poor for our sakes*. He had the command of all the wealth of the world, but show'd his contempt of it in leaving it to be enjoy'd by men of no worth or goodness; while he himself was so poor as ^x *not to have where to lay his head*; so poor as to subsist, very probably, upon his *own labours* before he enter'd upon his publick ministry, and afterwards on the generosity of his friends; and who took

^u Ephes. i. 6. ii. 18. 1 Tim. ii. 5. Rom. v. 19. vi. 23. ^w 2 Cor. viii. 9. ^x Matt. viii. 2.

took as little care to make his friends and favourites rich as he did himself.

ALL this shows that the *kingdom of grace* belongs to *the poor in spirit*. And if it be ask'd how this shows them to be *blessed*? the answer is easy. They have great peace and pleasure *immediately* arising out of that temper of soul, which qualify them to become subjects of the *heavenly kingdom*. They have a composure of mind, an undisturbed rest and establishment under all the changes of the present life, and the many cross occurrences of it, to which the proud, the ambitious, the covetous are intirely strangers. Their Prayers are acceptable with God, ^y *who forgetteth not the cry of the humble*; they are intitled to the presence of the ^z *high and holy one who inhabiteth eternity, who dwelleth in the high and holy place; with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* Finally, they may expect more liberal communications of *divine grace*; the consideration with which the apostle *Peter* sets home his advice upon christian professors. ^a *Be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. To this man will he look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at his word.* The per-

X 3

son

^y Psal. ix. 12.

^z Isai. lvii. 15.

^a 1 Pet. v. 5.

son set over this kingdom to manage all the affairs of it, and to dispense the rewards belonging to it, is the *Lord Jesus*; and he cannot but have a favour for those persons, and delight in them above all others, who are possessors of that *grace*, especially who excel in it, of which he himself was so bright an example. And certainly 'tis no little honour to bear so near a resemblance to our *king*, and to have so large a share in his favour. To souls so like his *own* our blessed Lord will not fail to manifest himself; his Spirit shall support and refresh theirs, and fill them with unspeakable consolation. And what more needs be said to show the *blessedness of the poor in spirit*, even in this world, where their glory is most eclipsed, and they suffer under many hardships and inconveniencies. Whatever measure of affliction is allotted them by God, or how ungrateful soever the usage they meet with from the hands of men, still they are blessed in this, that *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, that they are governed by the best laws, sharers in the noblest privileges, and approved as faithful subjects by the best of *Kings*. What an honour, what an happiness is this!

2. *BLESSED are the poor in spirit*, because *theirs is the kingdom of glory*, or that state of *eternal reward* which follows after
this

this life. They are heirs of that blessed world; ^b *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ*; and they shall as certainly in due time possess it, as their forerunner Jesus Christ is already enter'd upon it. They who have the *spirit of poverty*, so as not to have their hearts set upon the things of this world, shall be made rich indeed. Have they had little or nothing of this world's goods, and were they contented with what they had, tho' little? this contentment of theirs shall be rewarded with everlasting fulness and abundance. ^c *The poor, in this sense, being rich in faith, God has chosen to be heirs of his kingdom.* There shall be a happy and glorious reverse of their condition. It was with some difficulty that they overcame the temptations of those strait and low circumstances in which the Providence of God saw fit to place them; but by the grace of God they did overcome, and see now how *great* is their *reward in heaven*. They are now set above the reach of these, and all other temptations; and perhaps, the *years of famine* being ended, they have the quicker relish, and the fuller enjoyment of those *years*, or rather, *everlasting ages* of *plenty* which succeed them. ^d *In this life they had their evil things*; now is the time for them to receive their *good things*, they

X 4 are

^b Rom. viii. 17. ^c James ii. 5. ^d Luke xvi.
25.

are comforted for the few days in which they saw affliction and distress.

NOR is *this blessedness* confined to those whose *outward condition* is poor; but alike belongs to all who are *poor in spirit*, whatever be their circumstances in the world. ° Do they know how *to use the world*, if they have it, for the glory of God, and the benefit of their fellow-creatures; *not abusing it* by obeying the dictates of lust and covetousness? Let them be never so rich, would they think themselves *poor*, if they had nothing *better* to hope for, no interest in the favour of God, no title to a future happiness? Do they prize those things which are common to them with the poorest saints, infinitely beyond those by which they are outwardly distinguished from them? Such as these are not the persons spoken to by our Saviour, when he saith, † *Wo unto you rich, for ye have received your consolation.* This cannot be said of the rich whom I am now describing; they have *not received their consolation*; their chief consolation is not in present things; on the contrary, they would be inconsolable if this were their all. They can truly say, “ Rather let me be as destitute and wretched as the *poor man* in the *parable*, if, like him, I may be carried after death into *Abraham’s bosom*; “ than

† 1 Cor. vii. 31.

† Luke vi. 24.

“ than have my good things as the *rich*
 “ *man* had, and in the end meet *his* dread-
 “ ful doom. If I resemble him in respect
 “ of riches, ’tis thy Providence, O Lord,
 “ that makes this resemblance, which I
 “ trust therefore is not my crime ; but
 “ thanks be to thy *grace* I am not like
 “ him in his *moral* and *religious* character !
 “ I detest his way of life, his luxury, and
 “ pride, and intemperance, his want of
 “ gratitude to God, and compassion to the
 “ poor.” Blessed are all they who are of
 this christian spirit. Such as these have
 laid up for themselves *treasures in heaven* ;
 and therefore riches and honour are laid up
 for them, *even durable riches and righteous-*
ness ; riches, as much more satisfying, as
 they are more durable than the riches of the
 world, which they know how to despise
 while they possess them.

BLESSED also are the *humble* in mind,
because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ *Who-*
soever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he
that humbleth himself shall be exalted. So dif-
 ferent an *end* have *pride* and *humility*, if we
 believe the Saviour of the world, who is to
 distribute the rewards of the last day. Then
 will he say to the humble souls, “ Come
 “ up hither, take your place at my right
 “ hand ; you are the persons whom I de-
 “ light

⁵ Matt. xxiii. 12.

“ light to honour. Forasmuch as you did
 “ not your alms and other good actions to
 “ be *seen of men*, I will now reward you
 “ in the presence of my angels, and of this
 “ great assembly.” Well might the Wise-
 man say, ^h *That before honour is humility.*
 Humility seeks not honour of men, it shall
 therefore be the more highly honoured by
 God. And if all this be true, as we have
 the word of God to assure us it is, if per-
 sons of a *humble and contented mind* are to
 pass into this glorious and happy state when
 they depart out of this life ; then surely the
poor in spirit must of all men be pronounc-
 ed the *most blessed*. They will receive a *king-
 dom that cannot be moved* ; they shall share
 in the glories of that kingdom which infi-
 nitely exceed all the glories which the king-
 doms of this world, the most splendid and
 powerful of them, can boast. *Heaven* and
Happiness are words of the same meaning.
 When we would sum up the highest hap-
 piness of which human nature is capable in
 one word, we call it *Heaven* ; and by call-
 ing it the *Kingdom of Heaven*, if we do not
raise the idea, we set it in a fuller light. For
 in *this* kingdom who is the *King*, but *he*
 who is the *most high Possessor* of *heaven* and
earth, and almighty *Maker* of both ? This
 kingdom is now under the administration of
 the

^h Prov. xv. 33.

the *Messiah*, the Son of God, who will at last ⁱ *deliver it up to the Father, that God may be all in all.* He will be *in all* the inhabitants of that heavenly world, and he will be *all to them*; the life of their lives, the spring of all their pleasures, and a spring that is continually flowing, and never fails. They have access to the immediate *presence* of God and the *Lamb*, they behold the face of God seated on the throne of heaven with a *visible Majesty* becoming the Lord of the universe, and they have the honour to be always approved servants to the *King of Kings*. Perfect brightness, vigour, beauty, and immortality adorn their bodies; perfect knowledge, and goodness, their minds. They are employ'd in the noblest designs of the divine government, and ever discharge their trusts in a manner perfectly pleasing to their great King. For *this kingdom*, and for this happiness, the *poor in spirit* are in the very temper of their minds *fitted*. *Theirs* is the *temper* of heaven, which would not be *heaven* to them if their temper was *different*. The earthly minded and the proud are not qualified to partake of the happiness of that world. Like the *Israelites*, who preferred the *garlick* and the *onions* of *Egypt* to the *milk* and *honey* of *Canaan*, men of a worldly spirit would by no means think it an advantageous change

to

to be transplanted from earth to heaven; earth would have their *hearts* if heaven had their *company*: and as for the *proud*, what have they to do among those lowly spirits? ^k *who fall down before him that sitteth upon the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory; the glory of all is thine, and to thee we ascribe it. Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name, does the praise belong. Whatever we are, we are by thy free bounty and goodness, thy grace gave us the victory, and the same grace rewards our victory with everlasting rest and triumph."* The spirits of heaven are as humble as they are glorious; they are at once clothed with *glory* and *humility*, and they esteem their humility no little part of their glory.

LET us now apply this subject.

I. WHAT an excellent teacher is Jesus Christ, and how excellent that religion which is taught by him! The *morality* of the ancient *Philosophers* is very defective. The noblest, in some respects, is that of the *Stoicks*; but

^k Revel. iv. 10, 11.

but in *this particular* it fails most miserably, even more than that of other sects. Instead of inculcating *humility*, it too much cherishes the *pride* of the human heart. To judge only by the writings of the *Stoicks*, and much more by the boasts which they make of the *self-sufficiency* of their *wise man*, (that is of *themselves*) one would not think that *pride* was a very great fault: and yet certainly it is, and being likewise an epidemical disease, there was the more need that they who pretended to reform and perfect human nature by their precepts, should have set themselves against it. This defect is happily supplied by our divine Master. *He knew what was in man*, the distempers of soul he laboured under, and the virtues which would render him most dear and lovely in the sight of God; and therefore commands his disciples to be *poor in spirit*, encouraging them to be so by his own *example*, which was the best *comment* upon his *doctrine*. When he requires *humility*, he requires no more of his followers than he practised himself in the most difficult degree, for ¹ *he came not to be ministred unto, but to minister*; of which he gave a most surprizing instance, when ^m *he washed his disciples feet*, telling them, that *he had given them an example, that they should do as he had done unto them*;

i. e. con-

¹ Matt. xx. 28,

^m John xiii. 14, 15.

i. e. condescend to any offices of love to which they were called by the Providence of God, how much soever they might seem to lessen themselves hereby. Those very things, which some persons of bad tempers and lives have made *objections* against Christianity, are really very great *arguments* of its *truth* and *divinity*; such as, among others, the contempt of human grandeur, forgiveness of injuries, and humbleness of mind; which, in the sight of God, and in the judgment of sound reason, is of great price, how much soever it may be undervalued by those whose prejudices make them incompetent judges of it.

2. LET all then who *name the name of Christ*, be persuaded to *learn of him* this first and difficult lesson of christianity. It has the honour to be the *first* of the Beatitudes. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, thus the *eternal Wisdom* begins; and indeed the foundation had need be laid low, where the building is to be rais'd so high. *Humility* prepares the way for the practice of other virtues; there is no forming any notion of *repentance* without it. *Sin*, in its very essence, is *pride* and *presumption*; opposing a man's own fancy, and passions, and inclinations, to the wisdom and authority of God; *repentance* consequently must include *humility*. A *proud penitent* is a contradiction in terms, when we
 speak

• speak of repentance towards God. In confessing a fault to men, there may be a show of humility, when there is a great deal of pride in the heart; which would hinder a man from making such a submission, were he not under a necessity of doing it, or had not some worldly ends to serve by it: but then such a repentance as this is only outward; whereas the only repentance which a heart-searching God will accept, is that of the heart. Here therefore the humility of the true penitent resides. And as the penitent begins with *humility*, confessing and bewailing his sins before God; so humility assists him in going on to perfection. He who thinks *he has already attained*, is not likely to strive much for that which he fancies he has already. He who fancies himself to be rich when he is poor, is never like to be otherwise than poor. This is the condition of the *proud* man, who, for this reason, cannot be expected to make any tolerable progress in virtue and religion. To which we may add this other reason, that he is not so sensible as he ought to be of his wanting the *continual* aids of *God's grace*; and not being sensible that he wants help, he will neglect to implore it. *Prayer* is the very *life* of the *christian*; a man may as well live without breathing, as the christian without prayer. But will that man pray, will he

he pray always, will he pray with earnestness and devotion, who conceits that he is *sufficient of himself* for every part of his duty; or that if God does any thing, it is very little in comparison? It can hardly be imagined that such a man will strive with God in prayer, and intreat, as for his life, that God would not deny him the *assistance of his Spirit*, in order to his complete victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, the acceptable discharge of his duty, and his happy proficiency in every virtue. Under the *divine assistance*, what temptation is there which the christian may not hope to overcome; what virtue, in which he may not hope to excel? and what measures of divine assistance may not he hope to attain, who is *instant* and *persevering* in *prayer* for them? This every truly *humble* man is; and the more humble, the more fervent. In learning this lesson of humility we are farther to remember, that it is one of the most *difficult*; which I mention not with a design to discourage any, but to excite them to greater care and diligence. *Pride* is a vice to which we are all of us too prone, under one shape or other; it steals upon us unperceiv'd, and has a greater share and influence (I had almost said) in *every* thing we do, but to be sure, in *many* of our actions, than we can easily imagine. We naturally love ourselves,

ourselves, and this makes us willing to think well of ourselves; and when we are thus disposed, we lay hold of every thing which favours this inclination; whatever does in the least seem to justify this good opinion of ourselves, we carefully lay up, and extravagantly magnify, while we are wilfully blind to our faults and imperfections: this renders it difficult to know the pride of our hearts, and much more to conquer it; but the more difficult the conquest, the more glorious. By every inch of ground we gain upon this enemy, we shall reap some advantage, and find the difficulty of after-conquests much lessened. Let us therefore grudge no pains that we may be able to subdue the risings of pride, and learn humility and contentment. I add *contentment*, because, as I show'd before, it seems to be part of the meaning of the text; and indeed, by learning to be humble, we learn at the same time, and by the same means, to be contented; the humble man being always the most content. There is a manifest and inseparable connection between those two virtues; it is no wonder if the proud man be discontented, but it would be exceeding wonderful if the humble person was so; it being a thing never known, that the same person deserved the character of a humble, and a discontented covetous spirit. The hum-

ble man may not be free from all the remains of a worldly temper, and the reason is, that he is not altogether free from pride; but in the same degree as he hath the spirit of humility, he has the spirit of poverty too; and cannot excel in one, without making an answerable proficiency in the other. The humble man knows ⁿ *how to be abased as well as how to abound, every where and in all things he is instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* In short, *he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him.* Let us then be unwearied in our endeavours after these excellent attainments; let us not only endeavour to *seem*, but to *be* humble; not only to *seem* indifferent to the wealth and grandeur of the world, but to be *really* so. In order to this, I would leave with you the following Directions.

1. Let us converse more with *ourselves*. A narrow scrutiny into our own characters and conduct, into our hearts and lives, and frequent observations of the faults and follies of which we are guilty, would have a very good effect. He whose thoughts dwell most at home, is most likely to know himself; and the better any man knows himself, the more humble he will be. We should often ask ourselves, how have I behav'd in the
several

ⁿ Philip. iv. 12, 13.

several relations of life? what improvement have I made of my many advantages? what manner of person might I have been if I had been watchful to lay hold of the opportunities that were offered, and had made the best of my time, and all my abilities? what manner of person am I now? can't I think of any errors and follies which I have fallen into? if I am free from *anger*, am I not inclined to *sensuality*? if I am clear from *intemperance*, am I also from *covetousness*? if *just* to men, am I *habitually devout* towards God? am I as *charitable* and *beneficent*, as when in necessity myself I should think it reasonable others should be to me? have I always acted like a *wise* and a *good* man; always regarded my obligations as a *christian*, and taken care to fulfil them? Let us narrowly examine our actions, as to the principles and ends of them; the consequence of this self-examination impartially pursued, and frequently repeated, will be, that whatever our character be, or our behaviour has been, we shall see cause enough to be humble, even when we have the greatest ground for rejoicing; since the most perfect will find they have great defects, and that their improvements have not been proportionable to their advantages.

2. LET us imagine the world was as well acquainted with our *inside* as they are with

our *outside*; that whatever we know by *ourselves*, was likewise known to *others*; the foolish and sinful workings of our minds; the vain thoughts which pass within us; the passions which mutiny in our breasts; and the vexation we suffer upon very trifling occasions; what a small matter lifts us up or casts us down; how little command we have over ourselves; the imperfection of our best actions; and how far they sometimes are from being so good as they appear; should we, in case the world had such a view of us as this, be so apt to be puff'd up as we are now? if not, 'tis plain we ground our pride upon other mens ignorance of us. But if *men* do not know us thoroughly, *God* does, even more thoroughly than we know ourselves; those sins and errors which escape our own notice, are not conceal'd from him; and as the knowledge of ourselves, so the serious consideration of this knowledge which God has of us, is one excellent means of promoting our humility.

3. LET us not consider merely what we ourselves are at present, in *comparison* of some *others*; but consider what we are in *proportion* to the *advantages* we have enjoy'd, and what we might have been had we duly improv'd them. Perhaps some, in comparison of whom we value ourselves, have made greater improvements in proportion to their advan-

advantages than we have done. Though we have *five talents* we may be as unprofitable servants as he who hath but *one*; if we had five given us at first, and he but one.

4. LET us propose to ourselves the *best patterns* for our imitation. The example of the *Son of God* we should have continually before us, both for the dignity of it, and because it is the example of one whom we call our Lord and Master. It is the honour of the disciple to be as his Lord. And when we consider his uniform fervent piety, his cheerful resignation amidst the most afflicted circumstances, his active goodness, notwithstanding the worst returns; his invincible patience under the greatest injuries; his condescension to men, and intire subjection to God, with the like virtues, and compare our own temper and life with his, we shall soon be humbled at the apprehension of our great deficiencies.—The *Angels of light* too, let us consider them. They excel the sons of men by many degrees; they have more knowledge, and more love, and more strength, and never sin or die; yet are they *ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*. As much lower as we are than the angels, these kind and beneficent spirits do not think it beneath them to be our keepers, and to at-

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tend our steps. ^p *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*—Our Saviour gives this honourable character of *John the Baptist*, that ^q *among them who are born of women there had not arisen a greater than he*; and how remarkable was this great and good man for his humility, and his poor and abstemious way of living? *He was clothed with camels hair, and with a girdle of skin about his loins, and he did eat locusts and wild honey.* And his spirit was as lowly as his appearance was mean; for when the *Jews* sent to him to know who he was, ^r *he confessed and denied not, but confessed that he was not the Christ.* He would not give the least countenance to such a thought, tho' so much to his own honour. *He that cometh after me, saith he, is preferred before me, for he is before me, whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to loose.* He esteemed it an honour above his highest pretensions to perform the meanest office about the *Messiah*. *He must increase, but I must decrease*; with the thought of which he was well pleased, though he should be like the morning star, which after it has usher'd in the sun, is quite hid in his beams. ^s *St. Paul, who came not behind the very chief*
of

^p Pſal. xxxiv. 7.

^q Matth. xi. 11. iii. 4.

^r John i. 20, 27. iii. 30, 31.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 9.

Eph. iii. 8.

of the Apostles, reflects with so much humility upon his past conduct when he was a persecutor, as to stile himself *the least of the Apostles, not meet to be called an Apostle, yea less than the least of all saints.*

5. LET us often compare *pride* and *humility*, the spirit of poverty and the spirit of the world together. Pride ruffles the breast, disturbs society, and is alike displeasing to God and Man. *When pride cometh then cometh shame, but with the lowly is wisdom. By pride cometh contention and every evil work. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* Whereas humility secures the quiet of a man's own bosom, and renders him beloved both of God and Man. What success it has in recommending us to the notice and esteem of men we learn from the *parable*, which ^u Jesus put forth to those who dined with him at the house of a chief Pharisee, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms, saying to them, *When thou art bidden of another man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable than thou be bidden; and he who had both thee and him come and say to thee, give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he who had thee com-*

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† Prov. xi. 2. xiii. 10. xvi. 18. ^u Luke xiv. 7—11.

eth, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship, or honour, in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. The price it bears in the account of God may be learnt from the ^wparable of the Publican and the Pharisee, of whom the latter trusted in himself as being righteous, and despised others; but the former stood afar off, and would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven; but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner! Upon which our Saviour makes the same reflection as upon the former parable; I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. So that we see that before honour, both with God and Man, is humility. Humility is the ornament of all other virtues, and gives them their greatest grace and beauty. Humility is to a good conversation, what modesty is to a beautiful countenance; and though, in some sense, it throws a veil over a virtuous life, yet, by this very means, renders it more lovely and inviting, and secures our virtue as well as adorns it. The humble man is not high minded but fears; by walking humbly with
 God

^w Luke xviii. 9.—

God he walketh surely ; and stands the firmer, because he *takes heed lest he fall*. What an honour and happiness is it also to have a spirit superior to the world ? A spirit which has a kind of self-sufficiency in respect of worldly things, can despise the world when it has most of it, and rejoice amidst the greatest scarcity of worldly comforts. Such a temper is both a credit to the man who is possess'd of it, and to the religion he professes, while earthly-mindedness is a dishonour to both. Let all this persuade us to exert our utmost endeavours, that we become intitled to this beatitude of our Saviour, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*





S E R M O N XII.

The Blessedness of those that
mourn.

MATTH. V. 4.

*Blessed are they that mourn, for
they shall be comforted.*

THIS is one of those observations or rules which our divine Master laid down for the attainment of true happiness. “ You, my disciples, are to *mourn* that you “ may be *happy* ;” which is such unusual advice, that the enemies of our blessed Saviour think they are from hence supplied with an unanswerable objection against his religion ; and even some of his own followers are too apt to look upon it as a *hard saying*, till ’tis explained to them. For does not this contradict the common sense of mankind, who
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all agree to understand by happiness such a state in which a person has no reason for mourning, but the greatest reason to rejoice and be exceeding glad? So that there never was any one before who plac'd happiness in mourning. To which I answer, neither does Christ here do it; he only makes mourning to be the *way* to happiness, not the *thing itself*. He does not say, *Blessed are they that mourn*, and stop there; as if they were blessed under that very notion of being mourners; but immediately adds the reason of their blessedness, *for they shall be comforted*. Their final blessedness will consist in that abundant consolation which will be the reward of their mourning; and their present blessedness, not directly in their mourning itself; but in the comfort which they at present receive, and the assurance they have that in due time *their joy shall be full*. This single remark is enough to show, that our Saviour is guilty of no such absurdity as *putting darkness for light, and light for darkness*; which, in effect, he would have done, if he had supposed that mourning and blessedness, that is sorrow and joy, were one and the same thing. But still it may be ask'd, why should *mourning* be the *way to happiness*? is it consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God to make the way so unsuitable to the end? is it because
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there is a virtue in mourning; or that we should not have a relish for happiness, if we did not first of all know sorrow? or does *God willingly grieve the children of men*, and delight to see them grieve themselves, tho' no good end be answered by it? nothing of this can be truly affirmed. We cannot say that there is a *virtue*, or something commendable in *all* mourning; on the contrary, to mourn, where there is no reason for it, is *folly*; and where there is reason for joy and thankfulness, is not only a *folly* but a *fault*. And as for God's making it our duty to mourn, and putting us into such circumstances that we cannot help doing it, that so we may be the better capable of enjoying happiness after having tasted of the cup of misery, that cannot be the reason neither; since the Angels of light were never otherwise than happy, as, it is probable, man also never would, if he had continued innocent. Much less are we made or required to mourn, because God takes a pleasure in afflicting his creatures, or seeing them afflict themselves. Our *natural* notions of the goodness of God, teach us to think better of him; and as for the *Gospel*, it is so far from representing God after this manner, as to give us the most amiable and the most encouraging account of the nature of God, and of his kind and gracious purposes towards the children

children of men. It will therefore be necessary to open this subject with an *Inquiry* concerning the *mourners* here intended by our Lord, when he saith, *Blessed are they that mourn.*—We may consider then these words in two views.

I. As intended of some *particular* sorts of persons. Or,

II. As descriptive of *all* the true followers of Jesus Christ. And tho' I am well satisfied that the latter is the most proper way of considering them, yet I shall discourse briefly on the former. Let us then,

I. CONSIDER these words as intended of some *particular* sorts of persons. And thus considered, they must either denote such persons whose circumstances are *mournful*; or those who by the sorrows of repentance are endeavouring to recover themselves out of a sinful state.

I. THERE are persons whose circumstances are *mournful*; but surely *all* these are not therefore blessed. They may, by their own wilful and obstinate follies or sins, have brought themselves into circumstances of distress; and if so, they are hardly objects of pity, and much less entitled to a reward. They must not put such sufferings which are self-procured to God's account,
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but their own; and if, being corrected by their own rod, they escape any farther punishment from God's hand, they ought to be thankful, and think they come off very well, it being much better than they deserved. Nor is this all, but as the troubles and difficulties men are under may be no more than the natural consequences of their own ill conduct, so when they are in a state of mourning, whether they brought themselves into it, or were placed in it by the Providence of God, they may not *mourn after a godly sort*. Their behaviour, instead of being such as their circumstances call for, may be very unsuitable to them. They may have no regard to the hand of God, nor *make supplication to their judge*, nor have the least thought how they shall improve the affliction they are under. Instead of mourning like doves, they may rage and struggle as wild beasts caught in a net; be fretful and impatient, and *charge God foolishly*, when they should humble themselves before him. Now there is no danger that any should suppose these persons to be intended.

IT remains, therefore, that if these words are to be understood particularly of persons in *mournful circumstances*, it must be of such as *suffer for righteousness sake*, or such as *behave well* in their sufferings; and there is no doubt that both these sorts of men are *bless-*
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ed. Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake, ver. 10. These being the subjects of a distinct beatitude, cannot be intended in the text, the other may; that is, they who though they suffer not for *conscience sake*, yet, in the common afflictions of life suffer *patiently* the will of God, *meekly* resign themselves to his disposal, and, in short, remember to practise every virtue and every duty, which a day of affliction renders seasonable: these being the children of affliction, do, by their manner of bearing and improving affliction, prove themselves to be likewise the *children of God*. And *blessed are they who thus mourn, because they shall be comforted*. While they are under the chastening hand of God, he will not leave them comfortless, but give them support answerable to their burdens, and the good use they make of their own little strength. God will also comfort them, by making them to partake of the happy fruits which spring from sanctified afflictions; such as mortification of sin, an increasing conformity to the image and to the will of God, a greater indifference to the world, and even to life itself, and more vigorous desires after the heavenly state. And, farther, the time will come when they shall be *comforted* in another sense; that is, by
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deliverance out of their troubles; perhaps, in this life, a calm and lightsome season succeeding the tempest in which they have been tost; or, if not so, because God sees it not fit; yet, to be sure, after this life is ended, when ^a *all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes*, and their faces wear a perpetual serenity and chearfulness, the natural effect for that gladness with which their hearts eternally over-flow.

2. There are other persons, who by the *sorrows of repentance*, are endeavouring to recover themselves out of a state of sin in which they have hitherto lived. These are very sincere mourners; they sit down and mourn over their past follies and sins; or in the fulness of their hearts fall prostrate before the foot-stool of divine mercy, confessing and bewailing their guilt with the liveliest conviction of its many aggravations, with the most overwhelming shame, and the most pungent sorrow. They are sensible that their lives have been one continued deviation from the *end* of their beings and the *rule* of their duty; that they have acted the most senseless and the most ungrateful part. Time was when their hearts were hardened, and they could weep for any thing sooner than for their sins; when they were

^a Revel. vii. 17.

were such ^b *fools as to make a mock of sin*, and a jest of damnation; when they equally undervalued the promises of the Gospel, and despised its threatenings; and the admonitions of Providence, the checks of conscience, the warnings and invitations of God's word, were no more regarded than the whispers of a still voice are heard in the midst of a roaring tempest. But they are no longer those bold and daring sinners, those stupid and relentless wretches they once were; their souls melt with godly contrition, and their *eyes are fountains of tears*; or if their natural constitution be such that they do not shed many tears, yet their hearts are so heavy laden as to be ready to break; they mourn inwardly, ^c *they are pricked to their hearts*, and unfeignedly and deeply grieved that they should have sinned against God as they have done; for this gives the main accent to their sorrows, and lies like a heavy weight upon their souls, that they have offended against so great and gracious a God. “ ^d *Against thee, even against thee have I sinned*; I have trampled upon
 “ thine authority, abused thy mercy, griev-
 “ ed thy Spirit, and obstinately gone on
 “ in my sinful courses, notwithstanding
 “ all the methods thou hast been pleased

^b Prov. xiv. 9.^c Acts ii. 37.^d Psal. li. 4.

“ to employ for reclaiming me. At length,
 “ indeed, I am overcome; but, O how
 “ long did I stand out, and with what
 “ difficulty was I brought to yield!” They
 are now sensible of the intrinsic evil and
 turpitude of sin, that all its evil does not
 lie in its being forbidden, or in the punish-
 ment, which, without repentance, it draws
 after it; that, on the contrary, sin is hated
 and punished by God, because it deserves
 to be so; and, for that very reason, it is
 hated by the penitent, who shows what his
 notions of sin are by his sorrow for it, and
 his future care to avoid it. They not on-
 ly mourn for the *guilt* of their sins, but on
 account of the *power* which sin has gotten
 over them; they mourn after the same man-
 ner as captives mourn the loss of their liber-
 ty, or the sick to find themselves without
 strength, and ready to die of their disease.
 “ *I delight in the law of God after the in-*
 “ *ward man.* My reason approves that
 “ which is good, and conscience has so
 “ much command in me, that I am re-
 “ solved, by the grace of God, to practise
 “ it; *but I see another law in my members*
 “ *warring against the law of my mind, and*
 “ *leading me into captivity to the law of sin*
 “ *that is in my members.* O wretched man
 “ that

“ *that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!*” Blessed are all such mourners, for they shall be comforted. They may hear Christ inviting them in those affecting words; ^f *Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ’Tis true, these words were more immediately spoken to penitent sinners at that time, to whose case and circumstances they were more especially adapted. Persons under conviction of sin, and seeking after peace of conscience, were then more ignorant of the way of comfort. The sacrifices of the *law* could not take away sin, nor the promises of it afford intire satisfaction to a troubled soul. Where is the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin, and of divine assistance in order to our being made free from it, so clearly and fully revealed as it is in the Gospel; which Christ published to the world, that all those might have ^e *abundant consolation, who fled for refuge to the hope that was set before them?* The discoveries of God’s *grace*, so different from the gloomy dispensation of the *law*, must be exceeding acceptable to persons, who being under distress of conscience, and feeling the galling yoke and servitude of sin, found little relief from the *law* of *Moses*. And the

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^f Matt. xi. 28. ^e Heb. vi. 18.

same may be said of such as had lived under the *law* and *light* of *Nature*, which was still more deficient in the grounds and methods of comfort. But though these were more immediately invited to *come to Christ that they might have rest*, who were till then unacquainted with the Gospel of peace, to whom therefore such an invitation must be more than ordinarily seasonable; if they were burdened with a sense of sin both its *guilt* and *power*, yet the mercy here offered extends to all others, even to those who have sinned against the *light* and *grace* of the Gospel. Indeed, this is a very great aggravation of their sins, but does not however render them unpardonable; nor so forfeit the assistances and consolations of the *Holy Spirit*, that christians who have led wicked lives, be they never so heartily sorry for it, have no pretensions to them. The Gospel was not designed for *one* generation of men only, but for *all*; and 'tis the very nature of the Gospel to be a doctrine of forgiveness and spiritual liberty. It saith to all real penitents, ^h *Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.* To all those who are at war with sin, ⁱ *The law of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus, shall free you from the law of sin and death,* You that pray, and strive,
and

^h Matt. ix. 2.ⁱ Rom. viii. 2.

and watch, shall not pray, and strive, and watch in vain. But then they must not be too hasty, but wait till the days of their *mourning* are accomplished, and they are thoroughly prepared for consolation. They must not think that a well established hope is the work of a short time, and the enemy presently subdued; but with resolution and prayer, they may be sure they shall struggle through all difficulties, and enjoy *the peace of God which passeth all understanding*. They may be sure if ^k *they sow in tears, they shall, sooner or later, reap in joy*. Blessed, therefore, are all they who *mourn* by way of repentance for the errors of a sinful life, *for they shall be comforted*. If the anguish and disquietude of their spirits are not quite swallowed up in the joy of the Lord, yet they shall be considerably abated, and, at last, end in complete and everlasting rest.

HAVING considered the words as intended, of *particular* persons, whether such as are in *mourning* circumstances and behave well in them; or are *mourning* for the sins of their past lives; I proceed,

II. To consider them in that view, which I believe to have been the *principal* in the design of our Saviour, *viz.* as *descriptive* of

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all

* Psa. cxxvi. 5.

all the true followers of Jesus. And thus considered, they denote a *temper* of mind rather than the *act* of *mourning*.—I shall endeavour to explain this part of the christian temper, and then discourse a little concerning the *reward* of it.

I. I SHALL endeavour to explain this part of the christian temper, and, as I pass along, show the propriety and reasonableness of it. And here these *particulars*.—*Mourning*, as a temper of mind by which the genuine Disciples of Christ are characterized, signifies a wise sobriety of spirit in opposition to a sensual disposition, or the immoderate love of carnal worldly pleasure,—a mixture of religious sadness and thoughtfulness in the habitual temper of the soul, suitable to the present melancholy state of mankind, and the sinfulness and misery of this mortal life; which naturally implies in the last place,—such a temper as knows how to comply, in a proper manner, with the invitations to mourning which occasionally offer.

I. MOURNING, as a property of the christian temper, signifies a *wise sobriety of mind*, in opposition to a *loose, sensual* disposition, or the immoderate love of pleasure. The character of the sensualist, as drawn in scripture, is, that ¹ *his heart is in the house of mirth,*

¹ Eccles. vii. 4

mirth, whose vain companions, whose conversation and way of passing time, he prefers to all others. There is no happiness with him but in rioting and drunkenness, or such like gratifications; which make him say to his soul, ^m *Soul take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.* He is one ⁿ *who loves pleasure more than God*; not so much concerned to please his Maker as his carnal appetites; for the sake of which he is willing to hazard the loss of the divine favour. He is given up to his pleasures, dwelleth carelessly, ^o *walketh after his lusts*, and whatever he receives from the bounty of Providence, *consumes it all upon them.* Such a character as this is sufficiently exposed by being described; for who does not see how unworthy it is of a *man*, much more of a *christian*? The temper, opposite to this, I call *a wise sobriety of spirit*; when persons have the possession of their own souls, carefully abstaining from all unlawful pleasures, and preserving that moderation and temperance in respect of those that are lawful, which reason and religion prescribe. And the wisdom of this sobriety of spirit is easily shown, whether we consider man as a *reasonable*, or as an *immortal* Being.

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I. A

^m Luke xii. 19. ⁿ 2 Tim. iii. 4. ^o 2 Pet. iii. 2.
James iv. 3.

I. A *sobriety of spirit* in opposition to an immoderate love of *sensual* pleasure, becomes a man as a *reasonable* Being, and is therefore a mark of wisdom. Reason is the distinguishing excellence of man; brutes have senses, and some have their senses in greater perfection than ours, but they want reason, or at least that degree of it which is necessary to make them moral agents. In offending against reason, then we transgress the law and rule of our own nature. The mind is the man, which is the ground of the apostle's reasoning, *Rom. vii. 16, 17.* *If I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.* The rational principle within disapproves the power which sin has over me, and gives consent to the goodness of the law, at the very time that I break it. But wherein does the wisdom of this sobriety of spirit, and the folly of the contrary sensual disposition appear, as we are *reasonable* Beings? many ways.—'Tis the privilege of a reasonable Being, that he can reflect and consider; and this sobriety of spirit is a friend to reflection; as great a friend to it as sensuality is an enemy. To act, and not reflect upon our actions, to live without thinking, is to live and act like *beasts*, not like *men*. The
sober

sober man can retire into himself, recollect his thoughts, examine what objects are most worthy of his affection and pursuits, and in what way of life he may propose to find most content and satisfaction. His mind has its enjoyments as well as his body, and the former are those which he prefers after the maturest deliberation ; he weighs the nature and consequences of actions, calmly and impartially considers the influence which this or that course will have upon his health, his reputation, his worldly affairs ; what profit he shall have of those things which promise him present pleasure, and whether, upon the whole, he shall not be a loser by them. Such a man ^p *fore-seeth the evil, and hideth himself* ; he escapeth many dangers by his circumspection and vigilance ; and walketh safely, because he walketh cautiously. But, as to the lover of pleasure, it is quite otherwise ; he hates reflection, and renders himself more and more incapable of it ; shuns himself, cannot be persuaded to think soberly of any thing ; looks only to what is present, and despises the future ; and thus goes on till he finds himself plunged in difficulties and troubles, out of which he knows not how to free himself ; having wasted that substance which should have supplied his
plea-

^p Prov. xxii. 3.

pleasures, made himself as contemptible as he was before worthless, ruined his health, filled his mind with shame and uneasiness, and his body with pains and diseases, and, at a great deal of expence, procured a short and miserable life. The mischiefs flowing from a life of pleasure, are, in a very strong and affecting manner, represented in *Sampson's* love of *Dalilah*; in the history of which we see, how pleasure entices men, robs them of their strength, betrays them into the hands of their worst enemies, and, at last, to the arms of death.—*Again*; 'tis the part of reason to command the passions; the contrary would be as unseemly, as for a prince to be controuled by the meanest of his subjects. Now, in the sober mind, this subordination of the appetites and passions to the nobler faculties is preserved. Such a mind is the *master*, not the *slave*, and can *use the world without abusing it*; dwell in a body of flesh, and not be carnalized by it. This is a very great advantage which the sensualist wants; who, while ³ *he promises liberty* to others, and imposes upon them by this foolish pretence, *is himself the servant of corruption*; since of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage. 'Tis truly said of such a one, that

³ 2 Pet. ii. 19.

that he ^rserveth divers lusts and pleasures; he has as many masters as he has lusts, all which command him in their turns. And is not this a reproach to a man, to have his understanding dethroned, and lust and passion placed in its room? to employ what little reason he has in *making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*, and contriving means how to gratify the basest inclinations?—*Again*; since even irrational creatures are by an instinct of nature taught to seek their own preservation, it would be strange if reason should not study to preserve itself. A reasonable Being cannot act reasonably, if he does otherwise. This law of self-preservation is observed by the sober mind, but not by the sensual. Where there is a sobriety of spirit, reason is continually cultivated and improved; the understanding is more enlightened, and the judgment more correct and true, and all the mental faculties attend in their strength. But how different are the effects, where a sensual disposition prevails? the mind is more and more darkened, reason impaired, the judgment perverted, and the man becomes *weak* as well as *wicked*. And what now can be more apparant than the wisdom of this sobriety of spirit, if we consider man as a *reasonable* Being?

Being? Reason teaches a man to pass his life with as much inward satisfaction and tranquility as he can; and this the man of a sober mind does, while the sensual sinner, the man abandoned to his lusts and pleasures, is continually thwarting his own design, which as he professes, is to live happily. We may, therefore, say as the [†] *wise man*, *I said of laughter it is mad, and of mirth what does it?*

2. A *sobriety of spirit*, in opposition to the immoderate love of *sensual* pleasure, becomes a man yet more as an *immortal* Being, and is therefore, in that view, a greater instance of wisdom. And wonder not that I call man an *immortal* Being; for, as the mind is properly the man, so it is evident, both from reason and scripture, that the mind of man is immortal. Well then, if my soul be immortal, if when my [†] *body returns to its earth, my soul must return to God who gave it*, and be accountable to him for the part it has acted in the body; the question is, which will argue most wisdom, to have my mind composed to a just sobriety, or to give myself up to a life of sensual ease and indulgence, alike regardless of my present and my future interest?

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† Eccles. ii. 1.

‡ Eccles. xii. 7.

Is it not fit, if there be another world, that I should provide for it? if I shall exist out of the body, is it not fit that I should think what kind of existence it is like to be, happy or miserable? or am I indifferent whether happiness or misery is my final lot? or since that can never be, do I make myself believe that whatever my behaviour may be at present, it will not affect my condition in the next life? if I could be so void of reason as to believe this, that will make no real alteration in the thing itself. Let me therefore sit down and seriously think, which is the best preparation for eternity. But, alas! this very thing which is previously necessary to a right preparation for another world, is what a man is not capable of, who is swallowed up in the pleasures of this life. 'Tis, without doubt, necessary that he should spend some time in serious thought and meditation; but how shall he do this while he minds nothing but his pleasures? He must, therefore, begin with a retirement from his vain pleasures, at least for some time, that he may be able to make a right judgment in this important question. And if he only abstains from his pleasures till he has fully settled this question, *what he must do to be saved*, he will see the necessity of never returning

to

to them more. For, alas! a life of pleasure is not a life for any one to lead, who thinks and hopes to be saved. We must have a disposition of mind suited to the employments and pleasures of heaven, before we can be admitted there; a disposition for praise, and adoration, and thanksgiving, for the sight and fruition of a holy God, and the society of spirits made perfect in holiness. And, can any one imagine that a life of sensual pleasure, is a fit introduction to the life of heaven? Can they, who are *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*, take up their rest in God as the center of their souls, their supreme portion and happiness? do not their souls tend quite another way? are they not quite alienated in their minds, by their love of pleasure, from all the exercises of the divine life, such as faith, and hope, and love, the worship of God in spirit and in truth, a devout participation of the holy supper, and the meditation of heavenly things? are not all these a burden, and not a pleasure, to the sensual mind? Men of this character are not merely *strangers* but *enemies* to God and religion, secretly such, whatever they may be in profession to the *power* of religion, if not to the *form* of it,
which

which will do no man any great service. These two are joined together ; ^w *sensual, not having the Spirit* ; and he who ^x *has not the Spirit of God, can be none of his,* nor in the least qualified for a spiritual felicity. No ; the sensual sinner is far from having the temper of heaven ; the paradise of *Mahomet* might suit him, but not that place which *Christ* is gone before to prepare for his faithful followers. He, who would ^y *ascend to that holy hill, must have a pure heart, mortify his members which are upon the earth, crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts,* and be, as it were, dead to the pleasures of the world. In his judgment, a life of pleasure, instead of being a happy life, is the most remote from it ; it is his opinion, that every one ^z *who liveth in pleasure, is dead while he liveth* ; and therefore, that he may live indeed, to God and for God, as an heir of heaven and a candidate for immortality, he considers that he is but ^a *a stranger and pilgrim upon earth* ; and in that quality *abstains from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*—Thus, as an immortal Being, it appears to be every man's wisdom to get a *wise sobriety of spirit*, in opposition to a *sensual* disposition, or the immoderate

^w Jude ver. 19.^x Rom. viii. 9.^y Psal. xxiv.

3, 4. Col. iii. 5.

^z 1 Tim. v. 6.^a 1 Pet. ii. 11.

moderate love of pleasure. But *sobriety of spirit* is not all intended in the text, 'tis rather presupposed to a *spirit of mourning*, than the thing itself. I therefore add,

2. THERE must be a *mixture of religious sadness* (if I may so call it) and *thoughtfulness* in the habitual temper of the soul, suited to the present melancholy state of mankind, and the sinfulness and misery of this mortal life.—But of this, and the other parts of the subject, in my next discourse.





S E R M O N XIII.

The Blessedness of those that
mourn.

MATTH. V. 4.

*Blessed are they that mourn, for
they shall be comforted.*

IN the preceding discourse, I proposed to explain the character of the *mourners*, whom our Saviour pronounces *blessed*; and then to represent their *blessedness*. I have,

I. FOR explaining the character observed, that the words may be considered in *two* views.

1. As intended of some *particular sorts* of persons; and thus they signify such whose *circumstances are mournful*, or the afflicted who bear and improve well their afflictions;

ons; and those, who by the *sorrows of repentance*, are endeavouring to recover themselves out of a sinful state. Or,

2. As *descriptive* of all the true followers of *Jesus*; and this I apprehend their principal meaning. Thus considered, they denote a *temper* of mind, rather than the *act* of *mourning*. This temper I proposed to explain, and, as I went along, to show the propriety and reasonableness of it under the following particulars.

1. *MOURNING*, as a property of the christian temper, signifies a *wise sobriety of mind*, in opposition to a *loose sensual* disposition, or the *immoderate* love of pleasure. This I have explained and recommended as becoming men, considered either as *reasonable*, or *immortal* Beings.—I proceed,

2. *THERE* must be a *mixture of religious sadness* (if I may so call it) and *thoughtfulness* in the habitual temper of the soul, suited to the present melancholy state of mankind, and the sinfulness and misery of this mortal Life. There is a cloud hangs over the present state, which renders the prospect much less delightful to a serious mind. For,

1. *THE* sinfulness of the present state, is a just subject of *lamentation*. Man, 'tis true, is the workmanship of God, and all that befalls him, or is done by him, is under
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the direction of an over-ruling Providence; so that of all the things that are before us, there is none that is not either wisely *ordained* or *permitted* by God. But men have made themselves very different creatures from what God made them. The whole race is sadly degenerated, they are almost *all gone astray*; not because they were under a *necessity* of doing so, but because they have made a wrong use of that *freedom* which God has been pleased to endow them with, that they might be proper subjects of moral government, and of a state of trial; for there can be no trial where there is no liberty. But is this then all that God has done for men, to put it into their power to make themselves guilty and miserable? far be it from us that we should think so; he hath set *life* as well as *death before us*; death, that we might avoid it, life, that we might chuse it. He leaves not those of any age or nation without sufficient motives and encouragements to the duty he requires of them; nor are the *terms* of acceptance set above their reach, that assistance being supposed which God will never deny to the humble supplicant, the sincere and upright soul; and therefore, the christian mourner is far from accusing God, or falling out with Providence upon the account of those many moral disorders

which are broken in upon the world. Sin is not the off-spring of the *divine* but *human* will. But still, how just reasons forever God has for *permitting* moral evil or sin, (for he does no more than permit it) it is a melancholy thought, that *the wickedness of man should be so great upon the earth*. We, who belong to this sinful species of creatures, ought not to be unaffected with such a consideration as this, especially if we have in any degree contributed, by our bad example, to the growth of vice and immorality. But, supposing we have not, can we think of what man is become, and not lament over him? wretched creature, how art thou fallen, who wast ^a *made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour!* Can we have any love for our fellow-men (and he does not deserve the name of a man who has not) and not pity them, at the same time that we condemn and abominate their vices? or can we have any love to God, and not grieve for the dishonour done to his holy name, and the many violations of his righteous and equitable laws? that such multitudes should be engaged in a rebellion against their Maker, and that there should be so few to rise up for him against the evil-doers? Surely, this is a mournful speculation for a lover
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^a P^{sa}l. viii. 5.

of God, and of his own kind! The less tainted any one is with this epidemical disease, the more tenderly concerned he will be for those who are ready to die of it. The most virtuous and religious will most lament the prevalency of irreligion and vice. ^b *Rivers of water*, says the pious *Psalmist*, *run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.* Besides this, it is to be considered, that the most virtuous are but *imperfectly* so, they are *sincere*, but not *innocent*; they have many sins of their own for which to mourn, and they do unfeignedly mourn for them: they mourn the many defects, their small proficiency in the knowledge and practice of religion, the weakness of their faith, the languors of their love, the coldness of their zeal, their indevotion in duties, the remains of either worldliness, carnality, impurity, or other sins, under which they labour; for all these, though infirmities, and consistent with their covenant-relation to God, yet, as far as they are owing to sinful neglects and indulgencies, they are truly grieved and humbled. To reflect that the mercies of God, and the love of a Saviour, and all the motives and assistances of the Gospel, should have produced no greater effect, is some restraint upon the joy and gladness of their hearts.

2. FROM the *sinfulness* of the present state, let us pass to the *infelicities* of it. ° *Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards*; and by multiplying his transgressions he multiplies his sorrows. What a scene of misery have we before us? enough to draw tears from the eyes of those who attentively consider it, if they are of a *humane*, and much more if they are of a *christian* disposition, and to pierce their very hearts. Every place full of complaints, and the whole world a kind of hospital of the sick, the maimed, and the diseased; nations born to servitude, groaning under the yoke of the proud and cruel oppressor, laid waste by war, or famine, or pestilence, born in darkness, nurs'd up in superstition; kingdoms destroyed, and the people carried into captivity; families ruined, the cries of the poor, the tears of the fatherless and the widow, and the sobs of those who are in anguish and bitterness of spirit: not to speak of the *imaginary* evils of life which owe their being to fancy and mistake, how numberless are the *real* evils that are sown in it! pains of body, straitness of outward circumstances, frequent and cutting disappointments, death of relations, loss or desertion of friends, and the like, the very kinds of which are not easy to be reckoned up. Instances of this nature occur every

every day, the life of man is filled with them.—Indeed, we are to observe here as before, that the Providence of God is not to be blamed, since the part which that has in the *afflictive* events of life is the result of the most perfect *wisdom*, and therefore cannot infringe upon *equity* and *goodness*: and the good man is so fully persuaded of the truth of this, that he is ready to vindicate all the ways of God to man, which he esteems to be exactly *equal*, their *seeming* inequality arising wholly from the *real* inequality of the ways of mankind. All *natural* evils had their birth from *moral*, neither as to the degree of them do they ever exceed their cause, but fall very short of it; and besides that, are mercifully intended by the wise Governour of the world for the cure of mens vices, or at least to keep them from growing worse. As great as the dissolution of manners now is, if there was nothing to stop men in their career, nothing to trouble them and force them upon consideration, it would be much greater. But, however, though the sufferings of life are *necessary* for the chastisement of those who undergo them, or for a warning to others; yet 'tis sad, to consider that men should make them *necessary*. A generous heart cannot but be sensibly touched with the miseries of his fellow-creatures, were he never so in-

tirely exempted from them himself; and 'tis, undoubtedly, our duty to be so; such a mixture of sadness in a man's temper, arising from a comprehensive view of the miseries of mankind, is no disgrace to any one, nor should any one, if he could, strive to free himself from it: but then, I call it only a *mixture* of sadness, because it should not *over-power* the soul, and prevail so far as to incapacitate it for celebrating those ^d *tender mercies of God, which are over all his works.* The christian mourner is not so intirely taken up in observing and lamenting his own follies and sins, or those of other men, and the numerous evils which sin has brought into the world; but that he is ready to do justice to the examples of virtue and religion which are in the world, and to the grace of God which shines out in such examples: he rejoices in them, especially in the consciousness of his own integrity, and acknowledges, with all thankfulness and joy, the many blessings which the bountiful hand of God showers down upon an unworthy race of creatures, the merciful ingredients which are thrown into our cups, more than barely necessary to temper the bitterness of it. We must, therefore, remember that it is only a *mixture* of *sadness* that is required, answering to the *mixture*

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^d Psal. cxlv. 9.

ture of good and evil in the life of man. Nor is this *mixture* to be allowed any further than it is of use, since God expects from no man that he should sorrow for sorrowing sake. And then farther, that we may not mistake in the nature of it, I call it a *religious* sadness; religion must have a greater share in it than natural constitution. Some men are naturally of a soft and compassionate temper, and can say as the old man in the * *Roman Poet*, *Homo sum, humani a me nihil alienum puto*; “ I am a
 “ man, and therefore think nothing fo-
 “ reign to myself which concerns my fel-
 “ low-men.” This, as far as it is purely *natural*, is a *felicity* of temper, *amiable* indeed, but not properly *commendable*; for to speak truly, we are to be commended for nothing, but what is some way or other the effect of our own choice. This natural goodness of temper, may be cherished and improved into a social virtue, and then it is worthy of praise; but if it goes no farther, if the considerations and views of religion have no influence upon it, it has no title to that *blessedness*, which is pronounced in the text upon them that mourn. Natural generosity, and the ties of society are not excluded; nay, these are a very good foundation to build upon; but the perfection of
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* *Terence. Heautont.*

that temper of soul which I have been describing is deriv'd from religion. We are to consider men and things in the light of *faith*, that is, in their relation to God and another world ; mourning over the sins and vices of men, because God is thereby offended and dishonoured, and their salvation indangered ; and the miseries of life, because the displeasure of God is seen in them, and they are only introductory to much sorer punishments, which will be inflicted upon all impenitent sinners. We are to be mov'd and act'd by the noblest principles the *love of God*, and of *our neighbour* ; a love which regards not so much the *temporal* as the *spiritual* and *eternal* interests of mankind : such a love as this must sadden our hearts, and make them bleed for the evils which we see men suffering or bringing upon themselves.—Where there is such a *mixture of religious sadness and thoughtfulness* in the habitual temper of the soul, suited to the present melancholy state of mankind, the sinfulness and misery of this mortal life, there will naturally follow.

3. SUCH a temper as knows how to *comply* in a proper manner with the *invitations to mourning*, which occasionally present themselves. According to the observation of *° Solomon*, *There is a time to mourn*, a time when
mourning

• Eccles. iii. 4.

mourning is more peculiarly in season. The christian mourner observes every intimation of Providence to this effect, and much more the louder calls of it. Are the *Judgments* of God abroad *in the earth*? Is he *terrible in his doings towards the children of men*? Tho' *other* nations, and not *our own*, be immediately concerned, if we are of this christian temper, we shall not stand aloof from their fore, much less boast and insult when desolation cometh upon them, but shall sadden at the relation of their distant sufferings; and even tho' they are *enemies*, our prayer will be for them in their calamities. However we shall think ourselves more nearly interested, and more strongly obliged to compassion, if our *native* land be the scene of the divine *Judgments*. We shall not look on as idle and unconcerned spectators when our dear country lies a bleeding; either under the immediate stroke of God, or torn and wounded by the unnatural struggles and animosities of its own sons. Our compassionate Redeemer beholding *Jerusalem*, wept over it, saying, ^f *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes!* He lamented their blindness and hardness of heart, and all those crying sins, particularly their rejection of him their *Messiah*,

^f Luke xix. 42.

fiab, by which they were pulling down destruction upon their own heads. That which strikes deepest into the heart of the pious mourner, is when *religion* is in a dying condition, when there is a more than ordinary falling away from the principles and practices of Christianity, when the disciples of *Jesus*, instead of following that command of their Master *to love one another*, are divided into various and angry parties, which make it their business to blacken and misrepresent one another, and are continually plotting each others mischief and ruin; and by this means, not only neglect their common interest, but do it the greatest prejudice: when the christian church, or any considerable part of it, is in a state of persecution, when just men are delivered into the hands of the wicked, and truth put to flight by prevailing errors; at such a prospect of things as this, the soul of the true christian mourns within him, and his eyes pour out tears unto God. We read of ^e *Ezra*, that he *mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away captive*. And indeed, it would be a crime to be otherwise affected in such circumstances; which is the reason of the ^h *Prophet's* denouncing a *woe to them that are at ease in Zion*. Nay, we shall not only mourn with the *publick*, but with

^e Ezr2 x. 6.

^h Amos vi. 1.

with *private* persons too. If a friend, or an acquaintance, be under some great affliction, we shall take the infection of their sorrows, and mov'd by this inward sympathy, shall be at the same time more desirous and better able to comfort them; as it is said of *Job's* three friends, that ⁱ *they made an appointment together, to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him*; to mourn with him in order to comfort him. And all this is agreeable to the advice of the Apostle, ^k *to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep*. The *Stoick* may call these the *weaknesses* of human nature, and do all he can to divest himself of them; the *Christian* esteems it the glory of his religion, that it cherishes all those kind affections, and improves upon the tenderness of nature. In a word, are we afflicted ourselves in our persons or families, by bodily sickness, by the death of some near relative, by ill success in our worldly affairs, and the like? we shall not be among those who ^l *despise the chastning of the Lord*, we shall take notice of his hand when 'tis lifted up against us, and ^m *humble ourselves under it*; it will be our endeavour to accommodate ourselves to the circumstances we are in, and to have a temper adapted to the dealings of Providence

ⁱ Job ii. 11. ^k Rom. xii. 15. ^l Heb. xii. 5.
^m James iv. 10.

dence with us; and above all, we shall by our sufferings be put in mind to sorrow for our sins, and have our hatred against them inflam'd as the greatest of all evils, both in their own nature, and as the cause of all others.

HAVING thus explained the character of the christian *mourner*, I am

II. To discourse a little concerning his *reward*. *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

I. COMFORT *immediately* springs out of such mourning. It may look like a contradiction for joy and sadness to reside together in the same breast, and would really be one, if either of them was compleat; since perfect joy will not admit of the least sadness, nor perfect sadness of the least joy; but where neither of them is carried to the greatest height, they may be companions one to the other. And indeed, in this present variable and mixed state of things, 'tis very common for contrary passions to be blended together, and exert their joint influence upon the soul. Thus *fear* has a mixture of *hope*, and *hope* of *fear*; without which one of them would degenerate into *despair*, and the other take the name of *certainty*. 'Tis no unusual thing to be angry with
with

with those very persons upon one account, whom we pity upon another: neither the characters of men, nor the events of life, are intirely uniform; and hence it comes, that as there is a variety of passions or affections, so these passions mingle with and run one into the other. There are no two passions in which this more remarkably happens than in *grief* and *joy*. The very same occurrence, under different views and considerations, shall very powerfully move both these springs. Of this we have a most remarkable example in the history of ⁿ *Joseph* and his being sold into *Egypt*, where he met with several turns of Providence; till, at last, he came to be the *second* man in the kingdom: and particularly of his brethren coming thither to buy corn; when he saw them, and heard them talking one with another of their former barbarous usage of him (little imagining he understood what they said) *he turned himself about from them and wept*. It was, without doubt, a great pleasure to *Joseph* to see his brethren after so many years absence, notwithstanding their unkindness to him; to find them penitent, and to hear of the life and welfare of his aged father; and yet it was such a pleasure as made him burst into tears. He was more sensibly mov'd at the sight of his brother

ⁿ Genes. chap. xxxvii, and following.

ther *Benjamin*, for having ask'd them whether this was their younger brother, and spoken those few words to him, *God be gracious to thee my Son*; it is said, *he made haste for his bowels did yern upon his brother, and he sought where to weep, and he entred into his chamber and wept there*. And thus when he could no longer refrain from making himself known to his brethren, the *Historian* saith *he wept again*; his soul was even overcome with the strong workings of several passions. And how often do we see a surprize of happiness, sudden and extraordinary emotions of joy, expressing themselves by tears? so that 'tis very possible for persons to have comfort while they are mourning; and which is more, that very temper, which is here intended by *mourning*, ministers ground of great consolation; it is not barely reconcileable with comfort, but is the cause and foundation of it. For what is this but the very temper we ought to be in? 'tis the temper of a wise and good man, one who knows himself and the world, considers his own frailty and sinfulness, and as a fellow-member sympathizes with the whole body of mankind. 'Tis a reasonable and humane, as well as christian disposition; it shews a good understanding, and a high degree of benevolence; and must not a conscioufness of this disposition afford
great

great satisfaction? can a man act and behave like a man, and not be pleas'd with himself when he does so? can he feel the best affections that belong to human nature stirring within him, and not rejoice at it? can his heart overflow with kindness and good-will to his fellow-creatures, especially in distress, and not be itself refreshed with the delightful stream? is it nothing to be approved to one's own mind? to deserve the most amiable character that a man can be known by, of a soul which claims kindred with all other souls, and makes their interests, and joys, and sorrows its own? what are the pleasures of the gay, the wanton and frolicksome; much more of the debauched, the selfish, the malicious, the revengeful, compar'd with these? can a heart which has no softness but for pleasure, which never yields but to temptation, in other respects hard and unrelenting, can such a heart have a capacity to relish those divine joys which flow spontaneously from the sober, the serious, and the benevolent temper? It is an observation verified by every day's experience, that *° even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.* Where the pleasure is mean and low, and much more where it is criminal, a man's conscience reproaches him with it, he can never give

° Prov. xiv. 13.

his understanding to fall in intirely with his passions; besides which, there are remains of better inclinations in most men, which make them uneasy in the pursuit of those which are vicious. Here, on the contrary, it may be truly said, that in the midst of *mourning* the heart is joyful, and the present effect of such ingenuous and commendable sorrow is gladness of soul.

2. BESIDES this comfort, which is the immediate and natural product of christian *mourning*, there is another which comes from the *love* and *approbation* of our *fellow-creatures*, and from their *ready assistance* as often as it is needed. No man is more generally esteemed, no man more universally beloved, than one of a tender and compassionate disposition, who enters into the concerns of other men, puts his soul in their soul's stead, and, in the whole of his behaviour, appears to have a due consideration of that common nature, and of those common evils and calamities by which mankind are link'd together. Such a one steals the hearts of all who know him, and binds them to him by a kind of irresistible charm. And forasmuch as the desire of mutual love and esteem is natural to all men, he who is so happy as to deserve and possess a great share of both these, cannot but have rejoicing and comfort in himself upon that account,

count. In the course of human affairs, he may fall into adversity, and so become the object of other peoples compassion; and he is the most likely person to have it, and together with it, all the help which his case demands: having expressed a readiness to *mourn* with others in their distresses, he will not be left to *mourn* alone in the day of his affliction; and tho' this may not altogether remove the burden, yet 'twill very much lighten it. It is no little comfort to a man, when he sees others take part with him in his sorrows, and, according to their ability, willing to succour him; especially when he is able to regard this, as no more than a proper return for his own readiness in the days of his prosperity, to show compassion and kindness to others; being able to say as ^p *Job, I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widows heart to sing for joy.*

3. THE christian mourner is intitled to that comfort which more directly flows from the fountain of all blessedness. ^q *The God of patience and consolation, who comforts them that are cast down, will be their comforter; for* ^r *thus saith the high and holy One who in-*

B b 2 *habiteth*

^p Job xxix. 12, 13. ^q Rom. xv. 5. 2 Cor. vii. 6.
^r Isa. lvii. 15.

habiteth eternity, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones. Their own experience shall convince them that this temper is exceeding acceptable to their Maker, and renders them so. He delights in it as a temper of mind becoming creatures situated as we are; and what he delights in, he will immediately reward with inward joy and satisfaction. He, [†] *the God of hope will fill them with peace and joy in believing, that they may abound in hope through the power of the Holy-Ghost.* That the omnipresent God has such an access to the mind, and can cheer and invigorate it in all its powers and faculties, cannot be doubted; as there is very little reason to question that he *actually* does this in a greater or less degree, according to the preparation the soul is in for these manifestations of the divine favour, the need it has of them, their agreement with a state of trial, and the tendency of this joy to promote the several virtues of the christian life.

4. IN the life to come, those words *blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted*, will receive their utmost accomplishment, for then all *mourning*, the causes of it being removed, shall cease for ever; not

[†] Rom. xv. 13.

not one sigh, or tear, or sad complaint. Heaven is the proper region of joy; love, and joy, and admiration, are the only affections known there; the rivers of pleasure run pure and unmixed from the throne of God. And this being the final state of man, and a state designed to last for ever, it is apparent, that the design of God's making this short life a time of *mourning*, was, its being both a *sinful* state, and a state of *trial*, for one more *perfect* and *happy*; not from any pleasure that the Creator has in the sufferings of his creatures, for then he would not appoint that they should end with this life, and, after that, be swallowed up in an eternity of bliss. No; God made man to be happy, and he would make him happy immediately, did not his wisdom, as Governor of the world, judge it more fit and proper, that his fidelity and obedience should be first of all sufficiently tried, and what sins he was guilty of in this mortal life, should (if I might be allowed the expression) be expiated by the sorrows of it. And *blessed are they that mourn* now, who not only patiently submit to that portion of troubles and afflictions which Providence assigns them, but seriously reflecting upon the nature of the present state, endeavour to suit their habitual temper and behaviour to it: these shall have their full reward, *good mea-*

sure, pressed down and running over, shall be given into their bosoms; and when the laughter of the wicked is turned into mourning, their sorrows shall be converted into joy, they sow'd in tears, they shall reap in joy; they denied themselves the pleasures of sin which were but for a season, and shall therefore receive life, and blessedness, and glory everlasting.

LET us now consider the reflections which naturally arise from this subject. And,

I. WHAT has been said, is an abundant *vindication* of our divine Master, in making this a duty of his religion, that we should *mourn*, and affixing a *blessedness* to the discharge of it. Christianity is not only to be justified herein, but appears the more excellent and honourable. The heart of man is strangely vain, has an aversion to every thing which tends to damp its foolish mirth, and shrinks back from the first appearance of a sorrowful object. Had our Master given the reins to this vanity, he might have been more welcome to some, but would really have been no friend to mankind, and, by all impartial judges, must have been condemned as an impostor. Instead of thus pleasing and flattering men to their ruin, he puts them under a severer discipline, and prescribes them a method for the attainment

ment of tranquility and happiness *less grateful* for the present, but *more certain* in the issue. 'Tis a wise saying of a very wise man, that *'tis better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting*; that is, there is more instruction and profit in conversing at proper times with mournful objects, than in running on thoughtless in a continued course of ungoverned mirth and frolick: and had he himself practised upon this rule, it would have prevented a great deal of shame and vexation which he incurred for want of attending to it. A wiser than *Solomon* repeats much the same advice, and kept closer to it in his own practice. The example of Christ was never wanting to enforce the most difficult and self-denying of his precepts; and when we consider both in one and the same view, we must acknowledge that *never man spake as this man*, and that the christian religion is just such an institution as mankind needed, being alike suited to the nature of man, and the circumstances of the present life, to promote the practice of every human and divine virtue, and to prepare us for the most exalted happiness of which we are capable; a happiness of which the world never had a just and clear idea, till it was given them by the Author of our most holy faith.

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2. BY the foregoing discourse, we are enabled to discern and avoid those extremes into which men are too apt to run in this matter. Some set up a life of pleasure as the only happy life, while others regard all pleasure as a crime. Of these two common extremes the former is the most dangerous to the souls of men, the latter most disgraceful to religion, when that is apprehended to countenance it; whereas, in truth, religion rightly understood, forbids both. As for a perpetual indulgence to pleasure, it could not be innocent, though the pleasures we indulged to were so in themselves; for, 'tis not for a *sinner* to study nothing else but how he shall *please himself*, and forget both himself and his present condition: a life thus abandoned to pleasure and amusement, can never be reconciled to strict virtue; such persons can have no tolerable notion of it, and much less any inclination to practise it, there being in the present weak and corrupt state, something of difficulty and self-denial attending the ways of virtue and religion, especially at the first entrance. Were it therefore possible, that a person, devoted to his pleasures, should constantly abstain from those that were vicious and forbidden, yet he could be no *christian*, as long as the pleasures of sense had such an intire ascendant over him; and how much worse then must

must it be when the pleasures themselves are sinful, as well as his excessive indulgence to them; which is always the case when a man makes pleasure the very end of his Being, and scope of all his actions and pursuits. The other extreme is, it must be confess'd, less fatal, but, however, of very bad consequence both to men'selves and to religion: I speak not of those *mourners* whose hearts secretly fret against Providence, and who can scarce refrain their tongues sometimes from hard speeches against their Maker; these are not so properly *mourners* as *murmurers*, persons whose discontent aggravates the evils of life, lessens its advantages, and tempts them to bring a railing accusation against the equity and goodness of the divine government. Where there is the lowest degree of true piety, such a conduct as this cannot be thought of without abhorrence. What I mean, therefore is, when persons imagine they show their religion in being morose, and severe, and melancholy, when a cheerful look or thought is regarded as an approach to sin, if not a direct transgression of the law, and they so *mourn* as to *refuse to be comforted*. Either this total renunciation of the most innocent delights of life is no christian duty, or it will be im-

impossible to give any rational and consistent account of those many Texts of scripture, in which a life of religion is represented as abounding with pleasure, and the comforts and enjoyments of this life are urged as arguments of the goodness of God to mankind; which they would not be, if we were to take no pleasure in them. To which might be added, the example of our ^u Lord himself, who declared the innocence of *feasting* upon some occasions, by affording his own presence at a nuptial entertainment, and supporting its chearfulness and mirth by *turning water into wine*. Generally such false notions of religion proceed from an unhappy natural temper, and when the temper of religion is supposed to be the same with that of those men, they, who before were not very well disposed to it, have their prejudices and aversion against it hereby increased. Did we consider this as we ought, we should take care how we made natural temper the rule of our conduct one way or the other; this, where it is followed, usually leading men into an extreme either of mirth or melancholy.

3. To conclude; Let us aspire to the *blessedness* mentioned in the text, by walking
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^u John ii. 1.—

ing in the way which that prescribes us. Let us *mourn* that we may be *comforted*. The christian religion is particularly adapted to promote this temper, both by its *doctrines*, and by the *example* of its great Author. By the light of the Gospel, we discern the extreme danger which the souls of men are in, and the influence which the vices and errors of mankind have upon their everlasting state. And how can we but *mourn*, when we think of so many millions of souls sporting upon the brink of destruction, and in danger of perishing for ever? To which add the example of the Son of God, the greatest person that ever lived upon earth, and the greatest *mourner*. ^w *He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*: and were they not ^x *our sorrows that he bore*? did he not weep for us, and how then can we refuse weeping for ourselves, and for our fellow-creatures, whose happiness we ought to tender as our own, in imitation of that divine example which the Son of God has left us? Let us renounce the thoughts of a life of sensual ease and pleasure, and maintain a *wise sobriety of spirit* and such a mixture of *religious sadness* and *thoughtfulness*

^w Isa. liii. 3.

^x Ver. 4.

ness as agrees with the present degeneracy of mankind, and the sins and infelicities of this mortal life : and then, as we shall have pleasures and satisfactions now which the world knows nothing of, so we shall at last enjoy a happiness which is not allayed with the least mixture of sorrow.





S E R M O N XIV.

The character and blessedness of the
meek explained.

MATTH. V. 5.

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall
inherit the earth.*

THIS is another part of the christian temper, and a very amiable one too, equally an ornament to the professor of the Gospel, and to the Gospel professed by him. None can speak evil of it but those who have as little liking to the *reality* of all other virtues, what ever value they may seem to have for the *appearance* of some of them. It is impossible that a true judge of inward substantial goodness, should think meanly of this excellent quality.

THERE

THERE is a *meekness*, which is no more than a natural accomplishment, and sweetness of temper which some men bring into the world with them ; who, without taking any pains for it, are soft, and courteous, and obliging in their deportment towards all men ; it must be something very extraordinary to ruffle their minds, and put them out of humour : this must be owned to be a very valuable gift of nature, and happy qualification for society, rendering the possessor easy to himself, and agreeable to all about him. But, after all, there is properly no *virtue* in it, and therefore no *praise* belonging to it ; tho' one cannot but love the temper, yet we never reckon it a part of a man's *merit* as far as it is *purely natural*. Nature may have been kinder in this respect to one who is very *vicious*, than to another of *eminent virtue* ; to a *heathen* who lives in contradiction to the light of nature, than to a *christian* who walks according to the light of the Gospel.

THERE is a *meekness* of a still higher kind than this, which yet does not come up to the meaning of the Text, the product of *civil prudence*. The considerations it flows from relate only to this present life, the pleasure and tranquility of which are best consulted by a meek and quiet behaviour. 'Tis from such reflections that some men study
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to be quiet, and are upon their guard against all those things which may discompose their spirits, and make them act so as to incur the contempt or hatred of others. They are willing to live in some degree of reputation, to be upon good terms with the world; they would have their company courted; and, in carrying on their business, would have as few to thwart, and as many to favour and befriend them as they can: upon such principles as these they govern their tempers, carry it smoothly and obsequiously to those they converse with, put up many affronts, and aim to gain upon all by their good humour. We may commend these men as our ^a Lord did the *unjust steward*, they act wisely as far as their views go, and take the right way to arrive at their end, the gain or pleasure of this world, the kindness and good word of their fellow-creatures; this bounds their desires. *Duty* they have little regard to, and as little to the testimony of a good conscience, and the rewards of another life. Of such persons we may say, *verily they have their reward*, they generally have what they seek, and they shall have no more because they don't seek it. 'Tis doing this *meekness* too much honour to call it a *moral virtue*; moral virtue is a very different thing,

^a Luke xvi. 8.

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thing, built upon a nobler foundation, and directed to a higher end. The foundation of *moral virtue*, is the *nature* which God has given us, and the *relations* we stand in to him and other beings; the *end* is the *highest happiness* which we are capable of attaining in the practice of our duty, as far as it is discoverable by us: and whoever speaks contemptibly of *moral virtue*, thus explained, shows himself not to have a right notion of *christianity*, which is evidently designed to carry *morality* to its highest point of perfection.

HAVING said this little of *meeekness* as a *natural* and *civil* accomplishment, I shall now consider it according to that more excellent sense in which the Text speaks of it. And I shall,

- I. DESCRIBE this virtue; and,
- II. SHEW the blessedness of it.

I. I BEGIN with the description of christian *meeekness*. 'Tis a prevailing *mildness* and *gentleness* of spirit, which influences a christian's whole deportment, especially under temptations to *anger*, and *malice*, and *revenge*; proceeding from *conscience towards God*: so that we have here these *three* things which require our consideration; the *quality* itself, the *effects* of it, and its *principal cause* or reason.

I. As

I. As to the *quality* itself, *meekness* denotes a *mildness* and *gentleness of spirit*. The abode of this, as indeed of every other virtue, is in the heart; there it rules, tames and civilizes the passions, and preserves all things in peace. The main question, when we are inquiring after *meekness*, is, what spirit a man is of? what is the temper which he cherishes in himself? for 'tis ^b *the meek and quiet spirit that is of so great price in the sight of God*; the virtue or grace of *meekness*, not the art. The meek man labours after a *sweetness* of disposition, in opposition to *sharpness* and *austerity*; and after a *calm* disposition, in opposition to one that is *restless* and *boisterous*. There is much the same difference in the temper of the mind between the meek spirit, and one of a contrary character, as in the temper of the air when it is piercing cold or burning hot, or blustering and tempestuous, and when it is soft, and easy, and gentle: a person, eminent for this virtue, is properly his own master, possesses his soul in patience, and enjoys a tranquility so much the more secure and undisturbed, as it arises from the goodness of his principles, and the firmness of his resolutions; not from an accidental coincidence of the circumstances of his own life, or the actions of other men with his particular

^b 1 Pet. iii. 4.

humour and inclination, which is a very uncertain thing.

2. THE *effects* of this happy temper, may be judged of from the influence it has upon the christian's general deportment, and upon his mind and behaviour, when he meets with provocations to anger and passionate resentment.

1. THE christian's general deportment is very much influenced by the *meekness* of his spirit; his deportment in a *religious* and in a *civil* capacity; towards his *superiors*, *inferiors*, and *equals*. In religion it is of great service to keep men from being of an imposing, a dogmatical, and disputatious humour; striving for victory more than for truth; not able to bear that others should differ from them in opinion; impatient of hearing what they have to offer in behalf of their sentiments; and easily displeas'd and offended in hearing the word of GOD, if there be any thing that does not suit their taste and notions, or that seems to reprove or contradict any practice of theirs, though the reproof be never so just and true: *meekness*, I say, teaches men to act in a very different manner from this, according to those passages of scripture; *in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God,*
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° 2 Tim. ii. 25. [1 Pet. iii. 15. James i. 21. iii. 13.

peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth : ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear : receiving with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save their souls ; and showing out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom. The man of a meek and quiet spirit carries the same temper with him into his civil conduct, in which he is soft and gentle, ^d shewing all meekness to all men. His endeavour is to give no unnecessary offence to any ; to which end he avoids all austerity of manners, and would willingly be an example of the greatest good-nature and complaisance, that is consistent with a strict adherence to the rules of virtue and religion. He is respectful to his superiors, ^e rendering honour and obedience to whom they are due ; pleases them in all things where he can, with a good conscience, not answering again ; not needlessly contradicting them, and representing their designs or actions as weak and foolish. His inferiors he treats with the greatest humanity and condescension, can bear with them, if they happen to fail sometimes in the punctilios of respect ; he is a kind and gentle master to his servants, and how much soever he is above any, does not

^d Titus iii. 2.^e Rom. xiii. 7.

Titus ii. 9.

love to put them in mind of it by an air of distance and greatness. He is not averſe to good advice offered in a proper manner, becauſe it comes from thoſe who are below him ; regarding more *what* is propoſed than *who* propoſes it. With his *equals* he always converſes upon a foot of *equality*, rather aſſuming too little than too much, doing nothing to alienate their affections from him, but every thing to gain them that integrity will admit. When 'tis proper he can yield a conteſted point, and in *indifferent* matters adapt himſelf to their ſeveral tempers, in order to do them the more good. He is courteous and affable, and of an ingaging behaviour. Such is the influence, which *meekneſs*, according to the different degrees of it, has upon the chriſtian's *general* deportment. And,

2. THE good influence of it is ſtill more viſible in a time of trial, or when the chriſtian is under provocations to *anger*. Not that *meekneſs* is an enemy to *all anger*, for as the author of nature has given us none of our paſſions in vain, ſo this holds particularly true of *anger*, which is of uſe upon many occaſions, to repreſs and diſcountenance vice and folly, and to make us more warm and active in our oppoſition to them. Without ſome degrees of *anger*, our zeal in that which is good would ſometimes

times be too weak and languishing, we should not be so forward, as we ought, to reprove and punish men for their faults; and should find our courage apt to fail as danger approach'd, if *anger* against those whom we apprehended to be engaged on a wrong side, did not help to counteract our fear. We read of the wise and innocent *Jesus*, that ^f *he looked about upon his enemies with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts*; and we need not desire a better authority than this. The office of *meekness* therefore is not to extinguish the passion of *anger*, but to regulate it; and it is exceeding useful for this purpose, by preserving us from causeless, from excessive, and from unrelenting *anger*.

I. THE *meeker* any man is, the less likely to be *angry without a cause*. And in general, there is *no cause* for *anger* where there is *no fault*; and in proportion, the less the fault, the less the cause. Every deliberate act of sin is a just provocation to *anger*, especially such sins as carry in them a more direct affront to the divine majesty, and insult upon religion. Next to these are notorious violations of the rules of common justice and charity, wilful injuries, and of very great consequence, whether we ourselves, or others are the sufferers, Nay,

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such

^f Mark, iii. 5.

such actions in which the sinner hurts himself more directly than any one else, as by idleness, prodigality and excess, are not to be excluded. In short, we do not sin in being *angry*, as often as we are *angry* with men for sinning; and yet we must not confine the cause or occasion of *anger* to *sin* neither, as if there was nothing else but a plain and direct transgression of the law of God, that would justify our *anger*. It may be proper, and even necessary sometimes to shew our displeasure upon lesser occasions; as upon the account of a person's forgetting something which he ought to have remembered, and would have remembered if he had applied himself to his business as he should; doing mischief for want of taking proper care, indecencies of behaviour, disrespectful and affronting words, or actions, and the like: but still there must be something of a fault, something wilful in the person, as well as disagreeable in the action, tho' it does not rise so high as an immorality; for if that which offends us be done not only undesignedly, but as it were unavoidably, if it be a mere accident, or the pure effect of ignorance and inadvertency, our *anger* in all such cases is without cause, and therefore unreasonable and unjust.

2. *Meekness* will make us watchful against excessive *anger*. And we are to remember that *anger* is excessive as often as it is disproportioned to the cause; when a great flame is kindled by a small matter, and our resentments are carried beyond their due bounds. Does our *anger* unhinge, or discompose our spirits, put our souls into a very great hurry, so as to unfit us for the regular discharge of our duty, and to make us speak or act after an unseemly manner, by which means we render both our *anger* and ourselves too contemptible? are we so far transported by the violence of our passions as to transgress the rules of prudence, and especially of justice and charity? do we in the height of our passion expose religion, and break any of its commands? we may be sure this is not according to the Apostle's direction, ^g *to be angry and not sin*. *Meekness* would teach us better things than these, to moderate our resentments, and to forbear all reviling language, and much more all revengeful actions. Indeed the law of retaliation is ^h *an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*; but what saith our blessed Master? ⁱ *I say unto you that ye resist not evil*; that is, we must not discover a proneness to revenge, or delight to render evil for evil;

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but

^g Ephes. iv. 26.^h Exod. xxi. 24.ⁱ Matt. v.

but rather submit to a lesser evil, a tolerable inconvenience, than commit a greater in endeavouring to remedy it; we must rather chuse to suffer evil than to do it; and even when we bring an offender to justice, we must act out of regard to the publick peace, or in hope of the person's amendment, not from a principle of hatred and revenge.

3. *Meekness* will not allow of an *anger* which is unrelenting; the passion must not continue too long, lest it fret upon the mind, and rankle into bitterness and malice. *Anger* may pass through the bosom of a wise man, but as ^k *Solomon* has observed, *resteth only in the bosom of fools*. The heat and ferment of the passion ought to be soon over, according to that advice of an inspired writer; ¹ *Let not the sun go down upon your wrath*. The storm ought to be laid, and the fire quenched, that we may be cool as the evening, and in calmness and serenity of soul be able to offer up our devotions to heaven. That fire must not be spent in passion, which should be consecrated to the altar, and employ'd in consuming our sacrifice. The meek spirit, if mov'd, is soon compos'd, and returns to its usual tranquility.—These then are the effects of *meekness*, as it exerts its influence upon the christian's *general* deportment, and especially upon his
temper

^k Eccles. vii. 9.

¹ Eph. iv. 26.

temper and behaviour, when he is under temptations to *anger*.

3. THE principal cause, or spring of this *mildness* and *gentleness* of spirit is *conscience towards God*. It is this must denominate it a christian grace, and the fruit of the Spirit. God speaks to us partly by our own *reason* and *conscience*, and partly in the *revelation* of his will to the world, by his Son Jesus Christ; and we are to have an attentive regard to him in both these ways of making himself known to mankind. Does *reason* remonstrate against immoderate *anger*, and preach patience and meekness to us? we are to obey the voice of *reason* as the *voice of God*. We must consider conscience as God's vicegerent, and our understanding as ^m *the candle of the Lord*, which he hath set up in us; and we must reverence the dictates of our own minds, because God is really our monitor and instructor, tho' the knowledge we have of our duty comes from the right exercise of our own reasoning faculties. But we are *taught of God* in a yet higher sense, since he has *sent his own Son* to teach us the way of righteousness. It is God himself who has said by the mouth of his Son, *bles- sed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*, and calls us to the practice of *meek- ness*, and of all other virtues by his Apostles, whom

whom he has qualified and authorized for this purpose; so that in hearing them, we hear God who speaks by them. Here then is the great principle of christian *meekness*, which exalts its nature, and entitles it to the divine rewards; 'tis no other than a religious and devout regard to God, in whatever way he is pleased to discover his will to us, whether by *reason* or *revelation*: and as we are to practise *meekness* in obedience to the command of God, so likewise, because herein we shall glorify him. An example, wherein the several virtues of the christian life are conspicuous, tends to promote the glory of God, and the credit of religion; both as it argues us to have right apprehensions of God ourselves, and is apt to produce the same honourable thoughts of him in others: and that true goodness has this tendency to advance the glory of the divine Being is one thing which should recommend it to our choice, and will do so if our goodness be real. There is no good man but loves God sincerely, and the love of God with a desire of doing his will, and glorifying his name, includes a love of every thing that is good; as lovely and excellent in his eyes, and the way to render us acceptable to him, and qualified for the enjoyment of him as our chief good.

II. THE blessedness, or reward of the *meek*, is next to be considered. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* This promise may respect the church of Christ in general, which is, or ought to be made up of *meek* persons; or *particular* christians, that is, those of a *meek* spirit, in opposition to all others, even christians themselves who are of a different character.

I. LET us consider this promise as made to the church of Christ in general, which is, or ought to be made up of *meek* persons; for this is the true character of a disciple of Christ, and by which, they who should bear that name, were to be universally known and distinguished: and of the followers of Christ under this character, or of the *meek*, it is here foretold by their Master that they should *inherit the earth*; that is, overspread the whole world. The promise made to *Abraham*, that ⁿ *in him all the families of the earth should be blessed*, is by the Apostle *Paul*, express in this manner, ^o *that he should be heir of the world*. The decree concerning the *kingdom* of the *Messiah* runs in the same style, ^p *ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*. And in the 54th chapter of
of

ⁿ Gen. xii. 3. ^o Rom. iv. 13. ^p Psal. ii. 8.

of the prophecy of *Isaiab*, ver. 3, the church is comforted with the prospect of a large increase, which she should receive in the times of the gospel; *thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles*. The allusion in all these passages seems to be to the land of *Canaan*, which was given for an inheritance to *Abraham's* carnal seed, this was a very small and scanty inheritance in comparison of that which his spiritual seed (the *Messiah*, who was emphatically the seed of *Abraham*) and all those who imitated the faith of this good man, (who are likewise stiled his seed) are encouraged to expect when the kingdom of the *Messiah* should be established. Then the followers of Christ, the *meek* of the earth were to have the world, not a single country, as the land of *Canaan*, but all nations, for their possession. A great part of which promise was fulfilled within a few years after the ascension of Christ to heaven, during which period the gospel made a most amazing progress, people of all nations and languages becoming obedient to it, and after two or three centuries, kings and emperors themselves. And how was it that the disciples of a crucified Saviour extended their conquests so far, and in so swift a manner? not by the *sword*, as the *Israelites* won the possession of *Canaan* their inheritance; but by their *meekness* and *patience*, and other virtues, in concurrence with the *miracles* which they

they were inabled to work in confirmation of the christian faith. They overcame evil with good, extinguished the rage of their persecutors by their own blood; and armed with nothing but truth and innocence, and the marks of the divine approbation, reduc'd one country after another to the obedience of the faith, much after the same manner as the light of heaven travels from east to west, and triumphs over the darkness without noise or violence. And whenever the happy time comes for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, and much more for the universal establishment of it, in and over all the kingdoms of the world, it will not be done *by might or by power*, not in such a manner as the christians, some ages ago, recovered part of the holy land out of the hands of the infidels by armed multitudes; an attempt, which as it cost the lives of many hundred thousands, so met with little success, and that of very short continuance; this part of the world returning in no long time under its old masters: no, the work will not be accomplished in this way, but as it was begun at first by the *spirit of the Lord*, and particularly by a *spirit of meekness and gentleness*. Could we but once see the virtues of the christian religion generally prevail in the christian world, there might be some ground to hope that with those weapons they would not
only

only regain what they formerly possess, but peaceably enjoy the rest of their inheritance. The promises I have mentioned, together with the natural tendency of this spirit to promote true religion, should encourage us in our endeavours thus to spread it, and prevent our being disheartened by oppressions and persecutions; being assured that the cause of truth which has once so remarkably triumph'd over these, shall again triumph; and being assur'd also from the prophecies of the *Revelations*, that the time for the universal prevalency and triumph of pure christianity is not far off.

2. THIS promise may be considered as made to *particular* christians, that is, to the *meek* amongst them, in opposition to all others, even christians themselves, who are of a different character. The words are borrowed from *Psal.* xxxvii. 11. *The meek shall inherit the earth.* Well therefore might it be said of those who belong to Christ, *all things are theirs*, since theirs is the *kingdom of heaven*, and theirs the *inheritance of the earth*; under which two are comprehended present and future, temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings. Not that good men shall always have the largest share of earthly things; this might really be a disadvantage to them; but they shall have the surest title to that portion which their heavenly Father sees

fees fit to allot them, and the most certain possession of it; holding it by the immutable promise and covenant of God, and under the watchful care and powerful protection of his wise and gracious Providence. As no one can pluck the *meek* themselves out of the hand of God, so nor what God has given them to possess out of theirs. Whatsoever they enjoy not, or having once enjoyed, are deprived of again, does not come under that title of *food convenient for them*, which they shall never want. What is properly and strictly their allotted portion, shall be better to them than land of inheritance.

AGAIN, the *meek* shall quietly inherit their part of the earth, be it more or less. So it follows in the *Psalms* out of which these words are taken; *the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.* ¹ *Who is he that will harm you, saith the Apostle Peter, if ye be followers of that which is good?* A very great and undissembled virtue is, generally, the best defence both of a man's person and possessions; this holds remarkably true of those whose *meekness* and *gentleness* are remarkable: it is thought as dishonourable to set upon such, as for a man that is armed to abuse another who has nothing to defend him. As it was promised to the *Israelites*,
That

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 13.

^r *That none should desire their land, when they went up to appear before the Lord their God at the place which he had chosen; so, for the greater part, it may be said in the present case, that no one will have a desire to disturb those of a mild and gentle disposition in the possession of what they have, and are contented with, not invading the rights of others. Who, but a man of the vilest character himself, could delight to give trouble to one, who was universally known to have an aversion to all strife and contention with any person whatsoever? not but that the greatest good-nature, and most winning meekness, is sometimes abus'd; but then 'tis, as I said, by some of the worst of men, and ordinarily they have better usage even from the hands of those very men than others have.*

AGAIN, the *meek*, with their external enjoyments, have most comfort and peace within. To them, in an eminent manner, may be applied that observation of the *wise man*; ^f *Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith.* He never wants a feast who is of a *meek* and *quiet* spirit; he eats his meat in quietness, he has no such mutiny in his bosom as distracts the wicked man, and embitters to him his sweetest enjoyments: together

‡ *Exod. xxxiv. 24.*

‡ *Prov. xv. 16.*

ther with peace of conscience, there is peace between his reason and his passions; and besides this tranquility which naturally springs from the state of his own soul, there is the satisfaction which God produces in testimony of his approbation; for since, as we are told, ¹ *The ornament of a meek spirit is in the sight of God of great price*, we cannot imagine, that what he prizes so highly, he will not, in some degree, reward even now, by inward peace and pleasure.

FINALLY, the *meek*, unless God in his wisdom sees reasons for the contrary, shall *live longer* to inherit the earth, than ordinarily they would do if they were of an opposite temper. In this manner inheriting the earth, is oppos'd to a person's being swept away from it by death, in the thirty-seventh Psalm before quoted, ver. 9—11. *Evil doers shall be cut off, but those that wait upon the Lord they shall inherit the earth. Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be; but the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight himself in the abundance of peace.* 'Tis true, such promises as these had their chief reference to the times of the *Law*, when length of days was esteemed a greater blessing and mark of the divine favour, than it can be to those who

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 4.

have the clearest discoveries of life and immortality: but, however, they have not lost all their meaning now; there are many virtues which have a natural tendency to prolong the lives of men, while the contrary vices as visibly tend to shorten them. It is manifest that *meekness*, in a particular manner, has this friendly influence upon health and long life, not only by keeping men out of those quarrels which the sons of violence are continually engag'd in, and by which life itself is often made a sacrifice to passion; but by preventing the ill effects which unbridled passions have upon the animal œconomy. *Meekness* sweetens the blood, and other fluids of the body, and preserves them in an easy regular motion; by which means, the body does not wear out so soon, as when the blood and spirits are every now and then put into a violent ferment, and the whole machine disordered by passionate resentments, eager desires of revenge, vexation when it can't be accomplished, and remorse and sorrow when it is.—Let this suffice for the illustrating the *blessedness* promis'd to the *meek*, *They shall inherit the earth.*—The Application of this subject remains, which I shall reserve for the next Discourse.



S E R M O N XV.

An exhortation to meekness, and directions for attaining it.

MATTH. V. 5.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

I N the preceding Discourse I have

I. DISTINCTLY describ'd this *meekness* as a *christian virtue*, and shewn it to be a prevailing *mildness* and *gentleness* of spirit which influences a christian's *whole* deportment, especially under temptations to *anger*, and *malice*, and *revenge*, and restrains him from all *causeless*, *excessive*, and *unrelenting* anger, principally by *conscience towards God*. I have also

II. ENDEAVOURED to recommend it, by showing the *blessedness* promis'd to it in the text; *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.* This promise I told you might be understood, either as made to all christians in general, to the church of Christ, of whose genuine followers *meekness* is a distinguishing character, and then it denotes the success and triumph of the christian cause over violence and persecution, in a great measure owing to the meekness and patient virtue of the disciples of Jesus; or as made to particular christians eminent in this virtue, to whom it gives a sure title to that portion of worldly goods which is best for them, and secures their enjoyment of it under the peculiar care of divine Providence, and whom it declares happy on account of the greater external quiet, and the inward peace and satisfaction by which their *meekness* improves the enjoyment of their inheritance, and their longer possession of it; *meekness* naturally cherishing and preserving that health and life, which fierce *anger* and violent resentments wear away and ruin.—It remains that I make a proper Application of the truths delivered. And

I. FROM what has been said, it appears no difficult matter to vindicate the christian
Law-

Law-giver in this particular precept of his religion, which has been represented as very unreasonable by men who make their passions their rule, or govern themselves by those false maxims and notions of a brave and prudent behaviour with which the world is prepossessed. In the account of these men, a *meek* temper is the same as a *mean* and *cowardly* one; and *not to resent* all affronts and injuries is the way *never* to be without them: but the wisdom of our Saviour, which was the wisdom of God, judges otherwise, and so does the reason of mankind, when enlightened, and freed from the influence of partial and boisterous passions. It must be confessed, that some expressions of our Saviour concerning the practice of *meekness*, taken in the *letter*, and without any limitations, will not only have a very *strange sound*, but a very *absurd meaning*, such as these; ^a *I say unto you, resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the 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 cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.* For which reason, instead of understanding those words in a *literal* and *unlimited* sense, we ought to put a *moral* and *restrained* construction upon them.

D d 3

^a Matt. v. 39.—

them suitable to the nature of *Proverbial* sayings. The meaning, in general, is no more than this, that we are carefully to avoid whatever would be an indication of an *angry* and *revengeful* spirit; and, on the contrary, to order all the parts of our behaviour so, as may testify to the whole world that *meekness* is our proper temper and character: and as this may be done without resigning up all our rights to every invader, and bowing down the back that who will may ride over us, and laying our body as the ground, and as the street, to them that go over it; so we are allow'd to do every thing that *self-preservation* shall dictate, and is not contrary to the prevalency of a *meek* and *gentle spirit*. We should be *slow to wrath*, and so manage our anger, when there is the most urgent occasion for it, as to show that we act from *reason*, and the principles of *justice* and *charity*, not from an *impatience* of temper, and the motives of *revenge*. And provided we observe this one rule, we shall come up to what our Master requires of us; and, by such a mildness of temper make the best apology in the world for this command of our holy religion. For what can be more reasonable and lovely, than from a true greatness, of mind, and a compassionate sense of human follies and rashness

ness, to overlook affronts and lesser injuries, rather than by violently attempting to right ourselves to disturb the peace of society, inflame our own breasts with tormenting passions, and multiply quarrels and injuries without end? A heathen * Poet gives his testimony to the true greatness of a *meeke forgiving* spirit, and the meanness of the contrary, when he tells his friend,

——*quippe minuti*

*Semper et infirmi est animi, exiguique voluptas,
Ultio——*

Revenge is always the pleasure of a *weak* and *little* mind.

2. LET us, by the grace of God, resolve and endeavour to make this part of the christian temper our own: as those who are persuaded it will be both our honour and our happiness to be remarkable for a spirit of *meekness*, let us study to grow continually more and more perfect in this excellent virtue. Among a great number of rules that might be given for the government of our *anger*, I would recommend these few following.

1. As much as lies in you avoid all the occasions and temptations to *sinful anger*. Don't needlessly thrust yourselves into dis-

D d 4

putes

* *Juvenal Sat.* 13.

putes and quarrels, nor chuse to associate with persons of an angry and quarrelsome, or of an obstinate and perverse disposition, for fear of being insensibly led away by their bad examples, or provok'd by their foolish and thwarting conversation and carriage. This is *Solomon's* advice, ^b *Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul.* And when your relations and circumstances in life, or the course of your business, ingage you to be in company with such, seek, by all innocent methods, to preserve them in good temper; remembering, that after they have lost their temper, it will be more difficult for you to keep your own. And so in other cases, observe what it was which gave the first occasion to *anger*, and avoid it. Perhaps you said or did something which drew those words or actions from others, that you could hardly bear; let this warn you to guard your language and behaviour another time with more care. You should not make free with the *characters* of men, nor break *jest*s upon their persons or infirmities, but should study how to make your conversation as inoffensive as possible, not giving unnecessary provocation; since one provocation will be likely to invite another,
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^b Prov. xxii. 24, 5.

and what was only jest and merriment at first, to end in earnest. There is one thing particularly, which is a frequent occasion of the most fatal excesses of passion, and that is *intemperance*; which, at the same time that it increases the strength of our passions, weakens our reason, by which we should govern them; against which therefore, upon this account, as well as others, they who are liable to this sin, should be particularly watchful; especially they who have found the dreadful effects of it, in its making them say and do those things when *drunk*, for which they can hardly forgive themselves when *sóber*.

2. If you would not be *angry* without a cause, or have your *anger* rise to an undue height, know and consider well the *nature* and *importance* of those things which are the usual occasions and incentives to passion. Such knowledge as this would go a great way to prevent or moderate our *anger*; for, upon reflection, we should find, that many of those things which commonly produce the keenest resentments, are too trifling to deserve it; of which kind are those, by which neither religion nor we ourselves are really wrong'd, and which nothing but a foolish humour, or a false notion, renders so very offensive to us. A wise man will be asham'd to be in a very great

great passion about a thing, which he is inwardly convinc'd is scarce worth his notice: 'tis scarce to be imagin'd how much *senseless anger* might be cut off this way. Mens passions rise in proportion to the fancied cause or provocation, and that, commonly, is such as will not bear examination. Did we form a right judgment of the things of this world, we should not so often quarrel about them: a large soul, that can look with contempt on what is the object of the esteem and love of vulgar minds, is not so liable to the incurfion of *violent anger*; children, in their play, easily fall out, and the reason is, that thro' the weakness of their understandings, and their inexperience of the world, having no apprehension of better things than the toys about which they amuse themselves, they magnify the value of these in their own imagination. Now, in reality, those things which generally draw the affection and admiration of grown persons, are but another kind of baubles. Men have their *play-things* as well as children. 'Tis therefore of great use to have our minds furnished with right notions, to weigh things in the balance of reason, and to view them by the light of scripture. We should then have our minds so fill'd and possess'd with the prospects of another world, as to be little affected with the

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the evils and enjoyments of this; and, consequently, to be subject to no great disturbance and vexation when we were hindered and disappointed in our pursuit of them.

3. WATCH against *pride*, the most universal source of *anger*, and that to which the most violent fits of it are to be charg'd. Indeed, whatever be the reigning inclination, whether pride, or avarice, or sensuality, we are too apt to be out of humour with every person and thing that crosses it: but I believe it will be generally own'd, that *pride* is the worst of all our depraved inclinations in this respect, the most nice and exceptious, and either meets or creates to itself the most frequent matter of offence. The proud man cannot bear the least contradiction or neglect, imagines affronts and indignities where none were designed; expects that from others which no wise man would do, and what he himself is far from practising towards them. There is a very close alliance between *humility* and *meekness*; for which reason, he that would be meek, had need begin with being humble. *Humility* would teach a man to do more to please others, and to demand less in order to his being pleas'd himself; not to magnify every indiscretion or error in the conduct of another person, and to be more sensible of his own faults, and more severe

to them, which will hinder him from being quick to resent every thing that is not done exactly as it ought to be. When shall you know an *humble* man given to *anger*; or a *proud* man who is not *passionate*? So that in mortifying your *pride*, you kill the root of *inordinate anger*. To a mind prepossessed with pride, things appear quite otherwise than they do to one free from this prejudice; it being the nature of pride, like a false glass, to greaten some objects, and to lessen others; to swell injuries and affronts to an enormous size, and to shrink benefits into nothing: upon this account, as well as others, we should make it our business to subdue this naughty principle, to watch all its motions, and to counteract them; we cannot be greater friends to ourselves than by such a conduct, nor take a more effectual way to qualify ourselves to be agreeable and useful members of society, especially a christian one.

4. Nourish and cultivate in yourselves a *spirit of charity* and *good-will* towards all. ^c *Charity suffers long, and is kind*. It is the property of this virtue ^d *to cover a multitude of mistakes and failings*, instead of being bitter against men upon the account of them. Humility, meekness, and charity, are fast friends to one another. Charity is, in some respects,

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

^d 1 Pet. iv. 8.

respects, more helpful to meekness than humility itself; while humility is chiefly employ'd in counterworking our pride, and preventing the ill effects of that, charity has a greater positive influence, and by making us one, as it were, with the offending party, disposes us to exercise greater forbearance and long suffering towards him. *If I love my neighbour as myself*, I shall neither be so prone to *anger* as I might otherwise be, nor in so much danger of exceeding the measures which I ought to set to my passion. *Love thinketh no evil*; it does not meditate evil against others, nor lightly imagine they intend it against us. Where we entertain a hearty affection for another, we are willing to make all the allowances which the case will admit, to hear what can be said in their excuse, and are glad to find things prove better than they were at first apprehended. Such is the tendency of kind affections; and who is there but must be sensible, that were this method generally practis'd, *anger* would oftentimes have no place where it now rages. For a small degree of charity would serve to cover many of those faults which usually appear so provoking; and having made a few reasonable allowances for the ignorance or mistakes of others, or their human frailties we should find

find little remaining for our *anger* to work upon.

5. BE provided against the surprize of passion; and, to this end, count before you go abroad into the business and conversation of the world, that you may meet with many things which will try your temper, and resolve, that whatever they are, they shall not rob you of the government of yourself. It is a great matter to be found upon our guard, and arm'd for the combat. We can hardly suppose, considering the diversity of tempers with which we are to deal, and of accidents which every day brings forth, but some thing or other will occur to discompose us if we are not prepared for it: and if we consider the nature of our circumstances, and affairs, and make observations upon what is past, we may be able to conjecture pretty nearly at the temptations which fall in our way. By means of this foresight, attended with a firm resolution not to be carried away by our passions, our minds will not be so easily remov'd out of their place. Very often 'tis the unexpectedness of the thing which puts us into such disorder, as we are ashamed of when we come to reflect soberly upon our behaviour; and, consequently, we should not have been so apt to fall into it, if we had thought well of
it

it before hand. And surely, did we allow ourselves to recollect sometimes the many inconveniencies which arise from unbridled passion, the odd figure a man makes, the contempt to which he exposes himself, and the many foolish and shameful things he says and does when the *angry fit* is upon him; did we duely consider these things, and add the experience we have had of the evil effects of immoderate *anger* upon ourselves, alike prejudicial to our virtue and repose, we should not need many words to convince us of the necessity and wisdom of this previous care and resolution. We should therefore say to ourselves, “ I fore-
 “ see I shall be tempted, but am deter-
 “ mined not to comply with the tempta-
 “ tion. I will keep my mind in a rea-
 “ diness, and my heart firm and steady,
 “ so that I may not be hurried away be-
 “ fore I am aware. I will look upon
 “ causeless or immoderate *anger* as an ene-
 “ my for which I ought always to be pro-
 “ vided; and as a man who knows him-
 “ self to be in the midst of enemies will
 “ not be secure, so neither will I. It shall
 “ be my endeavour, by vigilance and reso-
 “ lution, to be prepared against temptations
 “ of every kind, and particularly temp-
 “ tations to *anger*; more especially, if my
 “ natural temper or circumstances in the
 “ world

“ world put me in more than ordinary danger of it.”

6. WHEN the storm begins to rise, presently bethink yourselves; check the passion in its infancy, and before it is grown too headstrong to be manag'd. After you have given the reins to it, and let it chafe and heat itself by its career, it will not be so easy to stop it: wherefore you should arrest and examine it at first setting out, that if it cannot give a good account of itself, it may be timely suppress'd. How many think they can play with their passions as a skilful rider can with a horse, turning him at pleasure; but find themselves miserably mistaken. The motions of *anger* are like that of a body down-hill, which increases every moment; or like fire, which if it has fuel to prey upon, the longer it continues, rages the more; or, according to *Solomon's* comparison, *The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water, therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with.* We have not so much command of ourselves as we foolishly imagine; and indeed if we do not command our tempers so far, as to keep ourselves within bounds, when it may be more easily done, how can we think we shall do it after we have broken
over

† Prov. xvii. 14.

over the boundaries which reason and religion have set us?

THOSE few *directions*, among many which might be mentioned, would, if carefully followed, be of great service for the regulation of our *anger*. And that we may be induc'd to use these, and all other methods, particularly *prayer*, *resolution*, and *vigilance*, for the governing our *anger*, and acquiring a meek and quiet spirit, I would offer a few considerations, besides what have been already urged, by way of *motive*.

I. LET us be put in mind of our duty, and excited to the performance of it by the *meekness and gentleness* of Christ. Never was there such a pattern of *meekness* as that person, who, in the text pronounces, *blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*: never did any one possess this virtue in the same degree of perfection; never did any one besides, meet with so many and so pressing trials to exercise it; and never any one set such an example under them as he did; so that it was no vain boast when he invited the world, saying, *learn of me, who am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls*. From his first entrance on his publick ministry, to the last moment of his life, was one continued ex-

^s Matt. xi. 29.

ercise of his *meekness* and *patience*. Not to mention the dulness of understanding, and *slowness of heart to believe* in his own disciples; the general ingratitude and stubbornness of the *Jews*, both rulers and people; their unbelief, hardness of heart, and extreme degeneracy and wickedness; the contradiction of sinners, the opposition that was made against him, the gross misrepresentations of his life and doctrine, and, above all, that malice which was not to be satisfied but with his blood, and which insulted him even in his last sufferings; these, and many other things, which might be nam'd, being considered, with the manner in which he bore them, cannot but give us the highest notions of our Saviour's *meekness* and *long-suffering*, and at once make us blush to think we come so vastly short of him, and resolve, if possible, to resemble him more. It is with this argument that the Apostle *Peter* exhorts the christians of that time, ^h *when they did well, and suffered for it, to take it patiently, knowing that hereunto they were called; because Christ also had suffered for them, leaving them an example that they should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who when he was reviled, reviled not again;*

^h 1 Pet. ii. 20—23.

again; when he suffered, threated not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously, ⁱ He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. His last words were not like those of ^k Zechariah, when the Jews slew him for telling them their faults, *the Lord look upon it and require it*; tho' even this was not dictated by revenge; ^l but *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.* Blessed Jesus, how can I answer it to God, to the world, to my own conscience, if having such an example of *meekness*, I refuse to follow it!

2. CONSIDER the special obligations which, as persons professing the gospel, we are under to the practice of *meekness*. Let it be granted, that this is difficult, and that there is little or no hope of succeeding in our own strength; but have we not divine assistance offered us, ^m *grace sufficient* to overcome ourselves, and every temptation? and, in proportion to the assistance, we have, or may have, in the performance of our duty, and the attainment of any virtue, must not our obligations be to discharge that duty, and to acquire that virtue, and even to attain to an excellence in them?

E e 2

Let

ⁱ Isa. liii. 7. ^k 2 Chron. xxiv. 22. ^l Luke
xxiii. 34. ^m 2 Cor. xii. 9.

Let *heathens* complain of nature, and of the number and strength of temptations, we know where to go for help against them. We do well indeed to be sensible of our own weakness, and the strength of our enemies, but this must be in order to magnify the *grace* of God, and the efficacy of the gospel, not to apologize for our sloth and indulgence to corrupt inclinations.

ⁿ The more is *given* us, the more is *required* of us. Let us apply with the constancy and fervour we ought to the throne of *grace*, and improve the *grace* we receive; and we shall find the government of our passions, and particularly of our *anger*, will become, by degrees, less difficult, and at length, in some measure, natural.—*Again*, the christian religion enables us to pass a *better judgment* upon the things of this world, which are the common incentives to immoderate passions. We usually love and esteem those things more than we should, and where these passions are first engaged, *anger* is sure to follow, as often as they meet with any opposition from other men. Now the gospel gives us such an account of these things, as, if believ'd and attended to, must beget in us a contempt for them, comparatively considered; and we shall not be likely to be
very

ⁿ Luke xii. 48.

very soon, or very much in a passion, about things which stand low in our opinion. Having this advantage from our religion, for discerning the folly of *immoderate anger*, we are the more obliged to abstain from it.—*Again*, christianity makes the acquisition of other virtues more easy, particularly of *humility* and *charity*, which will facilitate the practice of *meekness*, and thereby increases our obligations to it.—It proposes the *best examples* to our imitation. That of the *Son of God* being so eminent, and of such authority with all christians, I considered it distinctly under the preceding head. His Apostles and first Disciples copied after him much more exactly than his followers have generally done since: they met with the worst usage from an ungrateful world, and this not only without, but contrary to all reason and justice; and how did they bear it? The Apostle *Paul* has told us; ° *Being reviled we bless, being persecuted we suffer it, being defam'd we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are as the off-scouring of all things to this day.*—The *future reward* which the *meek* may expect will be considered presently. From all this it appears, that *christians* are under *special obligations* to the practice of *meekness*.

3. CONSIDER if you do not govern your *anger*, that will govern you. One or other must command, reason or passion; and, I pray you, which of these is fittest to have the government? for which of them was it design'd by the Creator? which will make the best use of it, most for the credit and advantage of the man, most for the glory of God, and for the benefit of society? these questions are soon answered. The mind, without reason and understanding would be like a man without his sight; and is it a desirable thing to be blind? no, certainly; every one esteems sight a very valuable blessing. But to what purpose have we sight, if we do not use it? had we not as good be blind, as shut our eyes, and suffer our feet to carry us over a precipice? this is the case of the *angry* man, not using his reason and judgment to direct and rule his *anger*; his *anger* guides and manages him, hurries him into the most manifest inconveniences, which no one could otherwise than perceive whose eyes were open.

4. CONSIDER that by leaving your *anger* without due government, you deprive yourselves of one good proof of your christianity; which those christians have, in whom the principles of their holy religion,

gion, and the *grace* of God, work effectually to the bringing their passions into subjection to their reasonable part. Is a man naturally prone to *anger*? without great care does he run into excesses of this kind. It must be a mighty satisfaction to such a person, and an argument of his being more than a nominal christian, when, from a deep conviction of his duty, a fear to offend God, and a desire to please him, he gains some good mastery over himself. This shows that *grace* has rectified *nature*. On the contrary, when a man indulges his passions, and then thinks to come off by charging all the blame upon *natural* temper; hath he not some reason to question, that if he avoids other sins, it is not so much out of regard to the authority of God, as for want of a strong temptation to them? For if there was such a temptation, why might he not comply with it, as he does with the temptations to *sinful anger*; which, in his calm and sober moments, he cannot but be sensible contradicts the rules of his profession, as well as those other sins which he avoids?

5. LET us consider what honour we shall bring to religion, by exhibiting in ourselves a shining pattern of this most amiable virtue. Were religion allow'd to reform and

change our tempers, as it would do if its efficacy were not hindred, the world would be convinced that christianity was not an idle name, but an active vigorous principle, and of the greatest use to promote the peace and quiet of the world: and this, to every one who has a real love for religion, as every true christian has, will be a consideration of very great weight.

6. THINK how much this virtue will contribute to the repose of your minds; that in proportion to your *meekness* will be your *peace* and *tranquility* at present. Our passage over the narrow sea of life is rough and stormy, or calm and pleasant, much as we ourselves make it. Let us be our own friends, and study our own true happiness, and we may avoid the worst part of that trouble which sinks the value of the present life: we shall have a beginning of heaven upon earth, and which is more,

7. THIS heaven within will be a pledge and assurance of that heavenly rest into which we shall be received after our trial is ended here below. Indeed, the only reward propos'd to the *meek* in the text, is, that *they shall inherit the earth*; but to all such, earth is no more than a *nursery* for heaven; and all the happiness they enjoy here, but a very imperfect essay of that ful-
ness

ness of bliss which is reserved for them hereafter. Whatever promises besides are made to good men, heaven is that which crowns all the rest. Forasmuch therefore as our reward at last will be perfect, let us make it our endeavour to be more perfect in this, and every other virtue, to which our christian profession obliges us.





S E R M O N XVI.

The character of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness explain'd.

MATTH. v. 6.

Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

IT were well for mankind if they as universally agreed in the true notion of happiness, as they do in their desire of it; and having all a right apprehension of those things from which their felicity and contentment must flow, did seriously and steddily apply themselves to the pursuit of them: no man then would be finally miserable, since 'tis intirely owing to men's own false notions or wrong conduct, that they fall short of their

their aim. Every one desires to be happy, but every one does not know or consider wherein his true happiness consists, nor use the only proper means for the attainment of it: few indeed do this, and for this and no other reason it is, that there are so few happy persons. Were they so convinc'd of the truth of our Saviour's assertion in the text as to have their thoughts, and inclinations, and endeavours directed to the object he here sets before them, not being wanting to themselves, God would not fail to crown them with the full enjoyment of their wishes.

IN my text there are *three* things which call for our consideration.

I. THE *object* propos'd to our desires, viz. *righteousness*.

II. THE *strength* and *fervour* which should accompany our desires after this *object*, express'd by *hungering and thirsting after it*. And

III. THE *blestness* promised to those whose desires are thus directed, contained in these words, *for they shall be filled*.

I. LET us briefly consider the *object* of our desires here propos'd by our Saviour, viz. *righteousness*. This word is differently us'd in scripture. According to the most common

common acceptation of it in the *Old Testament*, it denotes the same as *real holiness*, or *religion*, both in the heart and life: in this sense; the righteous man is the same as the pious or good man. Thus ^a *Noah was righteous before God*; and so likewise were ^b *Zechariah and Elizabeth, walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless*. And forasmuch as *Christ* was now speaking to *Jews*, who would naturally apprehend him to have no other meaning to his words than what they bore in the language of their own *scriptures*, we cannot doubt, that by *righteousness* he meant that which is *inherent*, or the image of God upon the soul, comprehensive of every grace and virtue: we have the more reason to conclude this to be his meaning, because in this very chapter, ver. 20. the same word occurs again; and is evidently to be taken in this sense. *I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.* That is, “unless your
 “ piety and goodness be of another kind
 “ than theirs, it would never gain you the
 “ favour of God.” He saith *your righteousness*, which implies that it must be *their own righteousness*, so far as that they must be the *subjects* of it, and co-operate with
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^a Genes. vi. 9. vii. 1.^b Luke i. 6.

the *grace* of God in the production of it; not the *righteousness of another* imputed to them. If their own *inherent righteousness*, or *goodness*, did not surpass that of this hypocritical generation of men, no other *righteousness*, tho' never so perfect, could procure them admission into the kingdom of heaven. By *righteousness* then, we are to understand the love and practice of every thing that is good; every thing that enters into the notion of a sober, righteous, and godly life; a rectitude of soul including every virtuous and holy disposition. As to the reason of the name, or why a holy temper and conversation should be called *righteousness*, not only that part of it which usually passes under the name of *justice*, but all and every part of it, there are these *two* obvious reasons to be given of it.

I. THE original foundation or ground of this, seems to be the absolute fitness and excellence of these things, from whence arises an immediate obligation to practise them. 'Tis necessarily and unchangeably fit, that every intelligent Being should act agreeably to his nature, and the relations he stands in to other Beings: he owes it to his own nature, and to the nature and reason of things, to act after this manner; insomuch, that if he acts otherwise, he must go against all
reason

reason and order, violate the law in his own mind, and be self-condemned; and what would this be, but a kind of *unrighteousness*? Since wisdom has a natural inherent *right* to prescribe to every Being how he shall act; and, consequently, whoever does that which wisdom and reason tell him he ought not to do, or neglects doing what they tell him he ought to do, is unjust, in counteracting the orders of the understanding to which the supreme power naturally belongs: even the *holiness* of God, which takes in all his moral attributes, his *justice*, *goodness*, *truth*, and *faithfulness*, is sometimes exprest in scripture by this term of *righteousness*; so 'tis said, *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*; where by the title of *righteous*, is meant the universal rectitude of the divine nature. And why is the word *righteous* made use of, but to signify that God, in every relation, whether as the Creator, or Governour, or Judge of the world, always does that which is most becoming himself, renders what is due to his own nature and perfections, which is the part of righteousness or justice; and, with the greatest reverence be it spoken, acts in that manner which his infinite *wisdom* obliges him to do.

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2. THE Term *righteousness* is expressive of the whole duty of man upon another account, viz. that in every part of it we only fulfil the obligation we are under to obey God. The author of our Beings and fountain of all our happiness, has an unquestionable right to require of us to lead a sober, righteous, and godly life; in requiring all these things of us, under pain of his severest displeasure, he does no more than he justly may; from whence it follows, that we cannot know the will of God, with relation to any part of our behaviour, and refuse to do it, without the most heinous *injustice*: whatever the sin be of which we are guilty, we are *unjust to God*; and on the other hand, ^d*when we have done all those things which are commanded us*, must confess that *we are unprofitable servants*; inasmuch as *we have done but what was our duty to do*. In respect of God, we can never rise above *strict justice*; never perform a work of *supererogation*; all that we can do is a *debt* to him.

THIS little may suffice to give us a general notion of that *righteousness* which is here propos'd to our desires and pursuits, together with the *reasons* of the name. By *righteousness*, is denoted *universal holiness* of heart and life; stil'd *righteousness*, because
it

^d Luke xvii. 10.

it is no more than we are in justice oblig'd to, both in regard to the nature and reason of things, and the obedience we owe to the commands of God.

II. LET us consider the *strength and fervour* which should accompany our desires after *righteousness*, exprest by *hungring and thirsting after it*.—Hunger and thirst are bodily appetites, or appetites of the soul, only as united to the body. The body stands in need of meat and drink for its nourishment and support; and that we might not either inadvertently or wilfully neglect to take what is necessary to these ends, the wise author of our nature has given us these two appetites of hunger and thirst which prompt us to seek after food convenient for us, and will not suffer us to be easy and contented without it; from hence these words are transfer'd to signify such *desires* of the mind as are strong and vehement, and not to be satisfied but with the enjoyment of their proper objects. It may be of use to explain, in some particulars, what is imported in this *hungring and thirsting after righteousness*.

I. IT implies a knowledge and conviction of the great *desireableness* of the thing after which we *hunger and thirst*—*Ignoti nulla cupido*.—What is *unknown*, is, for that reason,

reason, *undesired*; altogether undesired, if wholly unknown; and but little desired, if we know or imagine little in it that is desirable. Such a knowledge and conviction is the more necessary in the present case, to be instead of those painful sensations by which we are admonished of the want of meat and drink for the body. Would the body suffer by too long an abstinence from food, and all its vital powers fail after some time? To prevent this inconvenience, the body, unless it be under some preternatural disorder, feels such a pain and uneasiness in this abstinence, as makes us sensible, whether we will or no, that nature has not all which it requires; and after a little experience of the fitness of meats and drinks, to remove these painful sensations, we are not only powerfully allured by the presence of these things, but mov'd to seek after them when they are absent: but the wants of the soul do not immediately produce any such pressing uneasiness; men can want what is needful for their better part, and hardly perceive it; nay, sometimes, are exceeding positive *that they have need of nothing*; the reason of this is, that we are, at present, upon our trial for eternity, and therefore to the divine wisdom it seems meet and proper, that the care of our souls should not, like

‡ Revel. iii. 17.

the preservation of our bodies, be a thing we cannot well help, but the effect of serious consideration: *virtue* is to be our *choice*, not our *fate*. Were we obliged to look after our souls by a kind of *instinct*, which is the case with regard to our bodies, what room would there be for freedom and deliberation in the pursuit of the chief good? *Righteousness* is one of the *necessaries* of the soul, and yet will not be pursued by us, if we do not know and consider it to be so. In order therefore to *hunger and thirst after it*, 'tis requisite, that we should have a thorough lively conviction of its being the most desirable thing in the world for a reasonable immortal spirit, upon these *three* accounts; as it's *Life*, it's *Perfection*, and it's *Happiness*.

I. 'TIS necessary that we apprehend *righteousness* to be the *life* of the soul, and therefore desire it; it's *life* as a *moral* agent, tho' not as a *natural*. It is of the very nature of a soul to be a percipient or thinking Being, as well as indivisible; it cannot die as the body does, by a dissolution of it's parts, because it is one single uncompounded thing; nor, as it is probable, can it die by being depriv'd of its power of thinking; at least, we have no ground to suppose that it can ever die in this sense: it will always have a principle of thought and intelligence,

ligence, by which it will have some knowledge of itself and some acquaintance with other things; and a principle of election or choice, by which it will embrace some things and flie from others. But if these active principles are not employ'd about their proper objects, if there be no tendency in the soul towards moral and spiritual good, if it is void of all those divine qualities which constitute the image of God, we may regard it in this sense as a *dead* thing. Then does the soul live indeed, when it lives to God and for God; when God actuates the soul with his *grace*, and the soul by contemplation and love turns itself towards God; when it lives the life of God, lives to some valuable purpose, answers the great end of its creation, loves what is good, and hates what is evil; this is the proper life of the soul, as a *moral* agent; a life worthy of it, the life that was originally inspir'd into it, and to which it will be finally restored, unless it chuses a state of death. And what is it but *righteousness* which constitutes this life? for *righteousness*, as I explained it before, is a combination or union of all holy and virtuous dispositions. This, therefore, is the *life of God in the soul of man*; so we must apprehend it, that we may *hunger and thirst* after it. *Righteousness* is life, the noblest kind of life; and if all

life be desirable, except counterballanc'd by misery, this much more. Who can chuse but aspire to this life, that discerns the excellency of it? Or who, that in some degree discerns not its excellence, can with a due fervour of spirit aspire to it?

2. THERE must be a conviction that *righteousness* is desirable, as it is the *perfection* of a reasonable nature. This carries the idea somewhat higher. The perfection of *righteousness* is the perfection of the spiritual life, and the soul is more or less perfect in the same proportion as it is more or less holy. There is more of real excellence and perfection in the *moral* endowments of the mind, than in the *intellectual*; in a *will* determined by the rules of eternal *righteousness*, than in the highest degree of merely *speculative understanding*. A faint of the lowest form is a more perfect Being in this sense, than the most knowing and sagacious among the *fallen angels*; bearing a nearer resemblance to the ever-bless'd God in that holiness which is the glory of his nature. Indeed, all other excellence is *relative* to that which is *moral*; insomuch, that if we could suppose such a thing as an evil principle, or independent Being of great power and knowledge but without goodness and holiness; the power and knowledge of such a Being, let them
be

be never so great, would have nothing in them valuable to the Being himself that possesseth them, or worthy of esteem and veneration from other Beings. And further, as all other excellence and perfection is *relative* to holiness, so holiness promotes every other kind of perfection, and is, in the nature of things, and in the appointment of God, connected with it. The more complete any Being is in moral goodness, or *righteousness*, the greater will his advance be in knowledge first or last. Holiness has a natural tendency to brighten and improve the faculties of the mind, is the best qualification for the knowledge of the truth, and disposes us to value it the more for the good influence it has upon practice. The love of the truth is implied in that quality of the soul which we call *righteousness*; the heart of the righteous man is wide, tho' his understanding, by reason of some disadvantages he at present labours under, be narrow; and where a man has largeness of heart as the sand on the sea shore, he shall, one time or other, have a largeness of mind in proportion. *Righteousness* is the *perfection* of the soul in all its capacities, restores the order of the soul, assigns every faculty its place, purifies and exalts it, and prepares it for the enjoyment of its proper object: the consequence of which is,

3. THAT *righteousness* is not only the *life* and *perfection*, but also the *happiness* of a reasonable soul, and as such desirable. Perfection is in order to happiness. That it may be perfectly happy, the soul must be perfectly holy, according to the capacity of its nature; and agreeably to the degrees of its holiness its happiness is still increasing. There is a mighty satisfaction which immediately attends a right frame of mind, and conduct of life; [†] *the fruit of righteousness is present peace*, as the final effect of it is *quietness and assurance for ever*. [‡] *The ways of wisdom, or religion, are ways of pleasantness*. And then the pleasure we receive from without, even from God himself, infinitely the most excellent of all objects, the immense ocean of good, depends almost intirely upon the preparation of the soul for it by *righteousness* or goodness. As this earth is a strange land, and their abode here a kind of banishment to holy souls, who are continually labouring after the consummation of their wishes in the presence and enjoyment of God; so would heaven be to unholy souls, were they admitted there: they could not be happy in heaven, because not prepar'd for it; nay, having no relish for the pleasures of that world, and finding nothing else to entertain them, they
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† Isa. xxxii. 17.

‡ Prov. iii. 17.

would be miserable; and so they are at present; for tho' in this world they have a variety of things to divert their thoughts, to please their fancies, to engage their passions, and gratify their appetites; yet still, for want of *righteousness*, which is the natural state of the mind, they are very far from being happy; their passions being let loose, and ungoverned, create them a thousand disquietudes, besides the fears and reproaches of a guilty accusing conscience. Of all these things, and of the desirableness of *righteousness* upon all these accounts, the man who *hunger* and *thirsts after righteousness* has some conviction; and the clearer his apprehension, the firmer his belief, and the more frequent and intense his meditations of these things, the more urgent will his *hunger* and *thirst after righteousness* be.

2. THE conviction that *righteousness* is desirable, is followed with *fervent, efficacious, and lasting desires* after it. While the soul owns the desirableness of this divine accomplishment, it is not kept from desiring it by the influence of something or other of an opposite nature, within or without it. At their first springing up in the soul, these desires may not be so strong and vehement; but desires there are which are still waxing stronger and stronger; for where

the judgment is fully possess'd of the excellence of a thing, it is impossible but it should be attended with a rational desire after it: I say a rational desire, because, as the soul is capable of being acted upon in two different manners, by *sensible* objects which affect it, by the mediation of the body, and by *intellectual*, which influence it by the thoughts and apprehensions it has of them; it is furnished with desires suited to the nature of both these sorts of objects; and, many times, the objects not well agreeing, the desires of the soul carry it different ways: on this side, it is urged and solicited by its senses and passions; on the other, by the judgment of the mind, which excites it to pursue after those things which are its own proper and peculiar good; and not being able to resist the conviction of their superior excellence, as long as it attends to it, pursue after them it does, tho' pulled back by the body, and bodily appetites and pleasures. And when the desires after *righteousness* have gained that degree of strength, as to be properly express'd by *hungering* and *thirsting*, there is then a sensible fervour in them; the soul then breaths and longs after the beloved object; witness the pious *Psalmist*; ^h *As the hart panteth after water-brooks, so panteth my soul*

^h Psal. xlii. 1, 2.

soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? This language is like that in which he express'd himself when he was parch'd and faint with bodily thirst; ⁱ *And David longed, and said, O that one would give me to drink of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!* the water of which he knew was excellent, having often drank of that cooling spring. Some of this water being brought him by men who endangered their lives for it, he would not drink it, *but pour'd it out unto the Lord;* for whose favour and loving-kindness his *soul thirsted* more than his body did for that water: and to *thirst after God* is the same thing as *thirsting for righteousness*. “ Let
 “ others say, ^k *Who will show us any good?*
 “ tell us how we may get and enjoy the
 “ world; *Lord, lift thou up the light of*
 “ *thy countenance upon me!* O satisfy me
 “ early with thy love, or my soul will not
 “ be able to bear the impatience of its
 “ own desires! O shed abroad thy love in
 “ my heart! I could wish I were all
 “ love, for love would transform me to
 “ thy likeness. I love thee, but not enough;
 “ I would love thee more, even to the
 “ utmost stretch of my capacity. In lov-
 “ ing *righteousness*, I know that I love thee,
 “ since

ⁱ 2 Sam. xxiii. 15.^k Psal. iv. 6.

“ since in thee I behold it in its greatest
“ perfection. Here, O Lord, my wishes
“ center! I would have my soul repose
“ itself in thee, I would have it filled with
“ God, and *increase with all the increase*
“ *of God.* I would be the subject of his
“ *grace*, of the operations and influences
“ of his divine *Spirit* perfecting the life and
“ likeness of God in me; sure then, to be
“ the object of his *love*. He cannot but
“ love his own likeness, and there can be
“ no better demonstration of his kindness,
“ than his imparting this heavenly, this in-
“ valuable gift.” The desires of the soul,
when they rise so high as *hungring and*
thirsting, are always efficacious; by which
I mean, that they produce strenuous and
incessant indeavours to obtain the possession
of what we so earnestly covet. Those de-
sires must be very feeble, and very impro-
perly described by *hungring and thirsting*,
which have no visible effect, or no effect
which is considerable; which move the
soul a little, as a gentle wind curls the
waves of the sea, but do not pass into
action. A man must love his ease exceed-
ing well, who, when he is tormented with
hunger and thirst, had rather sit still and
starve, than stir out of his place to get
what would appease these craving appetites.
A great part of the labour of mankind is
for

for meat and drink; and, while others *labour for the meat that perisheth*, will not they who have a notion of another sort of meat, ¹*which endureth to life everlasting*, and hunger after it, labour for that? doubtless they will. This therefore must be taken into the idea of *hungring and thirsting after righteousness*, that such persons apply themselves to the use of all those means which promise them the accomplishment of their desires. They are wiser than to defeat their own desires by taking a contrary method, indulging to sloth and carelessness, doing nothing, or what is worse than nothing, ministring fewel to their lusts, and seeking the occasions of sin, instead of observing and embracing all the opportunities of promoting the welfare and prosperity of their souls. It is impossible a person who really *hunger and thirsts after righteousness* should act so inconsistent a part. One of this character will be intent upon mortifying every corrupt affection, avoiding every temptation, and practising every duty; he will watch and pray and strive, hearken to all the wise and friendly counsels of the word of God, and while he has the glorious end in view, will never matter the difficulty of the means or the roughness of the way: and, in this course,
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¹ John vi. 27.

he will persevere, for those desires after *righteousness* are steadfast and lasting. He does not make a few attempts, and then give over, begin well, but not patiently continue in well doing.—“ My soul follows after thee, O Lord, sometimes ready to faint thro’ the weakness of the flesh, but holds on, renews her pious resolutions, and finds her strength renewed, gratefully acknowledging that all her strength is from thee, whose right hand upholds her ! ”

3. As he who hungers and thirsts in a literal sense is not to be satisfied with any thing else, instead of that meat and drink which alone can lay the rage of those importunate appetites ; in like manner the soul which *hungers and thirsts after righteousness*, will rest contented with nothing besides that: a man ready to die with hunger or thirst, would give thousands of gold and silver for a few morsels of the coarsest food, or a cup of cold water, if he could not otherwise get them. There have been instances of this kind, of persons who have purchas’d a little food, which, at another time, he would have loath’d, or a draught of water, with all that they were worth ; and no unwise bargain. When ^m *Esau*, returning from the field faint and weary, could not persuade *Jacob*

Jacob to give him part of a mess of pottage he was eating, unless he would sell him his birthright, he reasons after this manner; *Behold I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do me?* In this, no doubt, he acted too hastily, for his extremity was not so great as he pretended, nor the right of *primogeniture* a thing so lightly to be parted with. But as to every thing in this world, wealth, power, grandure, if they were all to be put in the balance against the necessaries of life, what wise man would not reject them? If I must either quit these things, or perish of hunger and thirst; the matter needs not a moment's debate which of these I shall do; ⁿ *for what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his life?* or *what, having lost his life, can a man give in exchange for it, that it may be restor'd to him again?* Nay, could a man barely live without meat and drink, but so as to have these keen appetites of hunger and thirst always gnawing him; he must be a fool who would chuse such a condition for the sake of any temptation the world could offer him. So here, my soul *hunger*s and *thirsts* after *righteousness*; and what then will it avail me how prosperous I am in other respects, if I fall short here? This being the superior desire, the satisfaction of
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all my other desires (could it be suppos'd) would not recompence for the want of satisfaction in this. ° *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I can desire besides thee.* The man in the fable, who having a faculty granted him of turning every thing he touched into gold, could make no use of his food, because, upon his touching it, it was immediately converted into that metal, quickly perceiv'd his folly in desiring such a gift, and begg'd of the God who bestow'd it, that he would resume it again. “ Thus miserable should
 “ I be in the midst of the greatest abund-
 “ ance, if my desires of resembling and en-
 “ joying God were never to be satisfied.
 “ What tho' all other things were accord-
 “ ing to my wishes, what tho' I had it in
 “ my power to be every thing that I would,
 “ except to be holy; and did no sooner de-
 “ fire this or that, but I had it; alas, what
 “ would all this signify, if I must live with-
 “ out God in the world; if my soul must
 “ continue destitute of the only thing that
 “ can adorn, enrich, nourish, and satisfy it!”
 Such is the language, and such the temper of a soul that is full of *hungrings and thirstings after righteousness*; nothing but *righteousness* will content such a soul; it had much rather have all its desires and inclinations

tions respecting the body, and the world, denied than this; and if it comes to the trial, can part with all other things *for righteousness sake*.

THESE are the several particulars implied in *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*, viz. A conviction of the great desirableness of it, attended with fervent, efficacious, and stedfast desires after it; and these desires such, that nothing will content a man but the gratification of them. Every other enjoyment is despised in comparison of this, to which all other things together will not make up an equivalent. This finishes the *Second* general head. It remains

III. THAT I represent the *blestness* of persons of this character; and this I shall do in the next Discourse.





S E R M O N XVII.

The blessedness of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

MATTH. v. 6.

Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

IN the preceding Discourse I took notice of *three* things in the Text worthy of our consideration.

I. **T**HE *object* propos'd to our desires, *righteousness*, which is the same with real universal holiness and goodness, or religion both in the heart and life; styl'd *righteousness*, because it is no more than we are in justice oblig'd to, both in regard to the nature and reason of things, and the obedience we owe to the commands of God.

II. **T**HE

II. THE *strength* and *fervour* which should accompany our desires after *righteousness*, express'd by *hungering and thirsting after it*. This implies a deep conviction of the great desirableness of it, attended with fervent, efficacious, and stedfast desires after it; and these desires such, that nothing will content a man but the gratification of them. These *two* general heads I have considered, and I now proceed to the

III. THE *blessedness* of all those whose fervent desires are directed to this object. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled; they shall attain that righteousness which they so earnestly desire, and in, and together with that, shall enjoy all the happiness which is necessary to fill their biggest capacities.*

I. THEY are *blessed*, because they shall have what they desire, certainly have it, and have it to the full. The event is as certain as the word and promise of God can make it. God has said, or which amounts to the same, the Son of God, by authority from his Father, has said, ^a *Ask, and ye shall receive, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you.* And has God said it, and shall it not be? But, it may be, I am not one of those to whom

^a Matt. vii. 7.

the promise is made.—The answer is obvious; God excepts none who are sincere, and therefore none who are sincere can have any reason to except themselves; and the sincerity of our desires after the *grace* of God is, at present, taken for granted.—Is it the desire of your souls to be made free from sin, and restor'd to a participation of the divine holiness? You cannot doubt that these desires are approv'd by God, or that he will assist and crown them with success. You shall want no helps necessary to this end, either external or internal. Hear what *Christ* says; ^b *I am the door of the sheep, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture. I am come that my sheep may have life* (that is, all the means and provision for life) *and that they might have it more abundantly.* And he might well say so; and, upon that account, declare all those to be *blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness, because they should be filled*; having, in the dispensation of the gospel, liberally supplied us with every thing needful for our sanctification at first, and our continual progress in holiness; with the most excellent precepts, the most heavenly doctrines, the most engaging motives, the most beneficial institutions, and the most powerful assistances. Indeed, never any one who was unfeign-

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^b John x. 9, 10.

edly desirous to know and do the will of God, under the light of nature, and much more under the law of *Moses*, was left by God in a helpless and hopeless condition. ^c *God is rich in mercy to all that call upon him*; and as he is pleased when he sees a soul struggling with the body of sin, swimming against the stream, and, as far as it knows its duty, willing to practise it; so he delights to favour the attempts and endeavours of such a soul, however weak at first. This is true of all men, whatever dispensations they live under, but, in a more peculiar manner, of those who have the gospel reveal'd to them; they enjoy such helps as none before them ever did, and if these helps do not prove effectual to any, it shall not be thro' any deficiency on God's part, but on their own. A dispensation of the *Spirit* shall accompany the outward dispensation of the *Word* to all those who improve the *Grace* which is given them. They who desire to be righteous and holy, in the manner before describ'd, shall be righteous and holy. ^d *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.* These are the words of the evangelical *Prophet*, like to which are those of our Saviour himself, ^e *when he stood and*

G g 2 cried,

^c Rom. x. 13. ^d Isai. lv. 1. ^e John. vii. 37.

cried, saying, if any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. And forasmuch as every thing must have a beginning, God will not expect from the soul, at its first setting out in the christian race, that strength of holy desire which he does afterward. ^f *He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; will not despise the day of small things,* but will give strength to the weak who are sensible of their weakness, and continually improve his help. Let them follow the leadings of God's *Word* and *Spirit*, and their desires after perfection shall be still increasing, and with them their perfection itself; they shall be filled with the fruits of *righteousness* still more and more in this life, and compleatly in the life to come. We may seek other things and not attain them, but ^g *God never said to any upright souls, seek ye my face in vain.* It is very possible that our labour for other things may signify nothing, yea, 'tis very common, but, *that our labour should be in vain in the Lord*, is utterly impossible; which is such a motive to this labour as might reasonably be expected should prevail upon every one; especially when it is added,

2. IN and together with the attainment of this *righteousness*, they shall enjoy all that happiness which is necessary to fill their
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^f Matt. xii. 20. ^g Zech. iv. 10. ^h Isai. xlv. 19.

most enlarged capacities. ^h *He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst*; so spake the Son of God in the days of his flesh; and what he said on earth he fulfills in heaven. 'Tis true the promise is in some degree made good at present; they who have the beginnings of heaven in the holiness of their tempers, have some foretaste of its joys; but they are only prelibations and earnest of that ⁱ *fulness of joy* which is *in the presence of God*. And whence does that joy arise? there is no question, immediately and chiefly from the enjoyment of God. But what is it to enjoy God, but to love him, and to be loved by him? and what is love to God, rising to its highest perfection, but the perfection of holiness? and what is it but this perfection of holiness that renders us the objects of the perfect love of God? ^k *Then shall we be satisfied*, and not till then, *when we awake with his likeness*. In seeing God we shall be happy, because ^l *when we see him as he is, we shall be like him*. We shall be like him in his everlasting blessedness, because we shall resemble him in his unchangeable *righteousness*: such shall the final happiness of the righteous be; they now *hunger and*

G g 3 *thirst*

^h John. vi. 35. ⁱ Psal. xvi. 11. ^k Psal. xvii. 15.
^l I John. iii. 2.

thirst after the supreme good, they shall then ^m *hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; because they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them.* Having despis'd the treasures of the world, and laid up for themselves treasures in heaven, they shall forever spend upon these treasures, without being ever able to exhaust them; here are *durable riches and righteousness.* Their desire of freedom from all sin, and possessing the positive part of holiness, being now accomplished, draws after it the accomplishment of all their other desires; of the desire of happiness in general, and of all those particular desires, the gratification of which must conspire to render their felicity compleat. Those blessed souls ⁿ *delight themselves in the Lord, and he gives them the desires of their hearts.* And now we may say all desire is at a stand, they have all that heart can wish, and more than could once enter into their hearts to conceive; without all controversy therefore, *blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, since they shall be thus filled.*

I shall conclude with a proper Application of this Subject.

I. WHAT

^m Rev. vii. 15, 16.

ⁿ Psal. xxxvii. 4.

I. WHAT has been said will assist us in determining that question, *Whether the desire of grace be grace?* If the desire be sincere, the lowest degrees of it show a work of *grace* begun; and that I call a *sincere desire* which is founded in a right apprehension of the thing signified by the word *grace*, (as being the same with what our Saviour in the Text calls *righteousness*) and productive of suitable resolutions and endeavours. Here the happy change begins, and, in proportion to the strength and efficacy of these desires, advances forward; and when these desires are become so strong as to prevail over all our desires, to command the soul, and give laws to all its pursuits, indulging or controuling them, just as they happen to be consistent or otherwise with the hope of salvation, it may then be concluded, that the man is in a *state of grace*, and to be numbered amongst the righteous. The expression of *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*, cannot well denote any thing less than such a prevalency of holy desire: but where the desires are so imperfect as not to be able to counter-act the corrupt principle, and make head against the temptations to which a man is exposed in the course of his life, they are not sufficient to denominate him at present

a thorough christian; though, if they are carefully nourished and improved, they will at last come to be of this kind. And much less can any one reasonably build upon *a desire of grace*, which is only indistinct and confused; when a man wishes that he was a true christian, and a child of God, but does not reflect, that to become such, he must be ⁿ *holy in all manner of conversation*; nay, perhaps, fancies he may be so by the *imputation* of another's righteousness, without any of his own; this does not imply that the renovation of the soul is so much as begun.

2. How solicitous should we be to know whether the *blessedness* in the Text belongs to us; that is, whether we *hunger and thirst after righteousness*: this is not difficult to know; if we only consider the explanation before given of this character, and try ourselves by it, we need not to be at a loss what to think of ourselves. Are we thoroughly convinced of the exceeding desireableness of this holy temper, that it is our *life*, the *perfection*, the *happiness* of the soul? are our desires actually carried out after it, and are they fervent, efficacious, and constant? and, finally, are we ready to sacrifice the gratification of all our other desires to the satisfaction of these? can we answer in the affirmative.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 15.

affirmative to these questions? and, surely, if we are impartial, we may be able to tell whether we can or no; we have then nothing else to do but to rejoice in the happiness of our condition, and, by the consideration hereof, to encourage ourselves to persevere as we have begun, not dispirited by all the difficulties and opposition we can meet with.—Let me add two or three *marks* more, which we shall do well to consider and attend unto, when we are examining ourselves.

I. IF we *hunger and thirst after righteousness*, we shall have a high value for all the duties and institutions of religion; by which, under the influences of the *Holy Spirit*, and in concurrence with our own unwearied endeavours, this divine temper is produced and carried on in our souls. If the divine life is but just begun in us, we shall, ° *as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby*; and our desire to partake of the sacred nourishment, will dispose us, with all readiness, to embrace the opportunities we have of searching the holy scriptures, and meditating on the divine and important truths therein contained: we shall likewise readily attend where the word of God is preached, and

^P and give the greatest heed to what we hear, lest we should let it slip. As God has, in mercy to our souls, made it our duty to worship him in private and publick, and to give ourselves to holy exercifes; so we shall be sensible of his great goodness to us herein, thankfully acknowledge it, and wisely improve it. External duties, separately considered, are, indeed, of little value; but this is no objection against these duties, but against those who foolishly separate between the external performance, and the good effects which it is designed to have upon the mind; and when we consider them in this view, we cannot prize them too highly. 'Tis true, the agency of the *Spirit* is a principal thing to be regarded; but since the *Spirit* seldom acts without the instrumentality of outward means, (we may say, never where these means are slighted and despised) it concerns us to make the best use of them we can; and, provided we do so, at the same time imploring the inward operations of the *Spirit of grace and holiness*, and, uniting our own endeavours, we shall have reason to say of them, as *Christ* did of the words he had spoken to the *Jews*; that ^q *they are spirit and life*. From this approved tendency of the instrumental duties of religion, to advance and cherish a

divine

^p Heb. ii. 1.^q John vi. 63.

divine temper in the soul, it may be inferred, that all such as have little or no esteem for these duties, have consequently very little acquaintance with that *hunger and thirst after righteousness*, of which the Text makes mention.

2. ANOTHER *mark* of our having these fervent desires after *righteousness* is, that our other desires will be directed and moderated by these; so that the more we love God and goodness, Christ and heaven, the less we shall love the world, and the things of the world: for the capacities of the soul being limited, and the nature of the objects so very different, its affections cannot run with a full stream in both these channels at once; but as one fills, the other will empty. The alteration in this respect will be sensible. The heart of the covetous man, which thirsts after the riches of this world, is like a dry and parched desert, to which the most plentiful showers of rain signify little or nothing; since all that falls is immediately sucked up, and, after a little time, it has the same appearance of drought as before; thus, how much soever riches increase, the desires of the miser remain unsatisfied. And the same may be said of the voluptuous and ambitious, whose desires are eagerly set upon the pleasures or honours of the world. We may call such
desires

desires the fever of the soul; and what is there that will cure the soul of this feverish thirst? nothing else will do it but its hungering and thirsting after things of an opposite nature, such as the favour of God and his righteousness. Where these nobler desires are introduced, the others proportionably abate; insomuch, that supposing the soul to be fill'd with earnest desires after spiritual perfection, and a spiritual felicity, in the room of an immoderate fondness for earthly things, will succeed an holy indifference to them; they will not only appear contemptible to the judgment of the mind, but the prevailing taste which the soul now has for the pleasures of devotion, will give it a sort of disrelish for the satisfactions of sense. Never, therefore, imagine, that you are in the number of those *who hunger and thirst after righteousness*, in case you feel the ties upon your hearts towards worldly objects to draw as strong as ever.

3. IN consequence of the former characteristic, we shall judge of our happiness, not by our outward condition, but by the state of our souls; being not only contented, but thankful if they prosper. If the world does not smile upon me, am I afflicted beyond measure? can I nor meet with losses and disappointments, but I presently

sently conclude, that I am going to be utterly undone? do sad thoughts croud in upon my mind on such occasions; and in the multitude of such thoughts, will the comforts of God avail nothing to delight my soul? ah, what must I think of myself, if this be a true description of my case? certainly, I am quite destitute of the truth of *grace*, or this new, this divine principle is exceeding feeble in me. Were my soul in a vigorous, healthy state, active and zealous for God, and bless'd with the testimonies of his gracious presence, strongly tending upwards to the joys of eternity, and animated with the assurance of its being destined to this glorious lot; I should not think these were things to disturb myself about, none of these things would then very much move me; how could they, when my soul was intent upon the pursuit of such things as it esteemed of infinitely greater importance to it? “ No — my
 “ God, the smiles of thy countenance,
 “ thy *grace* purifying my soul, and thy
 “ love cherishing and supporting it, will
 “ make amends for the want of any out-
 “ ward comfort whatsoever! I own, I
 “ should be perfectly unworthy of these high
 “ privileges, and discover my ignorance of
 “ their value, if I could once entertain a
 “ thought, that any good man could be
 “ miserable.

“ miserable. Let me have the *honour that*
 “ *cometh from God*, the *rejoicing that at-*
 “ *tends the testimony of a good conscience,*
 “ and be *rich in good works*, and I shall
 “ esteem myself happy whatever else I
 “ want or suffer. At worst, my necessities
 “ and sufferings can but oppress and sink
 “ my body, my better part is safe, and
 “ my title secured to the happiness of the
 “ next life.” This is the *Second* inference,
 how solicitous should we be to know whe-
 ther the *blessedness* in the Text belongs to us ;
 that is, whether we *hunger and thirst after*
righteousness ; of which I have given *three*
 marks, that by them you might know your-
 selves, besides those to be gathered from the
Second general head.

3. WE should diligently cultivate these
 holy desires in our souls ; and for this end,
 the following rules, among others, carefully
 observed, and faithfully practised, may be
 of great service.

I. LET us ^r *crucify the flesh with its af-*
fections and lusts. Self-denial is one of the
 greatest friends to a weak and declining
 virtue ; 'tis like killing the weeds in a field
 or garden, which makes the wholesome
 plants to flourish, and the good seed to spring
 up and bring forth the greater increase. A
 life of sensual indulgence, or suffering our
 hearts to run out after covetousness, is not
 the

the way to promote, but hinder the growth of our desires after *righteousness*. 'Tis true, we cannot, by an immediate power over our minds, disengage ourselves from sensual and worldly inclinations, but we can withdraw that which feeds them; if the inward affection be not under our command, the outward action is: we can chuse, the *grace* of God assisting us, whether we will gratify our corrupt passions, and do the things which they put us upon doing. Our sensual inclinations prompt us to a great many things, but cannot force us; let us, therefore, resolutely and constantly counter-act them: instead of abandoning ourselves to a life of fleshly ease on the one hand, or excessive toil and care on the other, let us live as becomes the followers of Jesus, and we shall find, that by little and little, the very desires of our hearts will be changed, and what was very great self-denial at first, will at last, be hardly any at all. God does not require us to do impossibilities; that we *hunger and thirst after righteousness* is what he requires; and though we cannot do this in an instant, and by an absolute empire over ourselves, yet we can order our conversation aright, by that *grace* which God is always ready to afford us; and the consequence of this will be, that God will subdue our irregular desires, and plant others

in their room, which will be continually reviving and establishing by the influences of his *Holy Spirit*.

2. LET us practise frequent retirement from the world. The generality of christians lose themselves in the world, and therefore 'tis no wonder they do not find God ; they are hardly ever in their own company, hardly ever at leisure to commune with their own hearts, or to converse with divine and heavenly objects. Let us take a contrary method, often to retreat to our closets and into ourselves, abstract our minds from all earthly things, and, as it were, get above them into a higher region, from whence we may be able to view them with the indifference and impartiality of disinterested spectators, as if we were not inhabitants of the world, as shortly we shall not be ; or if inhabitants for a little time, yet strangers in it. When the mind was thus collected in itself, it would be able to form a sounder judgment of things, and not find it so difficult a matter to conform its inclinations to the dictates of enlightned reason. Why do the inclinations of the soul lean so much towards the world and the body ? one reason is, that it dwells as it were in the senses, and seldom or never retires to enter into conversation with itself. Why are invisible things so little regarded ?

garded? but because we so seldom withdraw from this visible scene, and by meditation, place ourselves in the midst of things unseen. It cannot be expressed how great advantage we should reap from the observation of this rule: in retirement we should unlearn the notions and the language we had learnt in the world, and learn to think and talk after quite another manner; for 'tis really in conformity to the world, its opinions and customs, that we go into wrong apprehensions and a wrong taste; from which of course we should gradually free ourselves by retirement and self recollection.

3. IN retirement we should accustom ourselves much to devotional exercises, cast ourselves down in the presence of God, strive to elevate our minds to him, and earnestly intreat him to have pity on us, to enlighten our darkness, and to help our weakness. Acts of repentance, and faith, and hope, and love, should be often repeated. By thinking of the odious nature and destructive consequences of sin, how it weakens, enslaves, and defiles the mind, how contrary to its felicity and perfection, and to all the obligations which God has laid upon us, we should feel in our souls a growing hatred to it. The more we sorrowed for it after a godly sort, the more shame and confusion it rais'd in our breasts,

the more we should detest it.— To repentance we should add the exercise of faith towards God, and towards our Lord Jesus Christ; faith in the presence and perfections of God, his Providence and his promises, and in all the glorious truths and discoveries of the gospel. Do I believe all these things? and is it possible if I know and consider what I believe, that these truths shall not have a very powerful influence upon me, and beget another kind of temper, and other views and desires than are to be found in the carnal and worldly? do I not hope to see God, and to be forever with Christ my Saviour and Lord? and will not this hope, frequently actuated by contemplation, actuate every grace and virtue and make me *purify my self as God is pure*? That our hope in an invisible God and of an invisible felicity may be strong and lively, it is highly requisite that it should be more explicit; and that it may be so, we had need in the silent recesses of the mind think both on what we hope for, and the ground we have for our hope. By this means our hope would have a very considerable effect upon us, which would be yet farther increas'd by the acts and exercises of divine love. We should be often awak'ning this holy passion. “ O how I love thee thou
“ best

“ best of Beings! rather, how would I love
 “ thee! when I reflect how amiable thou art,
 “ how infinitely amiable, and what thou
 “ hast done to deserve my love; how can
 “ I think of thee and not love thee! how
 “ run over in my mind thy numberless and
 “ most wonderful benefits, and not be
 “ irresistibly drawn by these bands of love!
 “ Or how can I love God, and not love
 “ that holiness which he himself so much
 “ delights in! How can I love my Saviour,
 “ and not have the most vehement de-
 “ fires to excel in that righteousness which
 “ will render me lovely in his sight!”

Prayer and *Praise* and *Thanksgiving* should
 be our daily, and our most delightful em-
 ployments. *Prayer* has enough to recom-
 mend it upon its own account to every pious
 mind, giving vent to those desires and af-
 fections, which being suppressed and pent up
 in the soul would cause great uneasiness and
 disquietude; whereas pouring them out in
Prayer brings unspeakable ease and pleasure.
 But when the christian considers the happy
 effects of it, how it exalts the mind, and
 strengthens and improves every good dis-
 position, his esteem for it is yet farther
 established. With our *Prayers* we should
 not forget to mingle *Praise* and *Thank-*
sgiving, blessing God for what he has al-
 ready done in answer to our desires; by

which means we shall be encouraged to go on in the way of our duty, not doubting that God will give more *grace* to those who gratefully acknowledge and faithfully improve what they have received, and not fail to perfect the good work he has begun. When we are prostrating our souls before God, we should in a particular manner beg of him to grant us his *Holy Spirit* to renew us in the spirit of our minds more and more; and be afraid of every thing which would offend and grieve him.

4. LET us often reflect on the distinction between our souls and our bodies, and the great preheminance of the former above the latter; and let us labour to confirm ourselves still more in the persuasion of this, and to have a clearer and juster apprehension of it. It must be owned the greater part of mankind do not live as if there were any such distinction as this, or at least as if they believed it; one would rather imagine by the intire bent of their pursuits, that they regarded the soul as no more than a finer part of the body, in whose fate its own will be involved, perishing with it, never to exist more: but however men may live, or whatever they may believe, the nature of things is not changed by it; it will still be true that the body is as much inferior to the soul, as a passive
unconscious

unconscious substance is to one which acts and thinks. There must be such Beings as Spirits, pure uncompounded substances, and of this nature the soul of man must be; it being impossible to account for the operations of a soul by the properties of matter. That they who have drown'd themselves in sensual gratifications should be averse to the notion of such immaterial substances, is not at all to be wondered at; because acting as if they consisted intirely of flesh and blood, they are willing to believe they are nothing else.—Let us, my Friends, consider that such excellent faculties and large capacities as we experience in ourselves can never reside in the body; and from hence let us raise our thoughts to another kind of Being, which tho' united to the body, is more worthy of our care. Did we believe and consider this as we ought, that the soul is of a nobler nature than the body, and consequently its interests and happiness of infinitely greater importance, we should not be apt to ^t *take thought for the body, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be cloathed?* and in the mean while be unconcerned about our souls, whether they are rich or poor, in a vigorous and flourishing

‡ Matt. vi. 31.

470 *The blessedness of those* VOL. I.
flourishing, or in a weak and languishing
condition. To conclude.

5. LET us seriously consider the certainty of a future everlasting state, the nature of its happiness, and the disposition of mind which must qualify us for it. 'Tis certain that there is another world, as certain that I am only a probationer in this, a subject in the kingdom of God, whose laws have other rewards and punishments annexed to them, besides those which immediately follow the observation or the breach of them in this life; since they are not sufficient to express God's love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity. From the gospel we are farther sure, that the world to come will be eternal, that "*the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.*" Hereupon let me pause a while and think—what is the duration of this vain momentary life to eternity? what comparison between the happiness of the one and the other? consequently, what can be of equal concernment to us at present, as being prepared for a happiness which is perfect and everlasting, and which can be enjoyed by none excepting such as are prepared for it? and wherein does this preparation for heaven consist? without all doubt, it must
be

be in a temper of mind suitable to the happiness to be there enjoyed; that is, in all those holy habits and dispositions which belong to regeneration; in one word, in that *righteousness* which the Text sets before us: so that if *righteousness* were not more desirable than other things, upon its own account, and for the advantages which ordinarily accompany it in this life (which it evidently is) yet still, as the *condition* of eternal life and happiness, and the only qualification for it, we must acknowledge it to be infinitely more valuable. To one who lays these things to heart it will be natural to aspire after a holy and pious disposition, and the nearer such a one draws to the heavenly world, the better fitted he will be for it, and anticipate more of its never ending felicity.

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