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SERMONS

ON THE

Following SUBJECTS.

VIZ.

The love of God a rational principle, and a moral virtue.	The true ground of the argument, from reason, for a future state.
Of the true happiness of man.	
The mischiefs of vanity, and an affected wisdom.	Of the Sabbath, and the moral ground of public worship.
The distinct offices and uses of reason, and revelation.	Virtue an uniform and consistent character.
Of blasphemy, and profane swearing.	A general discourse on the nature and use of prayer.
Of exemplary and shining characters of virtue.	The reasonableness of that branch of prayer, which is styled intercession.
Of slander and defamation.	
Of covetousness, envy, and discontent.	Of Idolatry, and visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children.
The advantages of consideration.	On the Mediation of Christ.

By JAMES FOSTER.

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This is the first and great Commandment.

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to

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S E R M O N I.



The Love of God a rational principle ; and a moral virtue.

MATTH. xxii. 37, 38.

---Jesus said unto him, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

This is the first and great commandment.



AT the time of our Saviour's S E R M. appearance the world was I. extremely depraved, and stood in great need of a reformation. The principles, and practice of true religion were very much corrupted, and its influence

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B

upon



2 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. upon the hearts and lives of men was in

I. a great measure lost. Even among the
~~~~~ *Jews*, who were the peculiar people of God, religion seems to have been degenerated into outward *pomp* and *formality*. Their great and leading men, and most eminent and celebrated sects, affected chiefly to be masters of ceremony and devout grimace, and wore the *garb* of religion, in order to advance their honour and influence among the people; and having resolved the whole of it into *external rites*, and a multitude of vain *traditional observances*, were generally regardless of the obligations of *moral virtue*, and the substantial immutable duties of a *holy life*. The Scribes, and Pharisees, and Doctors of the law were, in the main, men of profligate and abandoned principles, a set of designing hypocrites; who made use of an aukward *singularity* of dress, a demure mortified look, and the artifice of a *specious devotion*, to skreen their tyrannical impositions on conscience, their injustice, fraud and cruelty, from public censure. And, therefore, as our blessed Saviour, instead of complimenting their *vanity*, took very  
great

great and unusual liberties in reprov-  
 ing their *vices*; as he endeavour'd to expose  
 their absurd traditions and subtle pretences  
 to piety, by which they had cheated and  
 amused the ignorant and credulous vulgar;  
 and instead of *ceremony* and *affectation*,  
 which had too long usurped the venerable  
 name of religion, to introduce *sincere*  
 and *undefiled* religion, consisting in purity  
 of conscience and a virtuous life—They  
 apprehended that their *craft* was in dan-  
 ger, and that if he should succeed in his  
 attempts to establish this *new* reforming  
 doctrine, their credit and authority must  
 sink; upon which account, they had re-  
 course to the vilest and most senseless me-  
 thods of calumny to blacken his reputa-  
 tion, and prosecuted his ruin with inde-  
 fatigable zeal and malice. But because  
 they could find nothing worthy of pub-  
 lic disgrace, or death, in his regular un-  
 blemished character; and if they should  
 lay violent hands on him, it might *then*  
 have rendered them obnoxious to the re-  
 sentment of the people (many of whom  
 had some kind of reverence of him, on  
 account of the *force* and *excellency* of his

4 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. doctrine, and the mighty works which he

I. performed, generally of *beneficence* and *friendship* to mankind) they endeavoured to ensnare him by *captious* questions, that they might find some matter of *plausible* accusation against him, and take away his life under the *colour* of law and justice.

OF this we have several instances in the chapter of my text.—Their first stratagem was to inquire of him about the *lawfulness* of paying tribute to *Cæsar*, expecting, perhaps, that he would have said something in prejudice of *Cæsar's* authority, and injurious to his imperial dignity; and thereby have exposed himself to the cognisance of the *Roman* government, as a fomentor of *sedition*. The reply he gave to this, which could neither alarm the *jealousy* of the *Romans*, nor incense his own *country-men* against him for publickly defending their unjust *usurpation*, is an undeniable proof of his consummate wisdom in a thorough knowledge of Human nature, and suiting his discourse to *seasons* and *circumstances*.—After this came the *Sadducees*, and put to him, as they thought, a *nice* and *critical* question concerning



cerning the resurrection; but were answered, with great strength and superiority of judgment, even from the writings of *Moses*, the divine authority of which themselves acknowledged, to their own entire *confusion*, and the great *surprise* of the multitude.—Being disappointed in this scheme likewise, we read next of a certain *Lawyer*, or a teacher and expounder of the law of *Moses*, who asked him a *question*, tempting him, and saying, *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?* To this our Saviour replies in the text: And his words contain notions of religion so *sublime* and *rational*, so *full* and *comprehensive*, and assert, with such clearness and strength, the necessary *subordination* of positive and ritual, to irreversible moral ordinances, that their being recorded must be to the *eternal honour* of Christianity. *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind: This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self. On these two commandments hang all the*

6 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. *law and the prophets.* The Love of God and

I. of our Neighbour are the two grand and  
fundamental principles of religion; from  
whence all the duties of it *flow*, and in-  
to which, as their general sources, they  
may be all resolved. The *first* of these  
I intend to make the subject of my pre-  
sent discourse, which I shall pursue in the  
following method.

FIRST, I shall consider the *nature* of  
the duty enjoined in the text.

SECONDLY, inquire into the *reasons*  
of it.

THIRDLY, shew briefly why it is stiled  
the *first* and *great commandment*?  
And then endeavour to prove,


IN the FOURTH place, that the *Fear*  
and the *Love* of God are perfectly  
consistent, and may be both culti-  
vated in such a manner as not to *de-*  
*stroy*, or in the least *weaken*, each  
other.

FIRST, I am to consider the *nature* of  
the duty here recommended. The Love  
of God, as it is a principle or affection  
in

in the mind, is a proper *esteem* of him on account of his natural and relative excellencies, accompanied with a suitable *delight* and *complacency* in him. The Object of Love must necessarily be somewhat *beautiful*, *good*, and *desirable*: For there is a natural aversion in the mind of man to *evil* and *deformity*. And tho' mens understandings may be sometimes so darkened, and their judgment of things so perverted by irregular lusts and corrupt prejudices, as to mistake *deformity* for *beauty*; and tho' under the influence of such a wrong bias, they may really pursue *confusion* and *misery* under the notion of *order* and *happiness*; yet it is absolutely impossible that they should love and chuse the *evil*, or hate and refuse the *good*, when the mind discerns them in their *proper characters*. The foundation of Love, therefore, must be excellence *real*, or *supposed*: And this I have distinguished into *natural* and *relative*, meaning by natural the *intrinsic goodness* and *beauty* of the object, and by relative its *use* and *agreeableness* to us. So that we love the Deity as an absolutely perfect Spirit, and the most *amiable*


## 8 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. of all Beings *in himself*, and as communi-

I.  cating *good to us*\*, and the only source of full and complete happiness. But then our Love of God is of a much more *refined* kind than the love of external and visible objects: “ For with respect to the *latter*, “ it is, in a great measure, accompanied “ with *animal affections* and *instincts*, and “ must therefore be more *strong* and *sensible*, because all the impressions, which “ such objects make upon us, are conveyed by the *senses*. Whereas the “ Love of God, who is an invisible Spirit, will not be attended with such *rapture* and *emotion* (which is only the “ *Mechanism* of the animal part) but is “ *pure* and *intellectual*. The *understanding* approves of and esteems him as the “ highest excellence, and the chiefest “ good; upon which we are determined “ to place our ultimate delight and sa-

\* *i. e.* To us *men*, to *all* mankind indiscriminately, (and upon the same general foundation of reason, in the same equitable and fit proportions, to the *whole system* of rational beings) — not to any *individuals* arbitrarily and wantonly distinguished; which construction would be quite inconsistent with what the author has asserted in other parts of this discourse.

“ satisfaction

“tisfaction in him.” And for this reason, SERM.  
*viz.* because the Love of God “is not I.  
 “properly a *passion*,” as is the affection   
 we bear to sensible objects, I chuse to  
 call it an *Esteem* of him upon the account  
 of his excellencies.

Now in order to raise this *sublime* and  
*noble* principle in our minds, it is in the  
 nature of the thing necessary not only  
 that there be some *general* knowledge of  
 God, but that we entertain in the main  
*just* apprehensions of his infinite perfections.  
 We must be convinced of his *worth* and  
*excellence*, before we can, in a rational and  
 regular way, make him the object of our  
*esteem*; which will be rightly exercised, or  
 the contrary, as our knowledge is more or  
 less *exact*, and increase in proportion to  
 the *degrees* of it. But then the *knowledge*  
 of God, which influences to the sincere  
 Love of him, must not be an *abstracted no-*  
*tion*, but a *warm* and *vigorous* principle;  
 or, in other words, our Love of God is  
 not founded on the mere *apprehension* of  
 his excellencies, but upon a strong and  
 lively *sense* of them in the mind. For  
 many are far advanced in the *speculative*  
 knowledge

10 *The Love of God a rational principle ;*

SERM. knowledge of the Deity, and yet instead  
I. of being directed, by a principle of *Love*  
towards him, to an imitation of his per-  
fections and the practice of virtue, oppose  
his authority, and cherish such *dark* and  
*mischievous* dispositions, as are directly re-  
pugnant to his most amiable and spotless  
nature ; because they will not take due  
care to cultivate, and *impress*, the *right*  
*idea* of him, as a Being supremely excel-  
lent, and their only happiness, and of the  
immense obligations they are under to him,  
for the numberless instances of his favour  
and goodness. But when we are once  
established in *just* and *worthy* conceptions  
of our Maker, and our *knowledge* of him  
is, by proper meditation and spiritual ex-  
ercises, improved to an *habitual lively sense*  
of his consummate and incomparable beau-  
ties, the mind will naturally *adhere* to him  
as the worthiest object of its *love* ; and from  
a strong conviction of his absolute per-  
fection, *prefer* him to all other beings, and  
center its supreme *complacency* in him.  
This is a general view of the methods, by  
which that sublime *moral* virtue, which is  
declared by our Lord in the text to be the  
*first*

first and most necessary duty of religion, SERM.  
 is *planted* in the mind; by which also it I.  
 is *confirm'd* and *establish'd*, and *carried on*  
 to the most exalted pitch of purity and  
 fervor.

IT is of the utmost importance to observe further, that the Love of God is not a close silent affection in the soul, but an *active* principle. “ It does not consist in  
 “ *inward raptures*, in a *mechanical beat*  
 “ *and agitation* of the passions, and a *re-*  
 “ *tired contemplation* of the beauty of its  
 “ *object*; but discovers itself in *visible*  
 “ *fruits of benevolence.*”—— *This is the*  
*Love of God*, says St. John, *that we keep* I John v.  
*his commandments: And his commandments* 3.  
*are not grievous.* And again —— *Whoso* I John ii.  
*keepeth his word, in him, verily, is the Love* 5.  
*of God perfected.* In this therefore, as the  
 same Apostle speaks, *the children of God* I John iii.  
*are manifest, and the children of the Devil:* 10.  
*Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of*  
*God.* So that to render our account of  
 this most excellent and refined virtue complete, we must upon the whole define it  
 thus —— “ That it is such an *esteem* of  
 “ the Deity, accompanied with a strong  
 “ *delight*

12 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. “ *delight* in him, as produces in us a con-

I. “ *formity* to his moral perfections, and

“ an *exact observance* of his precepts”.

Having explained thus largely the *nature* of the Love of God : I proceed

SECONDLY, to inquire into the *reasons* of it. The mind of *man* (as has been already observed) and the same may be said with respect to *all* rational beings; the mind of *man*, I say, is so framed, that *beauty* and *excellence* are naturally the objects of his affection. They attract, in a manner, *irresistibly*, when discern'd in a proper and advantageous light; and nothing but ignorance, inconsideration, or an extremely corrupt and disorderly habit, can *prevent* their producing this effect. “ And if excellence in any Being “ be a *just foundation* of our esteem, it “ necessarily follows, that the esteem “ ought to *increase* in proportion to the “ degrees of it: So that as a *lower rank* “ of perfection demands an *inferior* regard, *absolute*, or the *highest possible*, “ perfection must be intitled to our *supreme* and *ultimate regard*.”

WHEN



WHEN we raise our thoughts up to the Most High, and seriously contemplate the glories of his character, our minds are ravished with the view of such consummate and boundless excellence. There are no shades or spots in his nature, but all is absolute and unclouded light. There is not the least defect, as there must be in the highest of derived beings; but we behold an inexhaustible fund of perfection to engage our admiration, and are lost in the immensity of the object. Our Love therefore, if it be regularly exercised toward such a Being as this, must be elevated to the highest pitch of life and energy: It requires the utmost purity and strength of our faculties, since it is conversant about such a transcendently amiable Object, whose beauties exceed all our ideas, and the most lavish and magnificent description. All the several glories of the creation, and the varieties of excellence which are dispersed among the beings that inhabit it, are derived from him; and are indeed but the shadow of that boundless perfection which himself possesses; and would, if collected together into one sum, be infinitely inferior

SERM.  
I.



14 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. rior to it. And what is the practical result of this, but that as God is *supremely* excellent, and the *great Original* and *Fountain* of all the scattered beauties that appear in the universe, he must be worthy of our chief and most devoted affection? A *cold* and *indifferent* regard is very unsuitable to the merit of such an infinite, all-sufficient Good; and the allowing any other a *co-ordinate* share in our esteem the greatest affront, that can be offered, to the unrivalled sovereignty of his perfections.

I. BUT it may be useful to inquire more particularly — “What *kind* of *excellencies* “ they are in the Divine mind, which in- “ title him thus to our supreme Love.” As he is absolute, he must be most highly *adorable* in *all* his perfections; but *Lovely* only in his *moral* character. For no man *loves* the bare self-existence and eternity of God; in like manner we cannot be said to *love* infinite power: There is something *awful* and *majestic* in these characters, they command a more solemn and distant regard, and strike rather with *surprise* and *astonishment*. And even *wisdom* itself, tho’ it be allowed to be an excellent quality, is  
not,

not, abstractly consider'd, the foundation SERM.  
of Love; because it is no farther valuable, I.  
than as it serves the purposes of justice and  
goodness: Which appears plainly from this  
single consideration, that if it be perverted  
to the contriving and supporting of op-  
pressive and mischievous schemes, it be-  
comes immediately, in all rational minds,  
the object of *contempt* and *aversion*. So  
that it is the infinite *goodness*, or the *per-*  
*fection* of God in his *moral* character,  
which alone renders him so justly and  
transcendently amiable: Or, in other  
words, we are obliged to love him above  
all, and in the most perfect manner, be-  
cause he is a Being absolutely righteous,  
benevolent and merciful; and the reflexion  
upon his necessary Existence, Omnipot-  
tence, and infinite Knowledge, comes in  
no otherwise than thus — “ That the ex-  
“ cellent and useful moral characters above-  
“ mentioned, are *unchangeably* essential to  
“ him; that he employs his boundless  
“ *wisdom* in *proposing*, and his irresistible  
“ *power* in *doing good*.” His *infinite be-*  
*nevolence* always inclining him to admi-  
nister impartial justice, and diffuse happi-  
ness

16 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM.

I.

ness through the creation, is the *true* and *proper* reason why we *love* him; and his natural attributes are only so far *lovely*, as they are *subservient* to his goodness, and enable him more effectually to *execute* what that suggests and prompts him to.

NAY, I may proceed another step, and add to what has been already said, “That  
“ even *particular instances* of favour and  
“ beneficence in the Deity, are not the  
“ rational foundation of the Love we owe  
“ him, but *the goodness of his nature only.*”  
We are taught indeed, by instinct, strongly to affect our selves; but notwithstanding this, in the reason of things, particular benefits conferr'd on us ought not to be the *absolute measure* of our love to any being, because it is possible that they may not proceed from a *benevolent temper*, or a *real desire* of our happiness, but from base and unworthy principles: And when this is the case, he that is the *instrument* of good to us (tho' we must, doubtless, be *pleas'd* with the event) cannot justly be the object of our *esteem*. Again, if a being should *arbitrarily* choose *us* for his favorites, and at the same time, without  
any

any provocation, delight in tormenting the rest of our fellow-creatures, and in making them miserable; could we, as indued with intelligent powers, and capable of distinguishing the morality of actions, love one who was so capricious and tyrannical in dispensing good and evil? Or rather, at the same time that we felt the kindly influences of his favor, should we not be filled with an inward detestation of the partial and mischievous disposition, by which he was acted? It seems to me, that this must be the first unperverted sense of a good-natur'd and generous mind. But when it contemplates the Father of the universe in the exertions, and final scope, of his benevolence, a quite different scene presents itself, a scene of delight and rapture: For his goodness, which is unbounded in the principle, and universal and infinite in its effects, affords the noblest idea of perfection we can possibly form; and where there is not either a great want of reflection, or an uncommon degeneracy, must inspire the most exalted sentiments of veneration, love and gratitude. I shall conclude this head with ob-

18 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. serving, that as God is *lovely* only in his  
I. *moral* character, and not on account of  
his eternity, power, knowlege, or other  
*natural* properties, we may from hence  
collect a sure *rule*, by which to *value* our  
selves; and that is, not to frame an opi-  
nion of *merit* from endowments of a na-  
tural or accidental kind, but to fix the  
reason of our *self-esteem* in, and propor-  
tion *it* to, the degrees of our real and  
intrinsic goodness. I am now to consider  
briefly,

IN the THIRD place, why our Saviour  
stiles the precept contained in the text  
*the first, and great, commandment?*—It  
is the *first principle* of all religion; the  
very notion of which is founded on the  
Love of God, and a serious regard to his  
authority. — It is the *chief duty* of re-  
ligion; because our obligations to it are of  
a higher and stronger nature, than to any  
other duty: It ought therefore above all  
things to be strictly and conscientiously  
observed. — It is the *root and fountain*  
of all other virtues, especially of the *social*  
virtues; of all offices of justice, huma-  
nity

nity and benevolence; which are inseparably *connected* with it, and never fail to be *produced* by it, when it is a genuine and vigorous affection. — And finally, as a *moral* virtue, it is infinitely preferable, not only to the wild freaks of a fanciful superstition, but even to *rites* and *ceremonies* of divine appointment. That this was the thing more immediately in our Lord's intention, seems probable from St. *Mark's* account of the matter, from whence it is plain that the lawyer apprehended him thus, and therefore return'd the following answer: *Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul,* <sup>Mark xii!</sup> *and with all the strength, and to love his* <sup>32, 33.</sup> *neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.*

THE LAST thing that I proposed to shew was, that the *Fear* and the *Love* of God are perfectly *consistent*, and may both be cultivated in such a manner, as not to *destroy*, or in the least *weaken* each

C 2

other.


SERM.  
I.  
~

20 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. other. The Fear of God is not, what many suppose it to be, a *slavish* principle, but a *filial* reverence; not the *dread* of a *tyrant*, but the veneration and humble regard that ought to be paid to a compassionate Father, to a wise and gracious Sovereign: Which at the same time, that it represents him as *terrible* in his vengeance, when the iniquities of his creatures demand and *force* the execution of it, represents him likewise as the most *amiable* and *delightful* object of our contemplation. If therefore we conceive of him as an *arbitrary* Being, who acts without regard to the reason of things, as a *pettish* Being, easy to be affronted, but slow in forgiving, as *severe* and *rigorous* in his demands, *revengeful* and *inexorable*, ready to take all advantages *against* mankind, and delighting in their *misery*; or consider only his absolute *dominion* and *power*, but do not take into our idea, that this dominion and power *are never exercis'd*, but by the direction of infinite Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness; and when we have entertained such a formidable notion of him, cannot think of him with-

out



out confusion and anxiety : — “ This SERM.  
 “ is not to *fear* God as reason and reli- I.  
 “ gion dictate, but really to *disbonour*   
 “ him. It is forming a character which  
 “ exists *no where*, but in our *distempered*  
 “ imaginations ;” and a character that is as  
 disparaging to the glorious perfections of  
 the Deity, as it is fatal to our own peace  
 and comfort. For the religious Fear of  
 God is nothing else, but the reverence due  
 to a Being supremely and immutably per-  
 fect. If therefore we are afraid of him  
 as a *stern* despotic Sovereign, we are mis-  
 taken in the very *ground* of our Fear :  
 For he is a righteous and most merciful  
 Governor. And if we consider his irre-  
 sistible power only, and are *frighted* at  
 the thought of it, as what is capable of  
 making the whole creation completely mi-  
 serable, our Fears are equally unreason-  
 able ; because “ there is no *such Being* in  
 “ the universe, as one possess’d of an un-  
 “ bounded power, *that is not under the*  
 “ *conduct* of unerring Wisdom, and most  
 “ perfect Goodness.” So that it appears, that  
 the great God is the just object of our *reve-*  
*rence*, and yet infinitely *amiable* ; or, in

22 *The Love of God a rational principle;*

SERM. other words, that the Love and the Fear of

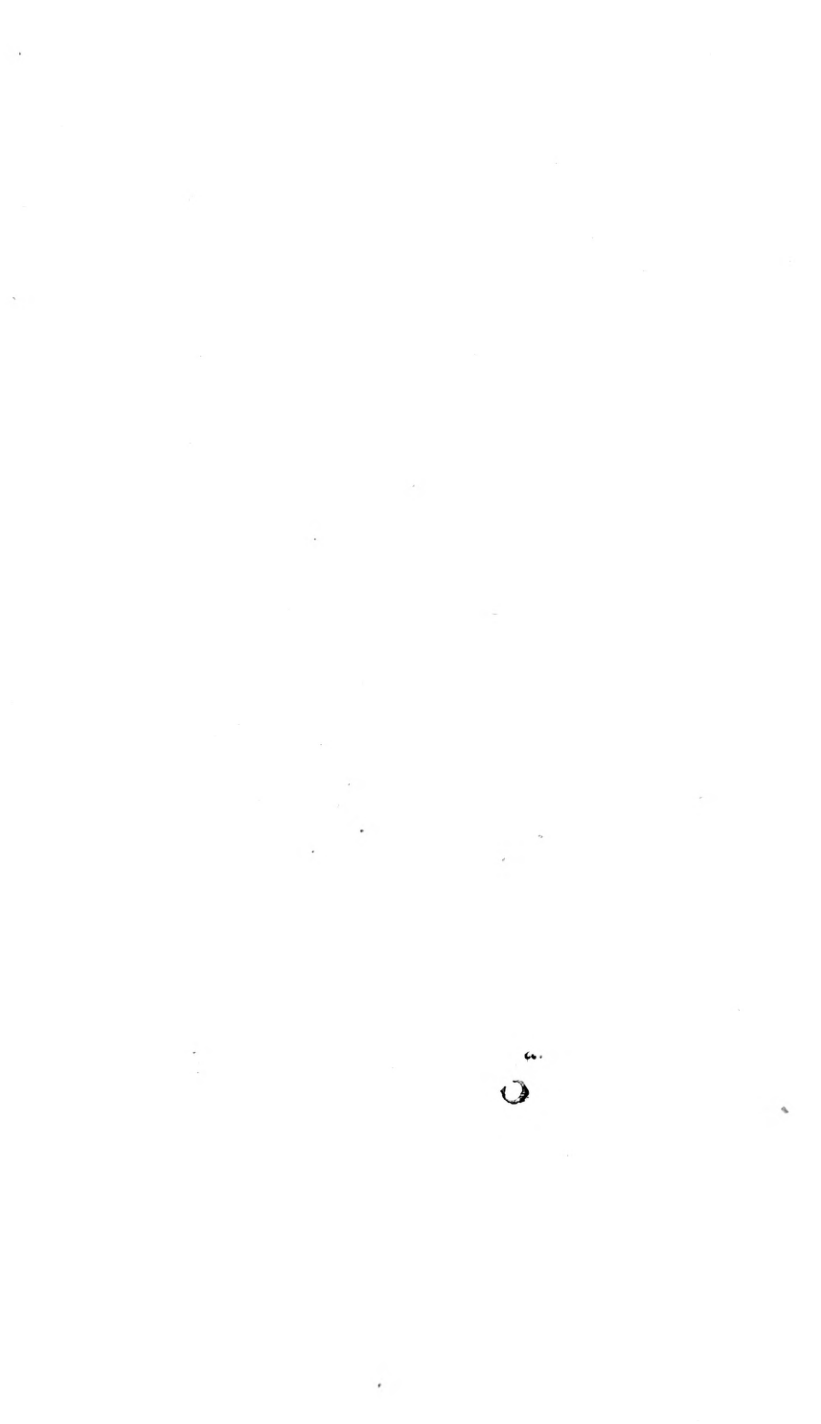
I. God are *inseparably connected*, and that they spring, indeed, from *the same general principles*.

AND it is for want of considering the matter in this view, that men have been so apt to run into one, or other, of these two *extremes*, equally mischievous to the cause of virtue and true religion: Either conceiving of the Deity as *all goodness*, without taking at all into their idea his infinite *wisdom*, by which the exercise of his goodness is always directed and regulated; or else, entirely *dropping* his goodness, and thinking on him only as a Being *absolute* in power, and *rigid* in justice. Whereas the only way, in which we can have a right and worthy notion of him, is to consider *all* his perfections as in a necessary *union* and *harmony* with each other. Otherwise we may *love* him, or rather, since such a *weak* character cannot be the object of a rational *esteem* and *complacency*, we may take a pleasure in representing him to our minds as an *easy* Being, who has no resentment of the violation of his laws and contempt of his authority, and  
from

from whom we apprehend no *evil*, how-  
ever irregular our behaviour may be;—  
but we cannot *reverence* him:—Or else,  
he will be so *terrible* to our imaginations,  
that we shall always be *distracted*, and  
filled with *aversion* and *horror*, at the  
thought of him;—And if this be the  
case, it is in the nature of things impos-  
sible we should *love* him.

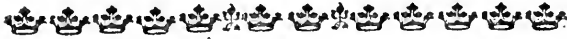
SERM.  
I.  
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## S E R M O N II.



Of the true Happiness of Man.

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PSALM iv. 6.

There be *many that say, who will shew us any good?---LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*



HE all-wise God hath interwoven a desire of *Happiness*, and an aversion to *Pain and Misery*, with the very constitution of Human nature. This is a principle implanted in the *animal creation*, as well as in mankind: But there is this difference between us and them; that whereas they are determined

SERM. II.

26 *Of the true Happiness of Man.*

S E R M. terminated to the pursuit of Happiness by a

II. *blind impulse*, we have *reason* and *understanding* to deliberate about what is best for us, and a power of prosecuting whatever appears to be so after close and serious thinking; and impartial weighing the nature of things. And, surely, we must be very besotted and extravagant creatures, if we hastily, and without due enquiry, take up with any thing for our *supreme good*, when the Happiness of our being to *eternity* depends upon the determination which we *now* make; and if we are not certain, before we venture upon any particular course of action, that it will *end well*, and be, upon the whole, to our advantage. *Pilate's* address to our blessed Saviour was about a matter of vast importance, when he ask'd him, *what is Truth?* But this seems to be question of still greater consequence——What is *Happiness?*——Because the just solution of it, at the same time that it delivers the mind from a troublesome and dangerous uncertainty, will lead it to the knowlege of the most essential branches of *moral truth*, and enable it rightly to understand the  
general

*Of the true Happiness of Man.* 27

general principles of virtue and religion. SERM.  
I shall, therefore, in the following dis- II.  
course,

IN the FIRST place, lay down some  
*rules*, to direct us in our *inquiries* af-  
ter Happiness.

SECONDLY, consider the reason sug-  
gested in the text, why so great a  
part of the world, tho' they are  
prompted by an ardent and inextin-  
guishible instinct in nature to *pursue*  
Happiness, *miss* of their *end*? And  
then shew,

THIRDLY, That the favor of God,  
and his approbation of them as their  
Governor and Judge, is absolutely  
necessary to the *Happiness* of *Man-*  
*kind*, and of *all* intelligent Beings.

FIRST, I am to lay down some *rules*,  
to direct us in our *inquiries* after Happi-  
ness. This is a matter of the first and  
utmost importance; because if we have  
no *sure principles* to proceed upon to lead  
us to the point in view, and enable us to  
distinguish *real* and *substantial* Happiness  
from

SERM. from specious and delusive appearances,  
 II. our *judgment* must of necessity be confu-  
 ed, and our *choice* wild and indiscrimi-  
 nate: And the fixing the foundation  
*wrong*, is the cause of the most deplora-  
 ble errors and miseries of Human life. I  
 would therefore recommend the following  
*rules* as absolutely, and universally, ne-  
 cessary to be strictly observed, and con-  
 stantly adher'd to—That we aim at a  
*Happiness* which is agreeable to our *nature*,  
 to our *whole nature*; but especially to our  
*distinguished* and more *exalted* faculties.—  
 That our prospects and expectations be *just*  
 and *reasonable*, such as we may *honourably*  
 entertain, and *probably* execute; and find  
 to yield, not an *imaginary*, but a *solid* sa-  
 tisfaction.—That the *Happiness* we ul-  
 timately propose, be that which is suited  
 to *every situation* we may be placed in, *every*  
*character* we may sustain, and to the va-  
 rious unavoidable *changes* and *vicissitudes*  
 of life:—That which is most certainly  
*attainable*, and most easily *secured*; which  
 is, in its own nature, most *permanent* and  
*durable*, and guarded against external acci-  
 dents:—That which may be pursued




and enjoyed without *shame* or *anxiety*, without *suspicion* of wrong conduct, or *fear* of future ill consequences:—Which will stand the test of deliberate *reflection*, and improve upon longer *experience*, that will support a calm and steady *serenity*, and most effectually deliver us from turbulent and disquieting *passions*. And there are two things more to be added, to make our *direction* and *rule* of judgment complete: The one is, that the *Happiness* we aim at be *uniform*, and not *inconsistent* with itself—The other, that it respect the *whole* of our existence. I beg leave, in as brief a manner as the importance of the subject will admit, to explain and illustrate each of these rules.

AND FIRST, the *Happiness*, which we aim at, must be agreeable to our *nature*, to our *whole nature*; but especially to our *distinguished* and more *exalted* faculties. “Our own original frame, and the  
“ constitution and order of nature, are  
“ the *standard* from which we ought never to depart, in judging not only of  
“ *truth* and *virtue*, but of *Happiness*.” For if the *Happiness* we design for ourselves,  
be

30 *Of the true Happiness of Man.*

SERM. be *above* nature, it must be entirely *fantastic* and *visionary*; and we may as well

II.  aim at being *Angels*, and raising ourselves, *altogether*, above the fixed rank of being, in which the Almighty Creator has placed us: Since we cannot enjoy the *Happiness* of superior intelligences, unless we are possess'd of their *capacities*—If, on the other hand, it be *below* nature, we must not only debase our conceptions and dishonour our dignity, but lose just so many pleasures for which we were formed, and those the most *sublime* and *refined* of all our pleasures.—Again, if it be *contrary* to nature, it must be a *false sophisticated* Happiness, liable to infinite *casualties* and *interruptions*; and can last no longer than the *false* appetite, and the *perversion* of nature continues.—And if it be adapted only to *one part* of our frame, let that part be supposed *equal* to the other, we are still but *half* happy; and cannot have a *regular* and *full* enjoyment of ourselves, while we are liable to the inward sense of such a *defect* in our pleasures, and to feel the uneasy burden of *other faculties*

for

*Of the true Happiness of Man.* 31

for which we have provided no proper SERM. employment, of *other desires* unsatisfied. II.

To find out, therefore, what is the *true nature*, what the most *substantial* part, what the *perfection* of Human Happiness, there needs another inquiry, and that is, “*What sort of a being is man?*” Why, we know, that he has strong *animal* passions; from whence this consequence directly results, that he was “designed, “within *certain bounds*, for the enjoyment “of *sensitive* pleasures.” We know, that he has *reason*; and must, therefore, have been “framed for *intellectual* pleasures.” — We know, likewise, that he is capable of *deliberation*, has a *sense* of the *beauty* and *rectitude* of actions, and a *power* to *regulate* his own conduct; and was, therefore, “intended for *moral* pleasures:” — And that he is a *dependent* being, a member of a *community*, whose wants are *general* and their interests *inseparable*, and that he has *native generosity*, *benevolence*, and *public affections*; and was, therefore, “constituted for *social* pleasures.” Now to *complete* the *Happiness*, which infinite wisdom ordained for man

32 *Of the true Happiness of Man.*

SERM. in the present life, “ all these several kinds

II. “ of pleasures must be allowed to have  
 “ their proper *place*, and to furnish out  
 “ their just *proportion*.” Even the *inferior*  
 are only to be directed and moderated,  
 and kept in their due state of subordina-  
 tion, but not to be absolutely *rejected* as  
 unworthy our regard: For, while we are  
 compounded of *body* and *spirit*, to endea-  
 vour to be quite *abstracted* from sense, and  
 wholly given up to spiritual contemplations  
 and exercises, “ cannot be *religion*; it  
 “ cannot be a *true* pursuit of *Happiness*;  
 “ but is *enthusiastic rigor*, an injury to  
 “ *ourselves*, and a violence offered to na-  
 “ *ture*.” And to preserve that *beautiful*  
*harmony* which the Creator has appointed,  
 a love of retirement, of meditation and  
 conversing with ourselves, ought not to  
 beget a *reservedness* and *austerity* of dispo-  
 sitions and manners; nor an intenseness  
 even in acts of devotion to *seclude* us from  
 society, and render us insignificant and  
 useless *to the world*, while we are *in it*.  
 And with respect to *animal* pleasures  
 this is the *rule*, “ that they be always  
 “ *consistent* with *those* of reason, piety,  
 “ justice,

“ justice, fidelity, and mercy ; then will  
“ the *ballance* be kept even, and the end  
“ of our creation answered.” The pleasures arising from rational religion, and a strict and generous exercise of the social virtues, can never be *irregular*, nor *interfere* with any of the innocent and desirable delights of sense ; they only *regulate*, without *destroying* them : So that while *these* have the *superiority*, the *natural propriety* and *order* of things is fully maintained. Add to this, that the proper Happiness of *a man* must be denominated from his *nobler* part : “ His *sensitive* gratifications must therefore be *reasonable*, or “ they are *unnatural* ;” unsuitable to his character, and a disgrace to it. They are in themselves the imperfection of his *present* frame, and an argument of its low and diminutive state : And if there be any nobler and more perfect existence designed for him, what the Scripture says with respect to this *higher station*, which it elegantly stiles *the kingdom of God*, is exceedingly probable on the foot of mere natural reason, *viz.* that *flesh and blood* are too *gross* to enter into it. So that

SERM.  
II.  
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SERM. whoever suffers sense to have the ascen-
 II. dent, and supreme influence, is insensible
 of the *honour* of his nature, and fond of
 that which *humbles* and *degrades* it ; and
 must either have *no notion* of any Happi-
 ness beyond what irrational creatures are
 capable of, or is *desirous* of none that is
 more excellent.

THE SECOND rule, to direct us in our
enquiries after Happiness, is, to take care
 that our prospects and expectations be *just*
 and *reasonable*. This in general, though it
 be but a melancholy, is a too just account
 of Human life: “ We *forget* the *past*, are
 “ *discontented* with the *present*, and in-
 “ *dulge* *presumption* and *fancy* about what
 “ *is future*,” inventing schemes of Hap-
 piness which we are never likely to effect,
 and which it is, sometimes, scarce *possible*
 to execute ; and, by this means, we make
 life a perpetual scene of *vexation* and *dis-*
appointment. And thus it will *always* be,
 if we either expect *more* from the world
 than it *can* yield us, or amuse our selves
 with *vain* hopes, that are *above* our rank
 and condition in it. If a man, in easy agree-
 able circumstances, cannot be contented
 because

Of the true Happiness of Man. 35

S E R M.

II.

because he is not possessed of an *affluence* of riches ; if another, who is respected and honoured in his station, is fond of *prebeminence* and a *more conspicuous* dignity ; if a third wants to be furnish'd with all the trifling *unnecessaries* of luxurious extravagance — I can see *no way*, notwithstanding the vast munificence of the Maker of the world, how they can *escape* being *miserable*. In order to be happy, therefore, consider the world *as it is*, and make the *best* of it within the bounds of *innocence*.

— Let contentment and resignation to providence *supply* the *imperfection* of mortal pleasures. — *Confine* your selves, as much as possible, within the compass of *natural* wants and inclinations — Take care of a *restless* desire of *superfluities* — Let your Happiness be *inward* — Expect not *too much* from the most applauded and envied enjoyments ; discard childish *hopes* and *fears*, nor entertain schemes against *reason* and *probability* — Resolve to go through life with *integrity* and *honour*, not *disturbed* with needless terrors ; but yet *arming* your minds against any *changes* that may happen, where the scene

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SERM. is so frequently and so unexpectedly shifted.
II.

THIRDLY, That alone can be considered as the chief and ultimate *Happiness* of man, which is suited to *every* situation and character, and to the various unavoidable *vicissitudes* of Human life. And the only thing, that can boast of these excellent properties, is *religion* — For when stripped of tyrannical *rigors*, and the frightful drefs of *superstition*, it is so far from being too *solemn* and *reserved* for the sprightliness and gaiety of *youth*, that it renders it amiable; and is the only safe and honourable guide through that stage of *levity* and *danger*. It approves itself likewise to the sedate reflection, and mature judgment, of our *riper years*; and renders *old age* more *venerable*, and submissively patient under its infirmities. And, to conclude this head, it *raises* the dignity of the great and honourable, and renders their rank and character more *illustrious*; and is the only thing that can correct the *insolence*, and give a *true relish* of the pleasures, of worldly *prosperity*; and naturally tends to inspire resolution, and a steady confidence
of

of mind, under adverse and unfortunate occurrences. SERM.
II.

THE two next *rules* are these — That is our truest Happiness which is most certainly *attainable*, and most easily *secured*; which, in its own nature, is most permanent and durable, and *guarded* against external accidents — And that which may be pursued, and enjoyed, without *shame* and *anxiety*, without *suspicion* of wrong conduct, or *fear* of future ill consequences, which will stand the test of deliberate *reflection*, and improve upon longer *experience*; that will support a calm and steady *serenity*, and most effectually deliver us from turbulent and disquieting *passions*. These rules are so closely connected, that they may justly be considered together, and so clear in themselves, and easy to be applied, that they scarce want a particular illustration. It will be sufficient therefore to observe, that the description here given of *Happiness* can neither belong to licentious *pleasures*, nor to the gratifications of *ambition*, nor to amusements of *vanity*, which depend either on the vigor of the *senses*, or on fancy, custom, humour,

S E R M. things infinitely *various* and *always changing*;

II.  things which are *impaired* by distemper, render'd *insipid* by age, *interrupted* by sudden revolutions in the state of our affairs, and *entirely lost* in death; and, though they meet with the applauses of a fond devoted *inclination*, have nothing in them so substantially valuable, as to pass the scrutiny of a cool disinterested *judgment*. But the pleasures of *religion* depend upon the rectitude of our minds, and that depends upon our own will, our own choice and resolution; so that they are more in our power than any other branches of our Happiness: And being what the glorious hosts of *Angels*, what *the Son of God* the head and lord of all the armies of heaven, and *the eternal God himself*, chiefly delight in, they must be the worthy object of our *assiduous* and *inflexible* pursuit.

AGAIN, The Happiness which we ultimately propose should be *uniform*, and not *inconsistent* with itself. All the *branches* of it ought to terminate in *one point*, all the *means* made use of for the attaining it should conspire to *one end*: For if they draw *different* ways, they un hinge and distract

distract the mind ; the necessary effect of which must be confusion and misery. But thus it is with all criminal and inordinate passions. — Let *pride* and *covetousness*, or *sensuality* and *covetousness*, prevail to any considerable degree in the same person (as there are infinite cases supposable, in which the impulses of these different passions may happen to *interfere*) “ they will of course destroy even the *natural false* pleasures that *each* might *separately* afford :” And which soever of them is denied its proper gratification, the conflict may be as *arduous* and *painful*, as to *subdue* it altogether ; though it has nothing of honour, or pleasure, or prospect of a reward hereafter to *counterballance* it. Or let us put another case, of a man that would make a kind of *composition* for his Happiness, by uniting the two *discordant* and *incompatible* principles of vice and virtue. He is a *reserved* irresolute sinner, and observes, as it were, a *moderation* in his excesses : And because *religion*, or *fear*, may hinder him going the utmost lengths in debauchery, he hopes to patch up what may pass for a good character *upon the*

SERM.
II.
~~~~~

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SERM. *whole*; and be, if not a title to heaven

II. upon the *strict terms* of the gospel, and in a judgment of *equity*, at least a recommendation to *mercy*. — But how is this *inconsistency* likely to serve his purpose? A few particular cases may occur that may be *exceptions*, but, if we argue from the nature of things, this must be the *general conclusion*, — That his *vices* will always be *inroaching*, and gaining ground, on *his sense* of virtue; or what there is still remaining, in him, of *natural conscience* will be *officious* in upbraiding and condemning his evil practices: So that he is unhappy *both ways*; not to mention the *distress* which he is sure to meet with in the final result of things, and when he is summoned to appear before the impartial tribunal of God. The only way left for him, is to be *truly*, i. e. *universally*, religious: Then every part of his conduct will have *one tendency*, to the honour of God, and his own rational perfection and felicity. — What are more properly stiled the duties of *piety* have evidently this *direction*; so has every act of *justice*, and every office of *compassion* and *generosity* to  
our

our fellow-creatures. And even the *regular enjoyment* of sensitive pleasure is an *exercise* of reason, or, at least, is *in pursuance* of an exercise of reason: And the strict and constant observation of the rules of regularity, which *reason* dictates, is an acknowledgment of its supreme *dignity* and *authority* — And reason being the *eternal law* of God (which revelation has only *revived*, and enforced by a *few* peculiar discoveries and institutions) the same conduct must also be an acknowledgment of his *universal rule*, and, consequently, is both *reason* and *religion*.

LASTLY, The Happiness, which we have in view, must respect *the whole* of our existence. This the common sense of mankind immediately assents to, and, if it be at all consulted, forces upon them this natural and *unalterable* conclusion: That if there be a *future* life, which *reason* strongly intimates; if there be a *future immortal* life, which *revelation* expressly asserts; it must be most *injudicious conduct*, it must be surprising and *extravagant folly*, to make no *provision* for our interest in it,  
and,

SERM.

II.

SERM. and, indeed, not to consider it as our *prin-*  
 II. *cipal* and most *momentous* concern.

HAVING, thus, shewn what are the proper *rules* to direct us in our *search* after Happiness, I proceed to consider,

SECONDLY, The *reason* why so great a part of mankind, tho' they are prompted by an ardent and inextinguishible instinct in nature to pursue Happiness, *miss* of their *end*. And it resolves itself, in all its different shapes and appearances, ultimately into this, that they expect to derive their *chief* felicity from *carnal* gratifications. This is directly and strongly intimated in these words of the *Psalmist*, there be *many* (the multitude, the *generality* of men in almost every station) *that say, Who will shew us any good?* i. e. " Who  
 " will heap *honours* upon us? Who will  
 " point out the way to *wealth* and *luxury*?  
 " Who will present new scenes of *plea-*  
 " *sure*, that we may indulge our appetites,  
 " and give full scope to the roivings of a  
 " wanton fancy?"—That this was the *substance* of what was intended by the sacred

cred writer in this question, the words SERM.  
put in *opposition* to it, in which he expref- II.  
ses his own wifer sentiments, are an un-  
deniable proof, LORD, *lift thou up the*  
*light of thy countenance upon us*: That  
what he here fuggests is a fair represen-  
tation of *fact*, experience loudly testifies;  
that it is a *false* notion of *Happiness* and  
a *fatal error*, reason plainly teaches. For,  
what are honours? What are riches?  
What is sensual pleasure?—They are  
*light* as vanity, *fleeting* as a bubble; *thin*  
and *unsubstantial* as air. A high post is,  
in many instances, but an *eminence* of *mi-*  
*ſery*; honours are continually *ſhifting* from  
one to another; and the brighteſt ſcenes  
of human glory are ſo tranſitory, that  
thoſe, who are the *principal characters*,  
can many times be compared to nothing  
more properly than to great *meteors*, which  
give a *ſudden blaze*, and then loſe all their  
light in obſcurity. In like manner it fre-  
quently happens, that men are pinched  
with *want*, and feel all the real inconve-  
niencies of *poverty*, in the midſt of the  
greateſt abundance: And our own *expe-*  
*rience* muſt have convinced us, to uſe the  
ſublime

SERM. II. sublime and beautiful language of Holy Scripture, that *riches take to themselves wings, and fly away from their owners.* And as for the pleasures of *sense*, they are, at best, but a superficial flash of delight, followed by loss of appetite, if not by remorse; but, generally, they are nothing more than a present *relief* from the troublesome and importunate cravings of *violent* and *restless* desires.—The sinner, at the same time that he seems so *gay* and *elate*, so *free* and *unreserved* in his pleasures, and so entirely devoted to his corrupt inclinations, may be substantially and inexpressibly miserable; and have the source and spring of his misery wholly *in himself*. And thus “the *inward scene*,  
 “ which is of the highest importance,  
 “ and which *alone* denominates and *characterizes* the man, may be a scene of  
 “ distraction, of self-upbraiding, of gloominess and horror; while the outward  
 “ *glares* with false lights, and is a mere  
 “ *fallacious* and *unnatural* disguise.”

LET me add to all this, that he who places his supreme good in animal gratifications (as he is the slave of *capricious* and *variable*,



variable passions) must be liable to be SERM.  
*disgusted* with his very pleasures; that eve- II.

ry entertainment in this low kind of *irrational* life, instead of allaying and calming, has a direct tendency to *inflame* those desires, for which there is *in nature* no *adequate* object: And, therefore, however he may flatter, blind, and impose upon himself, and expect to find an end of all his solicitude, and the full completion of his wishes, in indulgences of sense and appetite, he must certainly be disappointed in all his hopes of Happiness *as a man*.

—It may perhaps be said, that this is, in truth, no disappointment to him at all, because animal pleasures are his ultimate end, and he never aspired after any thing more *high* or *refined*. Allowing this to be the case, is he, upon a fair and impartial estimate, ever the less *unhappy*? Is he *the less* unhappy for not *knowing* his Happiness; *the less* unhappy, merely because he is *insensible* of his shame and misery? As long as this delusion continues, he can have no *inclination*, no *motive*, and consequently, it can scarce be truly said that

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SERM. that it is in *his power*, even to *endeavour*  
 II. to be happy. And yet *Happiness* is what  
 he professes to pursue, and it is for the  
 sake of this, that he follows the bent and  
 course of appetite : So that the conclusion  
 is unavoidable, that he must suffer *a total*  
 disappointment with respect to the *proposed*  
 scope of all his designs and actions, tho'  
 he may neither *see* his disappointment, nor  
*feel* the *anxiety* and *pain* of a disappoint-  
 ment. The disorders of tumultuous pas-  
 sions may, in numberless cases, *depress* and  
*obscure* the *understanding* ; but they can ne-  
 ver *alter*, never *confound*, the fix'd and im-  
 mutable *differences* of things. “ The scene,  
 “ which vanity and passion represent, is  
 “ generally *fictitious* in a great degree,  
 “ *high-wrought* and figur'd *beyond the life*.  
 “ A light and dissolute mind is apt to be  
 “ *extravagant* and *unbounded* in its prof-  
 “ pects, and to magnify beyond all the  
 “ *proportions* of reason, and all the *possibi-*  
 “ *lities* of things, as the world is at pre-  
 “ sent constituted, its particular and fa-  
 “ vorite object. It must surely then be  
 “ an extreme of folly, when its chief  
 “ pleasures

“ pleasures are at the *highest* in fancy, i.e. SERM.  
“ before they actually *exist*; and *least* II.  
“ when they are *real*.”

SOLOMON, therefore, who had shone in the height of luxury and splendor, had indulged himself even in *most* of our fashionable excesses, and given large scope to his senses and taste for vanity, upon a review of his conduct disapproved of, despised, and severely condemned *the whole* as a scene of impertinence and disquietude. And we know, from the unalterable nature of things, that this must be, in some degree, the *experience* of every other *sensualist*; though he has not ingenuity and honour enough to *acknowledge* it, nor perhaps a sufficient share of reflection to enable him to discern it aright, and make the proper *use* of it: Nay, though his understanding should be so wofully weakened and defaced, as to look on *Solomon* as having entirely lost the *politeness* of his taste, as soon as he was recovered to the *just* exercise of his *reason*, to sobriety and a sense of virtue. Prodigious it is, as well as highly to be deplored, that such *strange* infatuations should prevail amongst mankind!

SERM. kind! Inconsistencies, that one would think no strain of invention, not even *prejudice* and *vice* itself, could find out a way to reconcile. And yet, “ though the  
 “ slave of appetite is apt to admire those  
 “ instances of *sagacity*, which shew like  
 “ *sparks* and *faint glimmerings* of reason  
 “ in brute creatures, and looks upon them  
 “ as marks of *distinction* and *superiority* in  
 “ the animal race, because they, thereby,  
 “ approach *nearer* to the rank of Human  
 “ nature; he, at the same time, does his  
 “ utmost to obliterate that *intelligence* and  
 “ those excellent *moral* capacities, which  
 “ are the chief preheminance of *man* :” He *affects* to *despise* the chaste, the sedate, the strictly virtuous, men of ingenuous thought and sublime dispositions; and to *value* himself for his infamy. And as all this springs, principally, from what I have just hinted at before, *viz.* from false notions of politeness (which word seems to operate like *a charm* upon the inconsiderate, the gay, the voluptuous) I beg leave to conclude this head with observing, that, whatever *accidental* differences may happen, *Human nature* is in *all* the same, and *Human happiness*

*happiness* the same; vice, in its own nature, is equally *infamous*, and virtue equally *sublime* and *beautiful*, under every degree, whether of *politeness* or *barbarity*. If, indeed, all our *polishings* were applied to what is properly the *manly* part in us, to *adorn* and *enlarge* the understanding, and give a more *attractive grace*, or an air of greater *dignity* to our virtues, they would *then* be truly praise-worthy and honourable. But if they are confin'd to the *ear*, the *palate*, the *dress*, the *equipage* of the man, while his *mind* lies quite uncultivated, or is over-run with ignorance and vice: In this case, even those whom we call *savages*, provided they have sincere piety, though mix'd with superstition, fortitude, equanimity, probity, frugality, continence, generosity and benevolence of heart; *these*, I say, upon the supposition here made “are really *polite* —— And “*we ourselves* are *barbarous*.”




THE LAST thing propos'd was to shew, That the favor of God, and his approbation of them as their Governor and Judge, is absolutely necessary to the *Happiness* of

SERM. *Mankind, and of all intelligent Beings.*

II. But it would be needless to attempt a labour'd proof of this proposition, because, in every age, all who have believed a *Deity* and a *Providence*, have unanimously allowed it: And no wonder, since it is not a matter of *nice* and *intricate* deduction, but the reasons of it lie plain and obvious to *all* capacities. To have that great Being for our *enemy*, who has the absolute command of nature, and is the sovereign uncontrollable disposer of all events, is the most *dreadful idea* that the mind of man can form. No condition can be *so* miserable, as to have infinite wisdom, power, and even *goodness* itself, engaged to *punish* us, because we have corrupted our high-born nature, and abused its excellent capacities. And therefore, when the merciful Governor of the world makes us the objects of his *kind* and *favourable* regard, what higher felicity can we *possibly* attain to? What can afford more exalted, strong, and durable satisfaction to the mind? The *displeasure* of our Maker includes in it the utmost *distress* and *infamy*; and his *favor* every thing *great*, good, and honour-

*Of the true Happiness of Man.* • 51

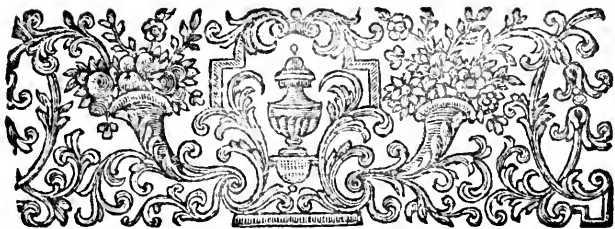
honourable. So that the devout prayer of SERM.  
the *Psalmist* will, likewise, be the humble II.  
and fervent supplication of every *wise* and   
*virtuous* man — *Lord lift thou up the*  
*light of thy countenance upon us.*

AND the *only* way, in which we can secure this inestimable privilege, and high honour, is pointed out to us by *Solomon*, at the end of the book of *Ecclesiastes*, in these words: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man:* — “ A compendium of his *duty*, and “ the sum of his *happiness*.”

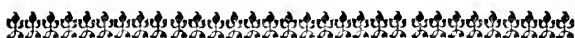








## S E R M O N III.



The Mischiefs of Vanity, and affected Wisdom.

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R O M. i. 22.

*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*



THE instances of *folly*, which S E R M. III. St. *Paul* here charges on the Heathen world, were their gross and stupid idolatries, introduced and established in defiance of some of the first and strongest dictates of reason; by which they had not only limited the *infinite essence*, and

E 3 debased


SERM. debased the *majesty* of God, but exposed  
 III. and vilified the *Human nature* itself. To  
 ~~~~~ have avoided these scandalous corruptions  
 they had an easy and certain course to
 follow; which consisted in nothing else,
 but their being guided by the *original light*
 of their own minds. For the principles
 and foundations of true religion were *visi-*
bly laid in nature. The existence, unity,
 eternal power, supreme excellence, and
 universal dominion of the Deity were, or
might have been, clearly seen, *being under-*
stood by the things that are made, i. e. by
 the *stupendous fabric,* and *shining beauty*
 of the universe. The evidence is always
before men, and strikes *all their senses;*
 and the reflection on it is *natural,* and,
 while the faculty of thinking continues,
 next to *unavoidable.*

HOWEVER, the miserably deluded *Pa-*
gan idolaters made a shift, by their unna-
 tural fictions, and the extravagance of their
low and carnal reasonings, to obscure, and,
 in a manner, obliterate these glorious
 truths. *They changed the truth of God in-*
to a lye; or, in other words, in the place
 of the *real and only* God of the universe,
 substituted

substituted a strange multitude of Deities that were but mere *chimera's*, and the creatures of *fancy*: And stained the honour of that invisible, all-powerful, incorruptible Being, who created, and animates the whole world, by representing him under the image of a *weak, passionate, and frail* Man, nay, of *inferior baser* animals; of the most *irrational, noisome, and injurious* animals; a stupid *ox*, voracious *birds*, and foul venomous *reptiles*. But notwithstanding they were thus confused and lost in error, notwithstanding they had pitched on such *emblems* of the amiable and eternal Deity, as had a direct tendency to render him either universally *mean and despicable*, or an object of *horror and detestation*; and could not have expressed his character with greater *reproach and ignominy*, if they had actually designed, with open malice, to defame and insult him; notwithstanding all this, I say, they still *boasted* of their *wisdom*, gloried in the perfection of their several forms of idolatry, and were *madly* incensed against the true doctrine of the *unity* of God, and the abolition of *image-worship*, as dange-

SERM.
III.
~

SERM. *rous novelties*, as mere extravagance and
 III. impious infatuation. And even the great-
 est part of the *Philosophers* themselves join-
 ed in paying the *establiſh'd* honours to *brute*
 Deities, and performing offices of religion
 before senseless and inanimate images; and,
 by this means, concurr'd with the *vulgar*
 in the solemn formalities and follies of
 their *superstition*. Nay, there is this par-
 ticular and remarkable circumstance to
aggravate their case, that they openly
 avowed, and doubtless invented, sophistical
 reasonings and subtilties to support the
 practice of an *outward hypocritical* com-
 pliance with the superstition of their coun-
 try; “ a practice evidently absurd to *rea-*
 “ *son*, because fatal to *integrity* and *honour*,
 “ and a most effectual bar to the *reforma-*
 “ *tion* of mankind in the worst state of
 “ degeneracy.” This brief relation of
 plain and undeniable facts must entirely
 justify St. *Paul* in the general censure
 which he passes upon the *Heathen* world
 —that *while they knew God* (or had it
 in *their power* to know him, and *ought*
 to have discerned him, by a right use of
 their faculties, in the works of nature)
 they

they glorified him not as God, neither were SERM.
 thankful; but became vain in their ima- III.
 ginations: Professing themselves to be wise, 
 they became fools.

“ BUT has this been the case only with
 “ unenlightened and bewildered *Heathens*?
 “ with those who were heretofore plung-
 “ ed in idolatry, and wanted those full
 “ discoveries of one God, and of his love-
 “ ly but awful attributes, which the reli-
 “ gion of Christ affords?” We cannot
 say this——Because instances have been
 frequent in these latter times, and in
 Christian countries, of persons who, un-
 der the pretence of superior discernment,
 and a more thorough insight into the just
 state of things, have learnt to refine away
 the *common principles* of reason; to start
groundless suppositions, and urge them as
 realities; to set aside the most important
 truths on account of objections, that are
 entirely founded on the *imperfect compre-*
hension of the Human mind, and the *nar-*
row scope of its intellectual powers; and,
 in short, “ to be just as wisely *sceptical*,
 “ as the *Heathens* of old were wisely *su-*
 “ *perstitious*.”——It is indeed impossible,
 that

SERM. that a sincere desire and calm pursuit of

III. wisdom, that a free and impartial exercise of reason, that a diligent and accurate search after truth, should hurt any cause that is worth contending for, or lead to any absurd opinions that are important and dangerous, because it is always *modest* and *ingenuous*, and, upon subjects of moment, deliberate in *weighing* all circumstances, and cautious and slow in *determining*. We are not therefore to imagine that St. *Paul* intended even *obliquely*, to disparage such a becoming temper and conduct as this; which is, as it were, “religion’s *barrier*, and serves to “illustrate its use and excellence.” But the vain pretence and formal ostentation of *wisdom*, a concern not for the *substance*, but the *name* only, is of a quite different tendency. “*Professing* to be *wise* has a “closer connection, than is, perhaps, “commonly thought, with *gross folly*.” And as this is clearly intimated in the text, and was, very probably, a principal thing in the Apostle’s *design*, I shall treat of it distinctly, and at large, in the *various* ways in which it may be the *parent* and

prop

prop of error: From whence several useful reflections will naturally arise, for the conclusion and application of this discourse.

SERM.

III.

AND in the way of general observation it must be allowed, “ that there is *no* passion attending Human nature, which “ blinds and infatuates so *universally*, and “ to such an *excessive* degree, as *Pride*.” It is attentive only to *itself*, and overlooks *all other* objects. It is a *narrow* passion that contracts the *whole* soul, and does not leave *room enough* for the reception and entertainment of knowledge. Every species of *Pride* produces these effects in some measure; but they appear most eminently, when that particular sort prevails, which may be called, by way of distinction, *the Pride of Wisdom*. — There are other cases, in which the haughty and arrogant may be brought to think calmly, in which they may *suffer* instruction, and be *convinced* of error; but when they are under the influence of this most inveterate and malignant kind of *Pride*, they are, for the most part, *absolutely incorrigible*.

THUS, for example, the man that values himself on his *wealth*, “ will be
“ apt

SERM. “ apt to deride a wisdom that is *poor* and
 III. “ *meanly habited*, and not recommended
 “ by the pomp and shew of outward
 “ circumstances:” But though he may
 think it a disgrace to him to receive in-
 formation from such as are in a more *in-*
digent and *servile* life, he may allow those,
 who are as rich as himself, to have a con-
 siderable share of *knowledge* and *experience*,
 and *improve* by their conversation. In
 like manner, he that is elate and swoln
 to high conceptions by *honour* and *worldly*
grandeur, “ may look down with con-
 “ tempt on the sentiments of the *vulgar*,
 “ and the dictates of common sense;” but
 may, however, have *one open* passage to his
 mind, through which men of equal, or su-
 perior dignity may communicate *right* no-
 tions of things. But if he is vain of his
understanding, and this is the very *precise*
point in which his *Pride* terminates, “ it
 “ will make him *hasty*, *unsuspicious*, and
 “ *positive* in his conclusions, and *stubborn*
 “ in error.” A man of this unhappy
 turn will be apt to imagine *all his lights*
 to be clear and strong. He seldom feels
 any *defect* in his capacity, or is conscious
 of

of *partiality*, or a *wrong method* in his in-
 quiries. He is inclined to trust to his *first*
 apprehensions as a sufficient guard against
 error. Every odd start of *fancy* is likely
 to be magnified as an uncommon and va-
 luable discovery ; liveliness of imagination
 to pass for a quick and penetrating *judg-*
ment, and the *presumptions* of vanity and
 self-conceit to be mistaken for the *demon-*
strations of reason. This is the natural
 state of a mind that *professes* itself to be
wise, and claims in this respect a prehe-
 minence above others : Let us now descend
 to particulars, and briefly consider the *va-*
rious steps, by which it may be led to
 extravagant sentiments in the great points
 of religion.

IN the FIRST place, an arrogant *conceit*
 and *affectation* of wisdom is always fond
 of being *distinguished*, and naturally loves
singularity, in order to be *remarked* for
 a peculiar character. “ In the way of
 “ *common reason*, it might, perhaps, make
 “ *no figure* to engage a particular atten-
 “ tion ; and, therefore, it must strike out
 “ *some new* discovery, that it may not
 “ be blended with the mass, the herd, of
 “ mankind,

SERM.
 III.

SERM. “ mankind, and *lost in a crowd*. So that

III. “ this desire of *false fame* directly leads
 “ to *absurd* and *odd* opinions; and there
 “ is, indeed, no setting *bounds* to the er-
 “ rors which it may produce.” From
 this principle *alone*, most of the *senseless*
 paradoxes and *libertine* doctrines, that have
 ever disturbed and corrupted the world,
 may be easily accounted for. If a man,
 with this view of getting fame, and shew-
 ing an uncommon genius, stumbles upon
 the truth, it must be by *chance*, because
 that was *not* the point he aimed at, but the
 amusement and gratification of his vanity;
 which may, therefore, be justly represent-
 ed, as giving the mind a perverse bias
 to *licentiousness*, both in sentiment and
 practice.

BUT farther, the man of *conceited* wis-
 dom will be apt, as experience loudly
 testifies, to fancy that he can *comprehend*
 every thing; which not only demonstrates
 that he has in general a right notion of
nothing at all, neither of himself, nor of
 any part of *nature*, but must fix in his
 mind most dangerous and fatal *prejudices*.
 For, FIRST, Upon a principle so abso-
 lutely

lutely *wrong*, no rational superstructure, no scheme of solid and useful knowledge, can possibly be *raised*. “Truth cannot be built on *ignorance* as its *foundation*; nor can any consequences be fairly deduced from *error*, but what are *equally* erroneous.”—Again, he that makes his own limited and shallow comprehension the *standard* and *measure* of truth, has nothing by which to *form* or *correct* his ideas; “nothing to *regulate* his judgment but itself.” And what if his judgment should be *wrong*; must wrong be right, and falsehood truth, to flatter his arrogance and self-sufficiency? Or can he be capable of making any *proficiency*, who is thus cramp’d in his inquiries, thus devoted and enslaved to his *present* conceptions? It is not to be supposed. This, however, is not the only inconvenience, that springs from so capital an error. For the same insolent presumption and pride of heart, which makes a person arrogate to himself such enlarged and capacious faculties, will prompt him to *oppose* and *reject* as false, every thing which he finds he *cannot* comprehend, or which he does not *in fact* comprehend,

SERM.
III.



SERM. comprehend, or has never *thoroughly* considered; and under the influence of this delusion, he will be in danger of renouncing some of the most weighty and beneficial principles of *reason* and sacred dictates of *religion*. Thus, for instance, because he *cannot conceive how* a thinking substance can be intimately united to matter, he may hold himself authorized to dispute at least, if not to deny, the *distinct existence* and *immortality* of the Human soul; because he *knows not how* the several parts of the vastly extended universe of being are preserved and governed, he may imagine himself justified in disowning a *providence*; and having *no distinct* and *adequate* ideas of immensity or eternal duration, he may think it his wisest course to profess himself *an Atheist*.

To which we may add, That he who is puffed up with self-conceit, and affects to show *a depth* of wisdom, will probably think it incumbent upon him to *dispute* almost every thing; and take great pains to blind *himself*, and *confound* others, by *metaphysical* shifts and intricacies. I say *blind himself*, “because reason may be
“ *perplexed*

“ perplexed and entangled, and render’d SERM.
 “ incapable of discharging its proper office, III.
 “ by an impertinent habit of *cavilling*, ~
 “ as well as debased and extinguished by
 “ *sensuality and lust.*” — The same per-
 son is apt to look upon it as a main ingre-
 dient in a wise man’s character, to oppose
 and deride all *public* principles: And
 therefore unless all the forms of religion,
 and the *prevailing* sentiments in every age
 and country, are certainly false, he must
 subject himself to the fatal necessity of
 discarding truth and error *promiscuously*;
 and can have *no rule*, by which to distin-
 guish and separate the one from the other.
 “ *Branches* of the religion of nature, and
 “ the *general principles* of morality, are
 “ blended with *almost* all schemes: So that
 “ by censuring and condemning in the
 “ *gross*, men are ever *sure* to be in the
 “ *wrong* in many things, whatever *chance*
 “ they may have, now and then, to be
 “ in the *right* in others.”

HAVING given a short account of the methods, by which the pretenders to uncommon wisdom may be misled and turned aside from the truth, let us now see

SERMON. by what means, it is natural to fear, they will be *confirm'd* and *harden'd* in their opposition to it: And these likewise may be all derived from their *vanity*. — The errors which a person of this character falls into through rashness, the love of singularity, a supercilious disdain of the fatigue of long and laborious thinking (which is a *disparagement* to men of large minds, of bright and lively parts; and *fit only* for groveling and flow capacities) these errors, I say, can in the nature of things never be rectified, “ but by entering on a “ *new* course of reflection and examination, and considering subjects *calmly*, and “ in their *full extent*; or by *assistance* “ from others.” But the former of these his self-conceit will represent as *unnecessary*, and the latter it will probably *despise*. For if, upon the first superficial view, and inaccurate loose survey of a subject, he has taken in the *whole compass* of it, and *digested* it completely, what is the unavoidable consequence? Why, in his opinion, it must be this, that his judgment is *maturely form'd*, and that all farther inquiries are *useless*. To review the subject

anew implies a suspicion of his *understanding*, *ingenuity*, or *care*; and not to be steady and firm in his conclusions, his vanity will represent to him as the discovery of a *weak* and *fluctuating* mind, *tossed too and fro by every wind of doctrine*: And thus all improvements are absolutely *precluded*. When a man flatters himself so grossly, it is hardly possible he should ever *grow wiser*. If his first *rude* notions, of which he is inflexibly tenacious, should happen to be *right*, he must be contented with a small portion, in all likelihood with the *rudiments* and *outlines* of knowledge, and cannot be expected to be a deep proficient, or make any considerable advances. But if his maxims and deductions are *wrong*, so they must *continue*; and there is not the most distant hope of his being recovered out of his beloved ignorance and delusion.

FOR he that *professes* himself to be *wise*, with the spirit of pride and ostentation, will, as was hinted before, entertain very degrading thoughts of the opinions and reasonings of the rest of the world: “ So that as he is not likely

SERM. “ to find any deliverance from his errors

III. “ from *within*, he cuts himself off from

“ all *foreign* help.” — The conceptions of others are trite and unelevated, their ideas gross and confused, their arguments trivial and inconclusive. — This is the genuine *temper* and *language* of pride, the language it has spoke in all ages; it is indeed the very passion itself laid open to public view, and described in legible characters: So that where it happens to be a predominant vice, persons are not likely to be reduced to a true sense of things by the most discreet and judicious instruction. “ And whatever *stock* of *wisdom* there may be in the world, it will “ probably be of very little *service* to *them*; “ nor can the difference be a great deal, with “ respect to any solid advantage which *they* “ may derive from it, whether the times in “ which they live are *dark* and *barbarous*, “ or *ingenuous* and *inquisitive*.” For we generally find it to be necessary that we should have some respect for others, in order to our receiving any benefit, any *increase* of *knowledge*, by their conversation. If they are the objects of our *scorn*, their argu-
ments

ments will be so far from having their *proper weight*, that their character, and the light they stand in, will be *too* insignificant even to engage our *attention*. They are condemned in part before they are *heard*; we are not only disposed to a listless and sullen *indifference*, but are, it may be, directly *prejudiced*. And then neither the force of *reason*, nor the charms of *eloquence* will move us: Or, at best, they will make but a faint impression, not *deeply fixed*, and therefore the sooner and the more easily *erased* — What holds true with respect to *particular characters*, in the common course of life, is the misfortune almost *universally* where the pride of knowledge has taken possession; almost all mankind are treated with a sovereign contempt: And, therefore, there is the utmost probability, that their most wise and generous endeavours will fail of the desired effect to remove such an inwrought and obstinate prejudice, which is mixed and tempered with the very *genius* and *habit* of the mind.

BUT, besides all this, there is another impediment in the way to prevent *wisdom*

SERM. and *vanity* from uniting, and that is, that
 III. self-conceit and *modesty* are at an irreconcilable variance: So that this base and most degenerate vice is *ashamed* of nothing so much, as of what is really most *laudable*, *viz.* of ingenuity in acknowledging *mistakes*; which, in themselves, are not the peculiar dishonour of *any single person*, but spring from the *general imperfection* of Human nature. “ A man might, in truth, “ be as justly ashamed of *hunger* and “ *thirst*, and the whole train of his *sensitive* appetites and inclinations, as of “ his *liableness* to err. They are *both* the “ established constitution of things, determined and unalterable.” And, yet, behold the *inconsistency* of a mind captivated and ruled by *Pride*! “ It can bear “ to talk without *pain* of a *decaying* frame, “ of *brutal* impulses, and all the *glories* of “ the understanding *faded*, or *destroyed* “ by the sudden violent shock of a *distemper*;—But the words *error*, *confusion* of sentiment, and *partial* views “ of things, are hard to be pronounced; “ though it be altogether as notorious, “ from experience and common observation; “ tion;

“ tion, that every man is unavoidably
 “ exposed to *these defects*, as it is that he
 “ has *senses* and *passions*, or that he is
 “ *mortal*.” And, indeed, the former nat-
 urally result from the *latter*, which are
 the *true source* of the limitation, dark-
 ness, and disorder of our rational faculties.
 The false shame, which we are now
 speaking of, has this substantial misery
 generally attending it, that it extirpates all
 notion of *sincerity* and sense of *honour*,
 and renders error *incurable*.—Upon the
 whole then what *light*, what improve-
 ment in substantial *knowledge*, and espe-
 cially in knowledge of a *religious* or *moral*
 kind, *can be expected*; and what *absurd*
extravagant opinions *may not be expected*,
 when vanity, and an arrogant pretence and
 affectation of wisdom, have gained the as-
 cendent? And how natural is it for men,
 thus *professing themselves to be wise*, not
 only to become absurd and corrupt in their
 imaginations, but irreclaimable in their
 follies? The reflections, suggested by the
 foregoing discourse, are chiefly these,

FIRST, As one grand instance of *impi-
 ous folly*, which St. Paul has charged on

SERM. the *Heathen* world, was this, that *they*
 III. *changed the glory of the incorruptible God*
 into images made like unto corruptible men,
 and irrational animals; “ we cannot,
 “ surely, but think it high time that this
 “ scandal was entirely banished from all
 “ Christian churches: And especially from
 “ Protestant churches, which have so-
 “ lemnly renounced the inventions of men
 “ as a standard, and professed to adhere
 “ to the Scriptures (against all arbitrary
 “ incroachments) as their ultimate and
 “ only rule.”——*To whom will ye liken me?*
 Ifaiah xl. *saith the holy One.— No man hath seen the*
 25. *shape of God, says our blessed Saviour.—*
 John i. 18. *Chap. v.*
 37. “ The attempting, therefore, to describe
 “ the invisible and immortal Deity by lines
 “ and figures, or any material emblems,
 “ is a manifest opposition to the doctrine
 “ of revelation, as well as shocking to the
 “ undepraved sense of nature. And the
 “ immorality is the more flagrant, because
 “ material beings, and such as are per-
 “ ceptible to sense, are either wholly in-
 “ animate, or mere animals without rea-
 “ son, or an inferior, if not the very
 “ lowest order of intelligent creatures.”

For

For this both *Jews* and *Mahometans* insult SERM.
 us: Who with all their corruptions, and III.
 groundless infidelity in other points, “ ad-
 “ here invariably to the acknowledgment
 “ of *one God* and *Father* of all; and ab-
 “ hor the thought of admitting a *partner*
 “ with him in his supreme glory and do-
 “ minion, and of *debasing* his *spiritual*,
 “ infinite, and incomprehensible essence
 “ by *superstitious pictures* or *images*.”

AGAIN, SECONDLY, As all the idolatries and superstitions among the *Gentiles*, before the coming of *Christ*, proceeded in a great measure from a *vain* and *affected* wisdom, many likewise of the most dangerous innovations, in *Christian* faith and worship, have sprung from the *same* source; from a *professing to be wise* beyond the *standard*: Which in all matters of religion, *purely Christian*, must be the doctrine of *Christ alone*, as it is contained in the writings of the *New Testament*. This being *wiser* than the *rule* of wisdom has, in many instances, abolished the *plain original truths* of the gospel, to make way for mere *sounds*, empty *forms* and *shadows* of *truth*, and mistaken *metaphysics*; which
 (though

SERM. (though it has not, perhaps, always been
 III. directly intended) have had in fact this
 melancholy effect,—"To foment *end-*
less contentions, and expose Christia-
 nity to scorn and ridicule." This our
 very *profession* of the Gospel, and the *re-*
ligious veneration which we pretend to
 have for it, should make us all, in our
 several stations, strongly concerned to pre-
 vent: In order to which, nothing can be
 a more effectual means, than to check
arrogant presumption and *self-conceit*; and
 to improve in ourselves at all times, and
 recommend to others, that *humble, inge-*
nuous, and *tractable* spirit, which is inse-
 parable from the *love* of truth, and a ne-
 cessary ingredient in a *wise* and *virtuous*
 character.





S E R M O N IV.



Of the distinct Offices and Uses of Reason and Revelation.

PROV. XX. 27.

The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD.



Y *the spirit of man* we must necessarily understand the intelligent thinking principle, that *naturally* directs to the knowledge of God, and points out the difference of good and evil; and which, according to the manner in which it operates, and the various offices in which it is employed, is stiled *understanding, conscience, will, memory* (which

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SERM. (which are all no other than *the faculty of*
 IV. *reason differently exercised* :) And as this is
 called *the candle of the LORD*, the general
 observation immediately suggested by the
 text is, that “*Reason is a DIVINE light.*”
 This is *natural* light; but *Revelation* we
 acknowledge to be an *extraordinary* light
 from heaven.—I shall endeavour to shew,
 in the following discourse, these two are
 so far from representing things in *opposite*
 views, and *disagreeing* colours, that they
 add a *lustre* to each other. And the me-
 thod I shall proceed in will be to confi-
 der,——FIRST, *How far* the province of
Reason extends: And then to point out
 the excellencies of *Revelation*, and its *pe-*
culiar advantages. No subject can be of
 greater importance, in directing and re-
 gulating our inquiries after *truth*; and,
 by not understanding it aright, we shall
 be in danger of bringing reproach and
 contempt both on *natural* and *revealed* re-
 ligion.

IN the FIRST place, then, it is properly
 and *solely* the business of *Reason* to deter-
 mine, in general, concerning the *being*,
perfections, and *providence* of God; those
 great

great truths and *first* principles, on which SERM.
 all religion natural and revealed is found- IV.
 ed. For when we attempt the *proof* of
 these from Revelation, we involve our-
 selves in a maze of insuperable difficulties,
 in an inextricable labyrinth of darkness
 and confusion.—We necessarily take it
 for granted that *there is a God*, when we
 attempt to prove that any particular scheme
 of religion is a *Revelation* from God ; and
 yet afterwards go about to establish, what
 we had before assumed as a *certain* prin-
 ciple, by the words of Revelation. This
 is the same kind of absurdity, as if a man
 should set himself to argue the *wisdom*
 and *goodness* of God, before he was able
 to prove his *existence* ; and then conclude,
 “ that there *must be* such a supreme and
 “ eternal Being, because he had *shewn*
 “ him to be wise and good.” — That
 the omniscient *Father of our spirits*, who
 perfectly understands the *frame* of the
 Human mind, *can* by an internal illumina-
 tion convince mankind both of his ex-
 istence and providential government, seems
 highly probable. However, as we can-
 not, without the most *idle* and *frantic*
 enthu-

SERM. enthusiasm, pretend to such *extraordinary*
 IV. and *immediate* discoveries, this is not properly *the point in question*: Which must be stated thus, “whether these *important*
 “*truths* are *capable* of being proved by
 “the mere testimony of any external Re-
 “velation? or whether they are *de-*
 “*ductions* of *Reason*, which every such
 “*Revelation presupposes?*”

THAT the *latter* of these is really the case, is in a manner self-evident. For the very *pretence* of a Divine Revelation would be *ridiculous*, if there was *no* God: And if the contrary could not be demonstrated by the *mere light* of *nature*, and there was not sufficient ground to believe it on the *common principles* of *Reason*, it must *appear* ridiculous to all mankind. Besides, by what methods could we possibly convince any of the *truth* of a *Revelation*, unless he be already satisfied with respect to this fundamental Article? If we tell him, that he is obliged to receive certain doctrines because *God has revealed them*, the question, which he may naturally be imagined to put to us upon this, is, How we *know* that there *is* a God? Should we re-

ply, that we are assured of it because *he* SERM.
himself has said it, it might immediately IV.
 be objected, that this is taking the very
 thing *in debate* for granted: And we must
 of necessity be bewildered, and forced to
 give up the cause, if our *Reason* is not
 capable of suggesting other arguments for
 it arising from the *nature* of things. Nay,
 I may proceed one step further, and add
 to what has been already said, that it is
 impossible for us to prove, with any good
 degree of probability, the truth of Re-
 vealed Religion, “ if we are not capable
 “ of being *previously convinced*, by our
 “ own reflections and reasonings, not on-
 “ ly of God’s *being* and *government* of the
 “ world, but of the *excellence* and *perfec-*
 “ *tion* of his *moral* character:” Since no-
 thing is more clear and unquestionable
 than this, that neither *miracles*, nor the
intrinsic goodness of the doctrine, can be
 urged as a sufficient evidence; unless we
 are assured that the Deity is too *just* and
merciful, to suffer miracles to be wrought
 by inferior beings to *impose* upon his crea-
 tures, and betray them into *dangerous error*;
 and withal of such consummate *wisdom*,
 such

SERM. such strict and unspotted *purity*, that no
 IV. principles but what are *consistent* and *ra-*
 ~~~~~ *tional*, and calculated to promote *virtue*  
 and *happiness*, can derive their original  
 from *him*.

SHOULD it be said, that the *miracles*  
 which are performed to *attest* the autho-  
 rity of a Revelation, are also strong and  
 undeniable *proofs* of the being and provi-  
 dence of God: I answer, that, “ upon  
 “ the supposition that *reason* cannot de-  
 “ duce these great truths from the *struc-*  
 “ *ture* of the universe, and the general  
 “ course of *nature*, this may be justly  
 “ *questioned*. ” For *those effects* which are  
 always visible, the *fixed* and *standing* laws  
 of nature, discover at least *equal* wif-  
 dom, power, and goodness, as can appear  
 in any miraculous operations we can con-  
 ceive of. “ The *latter* indeed, being *un-*  
 “ *usual*, strike more *sensibly*, and make  
 “ a deeper *impression*, than the *regular*  
 “ and *uniform* appearances of beauty and  
 “ grandeur in the universe, which are  
 “ constantly before us;” but cannot, if  
 duly considered, give us more *exalted* ideas  
 of the *power* and *skill* of the Agent. The

stopping the sun in his daily course (I SERM. chuse, in this place, to speak in the language of scripture, in conformity to vulgar prejudices) the stopping the sun, I say, in his daily course (which is one of the miracles recorded in the Old Testament) cannot in itself be deemed a greater operation, than the lighting up at first that glorious luminary: Nor is the restoring a dead person to life more wonderful (though it may surprise us more) than the communicating life to innumerable kinds of animals, and to various orders of rational beings. So that no miracles can fairly be admitted as a demonstration of the existence of an eternal mind, the creator and governor of all; if the fabric of the world be not, to the universal Reason of men, a much fuller demonstration of it: “ Which  
 “ is of so complicated a nature, and con-  
 “ tains in it such an infinite number and  
 “ diversity of effects, as must exhibit more  
 “ incontestable proofs of omnipotence, and  
 “ brighter signatures of most curious con-  
 “ trivance and extensive goodness, than  
 “ all the extraordinary productions of the  
 “ miraculous kind that ever have happen-  
 VOL. IV. G ed,

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SERM. “ ed, or which, we have solid ground  
 IV. “ to expect, *ever will* happen amongst  
 “ men.”

BUT allowing that *miracles might be* a convincing proof of God's being and providence, the general argument, which I have been pursuing, cannot in the least be weakened by it; because all that can be inferred from it is, that the *external evidences* of a Revelation are *equally strong* for the first principles of natural religion: And with respect to the argument from *miracles*, as well as those more *numerous* arguments which may be drawn from the *disposition* and *frame* of the visible world, it must still be left to *Reason* to determine, whether they are *sufficient* or *inconclusive*. For it is only by means of our intellectual powers that we can *weigh* the *force* of evidence, or are capable of *conviction*.— So that to take from *Reason* its unquestionable *prerogative* of fixing and ascertaining the being, perfections, and providence of God, not only undermines the *authority*, and derogates from the *honour*, of Revelation; but will be found, in its *consequences*, to subvert the *main articles* of the Religion  
 of

of Nature, which is the *basis* and *foun-* SERM.  
*dation* of it; and, of course, to have a IV.  
 direct tendency to harden sceptical and  
 perverted minds in *infidelity* and *atheism*.

AGAIN, SECONDLY, As it is the office of *Reason* to state and determine the fundamental principles of *natural* religion, it must likewise be allowed to judge concerning the essential *marks* and *characters* of a *divine Revelation* in general, and the *evidence* that is necessary to support it: And whether any *particular Revelation* answers to these characters, and brings with it unexceptionable *credentials* of a Divine original. That there are some *peculiar* characters, and *discriminating* properties, by which every pretence of Revelation must be *tried*, is as certain, as that there is an *invariable rule*, in all cases of religion and morality, to distinguish betwixt *truth* and *error*. Otherwise we are exposed to *endless* delusions, and can have *no guard* against the most *stupid* enthusiasm.—But *how* shall we know what these characters are, but from our *Reason*, which is the only *faculty* we have to judge by; and without which we

SERM. should be as *blind* and *undiscerning*, as *incapable* of piety, virtue, and moral government, as the very *brute* creatures? Or in *what way* can we be satisfied, whether any particular scheme deserves the name of a *Divine Revelation*, or be an absurd and wicked *imposture*, but by the help of the same *intellectual* light placed in our minds by the great Creator? To say that we are bound to receive all these things *implicitly*, on the *credit* of the Revelation itself, is to *suppose* it a Divine Revelation before we have *proved* it to be such; which can *only* be done by the methods which I have proposed.

BESIDES, if we admit it to determine the *justice* of its claim by its own authority, we lay ourselves open to the artifice and imposition of every bold and confident deceiver, who may be tempted to take the advantage of our *inattention* and *credulity*: And indeed there is no possibility of preventing this mischief, but by frequent exercises of *mature* deliberation and *rational inquiry*. We cannot account, on any other principle but that of standing by, and submitting to, the *decisions* of  
Reason,



Reason, for our believing any Revelation at all, or preferring one pretended scheme of Revealed Religion to another; for our embracing the Gospel, and rejecting the *Alchoran*.—For why do we acknowledge the *Christian* Religion to be true? —Not, surely, because we were educated in the profession of it: For this would be as good a plea, in some other parts of the world, for our adhering to *Pagan* superstition; but it is, or ought to be, because our Reason informs us that it is worthy of God, that its doctrines are consistent and credible, tending to promote universal purity, and excellently adapted to refine and perfect Human nature.—And why, on the other hand, do we reject *Mabometanism*, but “because the same  
 “light of Reason shews it to be an impos-  
 “ture; in its *speculative principles* and  
 “*rituals*, a corrupt medley of true religion,  
 “and the old *Arabian* superstition:—  
 “Because it encourages the *immoderate*  
 “gratification of sensual appetites; the  
 “*complexion* of its precepts being exactly  
 “suited to the *Paradise* it promises, which  
 “consists in such gross animal pleasures,

SERM.  
 IV.  
 ~~~~~

SERM. “ as are utterly beneath that state of *per-*
 IV. “ *fection*, to which it must be the *design*
 “ of genuine unadulterated Religion to
 “ raise mankind :—Because the *author*
 “ of it was a person infamous for *lust* and
 “ *ambition*, and consequently not such a
 “ one, as a man of any consideration can
 “ imagine that the wisest and best of all
 “ beings would *employ*, in the great work
 “ of instructing and reforming an igno-
 “ rant and degenerate world :— And,
 “ finally, because instead of working such
 “ numerous, *public*, and *unquestionable* mi-
 “ racles, as *Christ* and his *Apostles* per-
 “ formed in confirmation of the Christian
 “ doctrine, he propagated his religion by
 “ those methods of *cruel violence*, which
 “ are always discouraging, oppressive, and
 “ injurious to *virtue*, the *proper* support
 “ of *base views*, the *natural* source of
 “ *fraud* and *hypocrisy*, and, in a word,
 “ as *dishonourable* to the God and Father
 “ of mercies, who delights not in the
 “ misery and destruction of his creatures;
 “ as they were contrary to the *frame* of
 “ the Human mind, whose *convictions*
 “ cannot be forced by any worldly terrors,
 “ and

“ and to the nature of true religion which
“ is entirely *free* and *voluntary*.”

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THIRDLY, It is the business of *Reason* to judge of the *sense* of Revelation, as well as of its intrinsic *excellence* and external *proofs*. There are certain *rules*, absolutely necessary in order to the right understanding the Holy Scriptures, which if we do not carefully observe, we may run into the most monstrous inconsistencies in *opinion*, and absurdities in *practice*. For instance, the immediate *scope* and *design* of the writers must be diligently attended to, and the general *strain* and *tenor* of the Revelation always kept in view: Parallel passages should be consulted and compared, which, as they relate to the same subject, must *illustrate* each other; and such as are of a more obscure or ambiguous nature ought, according to all rules of good interpretation, to be explained by others whose meaning is *express* and *determinate*. And if we neglect these rules, which *Reason* prescribes, our sentiments of Revealed Religion will be confused and indigested: Nay, it must be mere jargon,

SERM. a scheme full of darkness, and, as to its
 IV. true sense, *forever unintelligible.*


“ THERE is *no medium* between employing our rational faculties in examining and stating the *doctrines* of Revelation, and being guided wholly by “sounds:” If the latter be our case, we may be able to *repeat words*, but shall *believe nothing*, or believe we know not what. If, for example, we interpret *proverbial* expressions *literally*; if we take general rules in their *utmost* latitude, without those exceptions and limitations which other parts of scripture evidently suggest, and the nature of the things themselves requires; if we carry *figures* to their *highest flight*, and make no allowances for the strength and boldness of phrase usual in the *Eastern* nations, and *stretch* and *torture metaphors* to every point of comparison, that either a fruitful invention, or a heated fancy, or a low and childish apprehension may dictate to us; what *enthusiastic* principles, what *wild* extravagancies, may we not build on perverted passages of Scripture?——“ Against com-
 “ mon

“ *mon sense and experience, truth and mo-* SERM.
 “ *rality, and the manifest design of Scrip-* IV.
 “ *ture itself.*” But all these inconve- }
 niences will be easily and certainly avoid-
 ed, if we take our *understanding* along
 with us, and make *that* our constant *guide*
 in consulting and explaining Revelation.
 What has been hitherto said is not only
 right in *Reason*, but confirmed by many pas-
 sages of the New Testament; in which
 we find an inspired Apostle appealing to
 the intelligent powers of those to whom
 he wrote — *I speak as unto wise men*; 1 Cor. x.
judge ye what I say. And we are univer- 15.
 sally exhorted, “ *to prove all things, to* 1 Thess. v.
 “ *search the Scriptures, to try the spirits* 21.
 “ *whether they are of God, to be ready to* John v.
 “ *give an answer to every man that asketh* 39.
 “ *us a reason of the hope that is in us*; 1 John iv.
 “ *and, to sum up all, to be children in* 1.
 “ *malice, but in understanding men.*” 1 Pet. iii.
15.
1 Cor. xiv.
20.

To which we may add, that it is *Reason alone* that can set in a clear and distinct view the *excellencies*, peculiar *beauties*, and *uses* of Revelation: For if *this faculty* be not capable of discerning them, and displaying them in their proper light, they

SERM. they must be quite insignificant; and as
 IV. absolutely *lost* with respect to *mankind*, as
 to beings that are entirely *irrational*.

IN the LAST place, The *light* of *Reason*, which is a *ray* from the eternal source of *intellectual* light and truth, is of such importance, and its *authority* so sacred, that nothing can justly be admitted as a principle of *revealed* Religion, which is repugnant to it. If by Reason we understand in general an *inward judgment rightly* and *exactly* formed (which amounts to much the same, with the *abstract nature* and *truth* of things) it is self-evident that every pretended Revelation, that is inconsistent with *this*, must of necessity be an *imposture*; because the all-wise, most merciful, and unchangeable God can neither *contradict* himself, nor *impose* upon his creatures. “ Or if by Reason we mean every
 “ *man’s private Reason*, even *that* must be,
 “ with respect to him, the ultimate *judge*
 “ of truth.” For to say that he is bound to receive any principles, against the *sense* and *apprehensions* of his own mind, is obliging him to an *impossibility*, viz. to *allow* that to be true, which at the same time he *believes*

to be false. *All* that is advanced against the SERM.
use of *Reason* in matters of Religion, and to IV.
demonstrate its weakness and corruption, 
is an *appeal* to it; every argument that is
offered for setting up *other* more authori-
tative decisions of right or wrong, *other*
measures of truth and falshood, supposes
it qualified for deciding this grand question
“ — What is the *ultimate* standard in
“ all cases of this kind? And if it has
“ *ability* to determine this fundamental
“ point on which *all* depends, it may,
“ surely, be *permitted* to judge in other
“ instances; especially in points of far less
“ consequence to the general cause of
“ virtue and piety, to the present and fu-
“ ture happiness of mankind.” But if
Reason has so large a compass, and such
an extended authority — what is become
of the excellency of *Revelation*; and where
are all its boasted advantages? Is it not ren-
dered in a great degree insignificant? A
little reflection will convince us of the con-
trary: For,

FIRST, notwithstanding all that has
been said, the *expediency* of a Revelation
is most evident, and its *uses* are vastly great
and considerable. We can scarce, indeed,

SERM. suppose, that there are any truths of the

IV. *first* rank, and of *universal* moment with respect to the happiness of mankind, but what reason, if duly cultivated, *might* have discovered. And yet there are *few* even of *these*, which the reason of *every man* has actually discovered; and scarce *any*, but what prejudice, vice, and superstition have, in almost all ages of the world, perverted and darkened. Again, let *doctrines*, and *rules* of life, be in themselves ever so plain to an attentive and inquiring mind, yet we know from experience that they *may be*, we find in fact that they too commonly *are*, *misrepresented*, *disfigured*, *changed*, and *lost*, through the unhappy influence of wrong education and custom, through indolent superficial thinking, through pride and stubbornness of mind, and the force of many other irregular passions and habits; which are the *natural source* of error. — And what now is *fit* and *proper* to be done, in such a circumstance of general and dark delusion? “ Must the benighted understanding be left entirely to itself, to strike
“ out some *new* and *better* light? Is there
“ no other *wise* remedy, for the cure of
“ this evil, than the *mere chance*, frequently

“ quently against strong probabilities to
“ the contrary, that the irregular and de-
“ praved judgment may, one time or
“ other, *rectify* and *reform* itself? Does
“ the making use of *instruction*, with re-
“ spect to those who are out of the way,
“ derogate in the least from the natural
“ *dignity* and *strength* of reason? When
“ mankind are *actually* abandoned to ido-
“ latry, and over-run with barbarity and
“ ignorance, are they to be given up as
“ *irreclaimable*, and denied all *helps* to
“ inform their understandings and remove
“ their prejudices? Are communications
“ of knowledge, in points of the highest
“ importance, ever the less *useful* merely
“ because reason, if *rightly exercised*, might
“ have suggested just notions of religion
“ and moral conduct?” Has it not been
allowed, in all ages, to be of signal *advantage*
in the world to reform public corruptions
and superstitions? Are not those, who have
been engaged in this great work, treated
with distinguished *honour*? Nay, “ Is not
“ this the very *pretence* of the opposers of
“ the Christian Revelation, and what they
“ themselves are apt to *boast* of (far from
“ deeming

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“ deeming it an impertinent *officiousness*, or
 “ an *insult* on the understandings of men)
 “ as a most generous and laudable at-
 “ tempt? — But if it be wise and fit in
 “ itself, can it be unfit, can it be unwise, in
 “ God? If the expediency of *Human in-*
 “ *structions* be acknowledged, can *Divine*
 “ *Revelations* be unnecessary? Can the
 “ wisdom, the goodness, the compassion
 “ be *less*, where the advantages are *greater*,
 “ and the condescension is *infinitely great-*
 “ *er*?” This, surely, is a most *fantastical*
 method of reasoning, which overturns *all*
 principles, and shows the force of preju-
 dice to extinguish *common sense*.

FOR the plain truth of the case is this:
 That as a man *externally* blind most evi-
 dently stands in need of the *direction* and
guidance of those who have the use of sight,
 so a darkened *understanding* wants and re-
 quires *instruction*. And as it would be ex-
 tremely *ridiculous* if, in the former instance,
 we should think it necessary to inquire,
 “ whether the man was *naturally* blind,
 “ or *accidentally* blind? and especially, if
 “ he himself should *refuse* to grant the
 “ assistance and care of others to be a great
 “ *conve-*

“ convenience and advantage to him, be-
 “ cause he had *originally* the use of his
 “ eyes, and might still have enjoyed it en-
 “ tire, had it not been for his own vicious-
 “ nefs and voluntary indiscretion:” As
 this, I say, would be extremely *ridiculous*;
 so is it little less *absurd* to confound our-
 selves by vain and subtil disquisitions, whe-
 ther the intellectual blindness of mankind
 proceeded from an *original defect* in their
faculties, or from *later* and more *remote*
 causes, in order to judge aright concerning
 the *expedience* and *usefulness* of Divine Re-
 velation. There is indeed some *difference*
 in the two cases which have been now re-
 presented, but it is by no means sufficient
 to destroy the weight of the general *argu-*
ment, which I have drawn from the com-
 parison. For though a recovery, when
 the *inward sense* is perverted, may not be
 absolutely *impossible*, as that of the sight
 of the *bodily eye* sometimes is; it may,
 however, be to the last degree *unlikely* with-
 out extraordinary means. — Prejudices
 may be next to *invincible* — Errors deep-
 ly *rivetted* and strongly *supported* — The
 utmost efforts of Human reason, to re-
 form

SERM.
IV.



SERM. form epidemical vices and absurd opi-
 IV. nions, may upon *trial* be found *useless*
 and *unsuccessful* — There may be no
 probable prospect of any *surer* and more
effectual method to answer this desirable
 end: And the *history* of mankind, with
 respect to religion and the knowledge and
 worship of the supreme eternal Deity (at
 the time when *Christianity* was first made
 known) answers in a great measure to the
 foregoing description. — “ *Just* notions
 “ of God were, in general, *erased* from
 “ the minds of men. His *worship* was
 “ debased and polluted; and scarce any
 “ *traces* could be discerned of the ge-
 “ nuine and immutable religion of na-
 “ ture. A degenerate and *barbarous* su-
 “ perstition obstructed and clouded even
 “ the sense of *morality*, and the *social*
 “ *virtues*. The *aids* and *refinements* of
 “ philosophy were either *never* applied to
 “ this grand source of error and deprava-
 “ tion of manners; or were applied in
 “ vain.” And in such a disordered and
 almost *incurably* bad state of things, to
 deny the *irradiations* of Divine light to be
 of eminent advantage, and a remarkable
 instance

instance of wise and gracious condescension, is a surprizing instance of *folly* and *ingratitude*. But further,

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SECONDLY, A Revelation may not only be useful in *rectifying* corrupt principles, and *establishing* right ones upon a better foot of probability; but may also afford *sufficient evidence* to induce us to believe what we could never have *expected*, or might, *perhaps*, have thought *improbable*, nay, some points not *at all discoverable* by natural reason; but yet of signal consequence as *motives*, powerfully and universally exciting, to a regular and inflexible course of virtue. This will fully appear by two instances—the general *resurrection*; and the *eternity* of future rewards: Concerning the *first* of which *reason* is entirely *silent*, and gives *no intimation*; and as to the *latter*, though it may *conjecture* and *presume*, and amuse with pleasing *expectations*, it has no principles on which to proceed in forming *a certain conclusion*. So that a Revelation may revive the *attention* to *moral* truths, that had been for a long time obliterated, and lost amidst a confusion of errors; it may give

SERM. a *sanction* to other doctrines, which, though
 IV. not *repugnant* to, were however *undiscoverable* by mere natural Reason; and make even *important* principles, which to Reason are obscure and doubtful, *clear* and *unquestionable*.

UPON the whole, we learn, from what hath been said, what little foundation there is for setting *Faith* and *Reason* at *variance*, and making them oppose, and clash with each other; “ since all faith, that
 “ does not spring from a blind and wild
 “ *enthusiasm*, is an *exercise* of Reason, a
 “ *free ingenuous exercise* of Reason :” And to suppose the contrary is disgracing and subverting *Christianity*. The *arguments*, or *grounds*, on which we believe revealed religion, are indeed some *extraordinary facts* that happened out of the common course of *nature*; “ but the *process* in judg-
 “ ing of the *credibility* of these facts, and
 “ how far they are an *evidence* of the
 “ truth of the Revelation, is conducted
 “ and carried on by the *understanding*, as
 “ in all other subjects of *rational inquiry*.” The representing Faith and Reason as *inconsistent* principles is the *root* of infinite
 error

error and superstition: It is the grand *engine* which supports that heap of folly, contradiction, and impiety, that passes under the name of *religion* in *Popish* countries. And as we have been *alarmed* of late from all quarters, as if this senseless and oppressive *superstition* was gaining ground amongst us (which every friend of *virtue*, every lover of his *country*, should be solicitous to prevent) I can think of recommending nothing as more proper to put a stop to so fatal an evil, “ than that we “ encourage the use of *Reason* in religion, “ and make our *Protestantism* consistent; “ and do not endeavour, by *disgracing* “ Human Reason, to impose upon the “ people incomprehensible *mysteries*, and “ doctrines that cannot stand an *impar-* “ *tial examination* :” For these are the very *same arts*, by which *Popery* itself was first established, and rose, by degrees, to its utmost height of extravagance and barbarity — The light of Reason will *dispel* all such clouds of error; but if that be industriously stifled and extinguished, men must be liable to be *practised upon* by every crafty insinuating impostor, and

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SERMON. will be easily *seduced* from their religion.

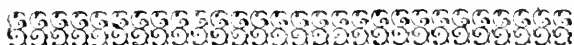
IV. — I shall conclude with observing, that
the more of *Reason* we see in our religion,
the more shall we be disposed to practise
it; when it appears not to be enjoined by
a mere *arbitrary* authority, but to be most
excellent in itself, and conducive to our
happiness. And as our *obligations* are
stronger, chearfully to follow the rules
which it prescribes, our *guilt*, if we con-
tradict its precepts by a dissolute and vi-
cious life, must be more black and ag-
gravated.— *I beseech you therefore, bre-*
Rom. xii. *thren, by the mercies of God, that ye pre-*
1. *sent your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and*
acceptable to God: For this is your REA-
SONABLE service.



SERMON



S E R M O N V.



Of Blasphemy, and Prophane
Swearing.

EXODUS XX. 7.

*Thou shalt not take the name of the
LORD thy God in vain: For the
LORD will not hold him guiltless,
that taketh his name in vain.*



THE *first* commandment was designed to enforce the belief and acknowledgment of the *unity* of God, that fundamental principle of all religion; and to secure from all *diminution*, and impious *invasion*, the unalienable rights

SERM.
V.

SERM. rights of his supreme and universal Sovereignty : The *second* was intended to maintain the *worship* of the Deity (one of the chief branches of *moral* duty) pure and unadulterate, according to the primitive laws of reason and nature ; that gross, unrefined, and unworthy apprehensions of him might not, by introducing *idolatry*, obliterate *real piety*, and make *religion* an enemy to *virtue* : But the *third*, which is the subject of the present discourse, has no immediate relation to idolaters ; on the contrary, it supposes a *professed belief* of one only LORD, the Governor and Judge of mankind ; to whom they are ultimately accountable, and from whose *tribunal* there is no *appeal*. And the direct view of it was, to impress on the minds of men such an awful sense of his perfections and providence, as should, at once, be a motive to the exercise of universal virtue, and subserve the *wise* and *useful* purposes for which *civil government* was instituted.

THE precept itself, in the opinion of many great expositors, might have been better translated thus : *Thou shalt not take up the name of the LORD thy God falsely,*

“ or

" or make use of it by way of *appeal* to SERM.
 " him as *omniscient*, and to whom be- V.
 " longs the *final decision* in all cases of ~~~~~
 " equity, in attestation and support of a
 " *falsehood*." The *Psalmist* therefore joins
 these two phrases together, in his descrip-
 tion of a religious and upright man; that
he hath not lift up his soul to vanity, nor Pfal. xxiv;
sworn deceitfully. And, indeed, for the 4.
 same general reason, that *false* Gods are
 stiled *vanities*, or *vain* Gods; *vain* Oaths
 may signify the same as *false* Oaths. This
 is most evidently the language of *Scripture*,
 and agreeable to every sentiment of
right reason. And it is very probable, that
 our blessed Saviour (who had before re-
 ferred *distinctly* to *other* precepts of the
 Decalogue) had an immediate regard to
this particular precept in these words:
Ye have heard that it hath been said by them Matth. v;
of old time, thou shalt not forswear thy self, 33.
but shalt perform unto the Lord thine
 Oaths.

THE FIRST and principal thing there-
 fore, that, we may reasonably suppose, is
 forbidden by the third commandment, is

H 4.

Perjury;

SERM. *Perjury*; a crime so repugnant to all the ideas that mankind have ever formed of *God*, and so utterly subversive of *public order*, that it has been held in the utmost abhorrence, and branded with signal infamy, in *every age and nation*. The true nature of an *Oath* is this: An *appeal* to *God* as the *supreme judge* of equity, in all controversies about right and wrong, as the friend and *patron* of the *injured*, and the severe *punisher* of the *injurious*; it is an *appeal* to his infinite knowledge as a witness to our integrity, and an *imprecation* of his just and heavy vengeance upon ourselves, if we are knowingly and deliberately *insincere*. The man, therefore, who swears positively to a *falsehood*, or takes an *Oath* which he is determined to *violate*, or who, upon any temptation, *recedes* from what he has solemnly and *warrantably* sworn, must not only be entirely destitute of the *least spark*, and most *languid impression*, of religion; but, if he is not a *speculative Atheist*, must act in direct *contempt* and *defiance* of *God*. He must be a downright *monster* in nature, deriding the *justice* of the *Deity*, and challenging *Omni-*
potence



potence to do its worst. And moreover, the crime of Perjury may not only be attended, in *particular* cases, with extremely injurious consequences; but as *Oaths* have, in almost all communities, the *last determination* in points of social justice, whether respecting *life* or *property*, and are the principal *fences* of government itself, besides introducing present and temporary inconveniencies, it manifestly tends to the overthrow of all right, and to the confusion and total dissolution of all civil societies. So that there is no possible *villainy*, but what we may fairly suppose the *perjured* to be *capable* of committing without remorse: (Or what those, who swallow Oaths without *consideration*, or allow themselves to frame *equivocations* and *mental reserves*, are not *preparing* themselves for the commission of) because they neither *fear God*, nor *regard man*, and are absolutely divested of all sentiments that are either *generous*, *virtuous*, or *humane*.

VERY near a-kin to this most abominable crime, is, in the SECOND place, the binding

SERM. binding ourselves by an *Oath* to perform
 V. things that are *in their own nature* immo-
 ral; or to adhere strictly and inviolably to
 any *engagements* and *confederacies*, which,
 in themselves, are unlawful and criminal.

THIRDLY, Every rash and indeliberate
 Oath, and especially the habit of wanton
 Swearing in common conversation, falls
 very naturally within the *scope* of the pro-
 hibition contained in the text: And, ac-
 cordingly, Christ himself has expressly in-
 cluded it in the *just* and *rational* explication
 of this commandment. This alone could

Matth. v. be the intention of these words, *Swear not*
 34. *at all*, and not to represent *all* Oaths as
 absolutely *unlawful* among *Christians*; be-
 cause (to assign, at present, no *other* rea-
 sons) he himself answered upon *Oath*,

Mat. xxvi. when he was, long after the delivery of
 63, 64. this divine discourse, *adjured* by the High
 Priest. And as the vice last-mentioned (to
 the disgrace of *religion*, and the shame of
Human nature) is become an *epidemical*
 and fashionable *extravagance*, it of conse-
 quence demands a particular attention, and
 to be treated of and *condemned* more at large.

I WOULD

I WOULD therefore observe, in the SERM.
FIRST place, that it is an act of gross *im-*
piety. I take it for granted, that we *all* V.
 believe the being of a God; “because if
 “we are *Atheists*, this practice upon our
 “own principles, or rather *want* of prin-
 “ciples, will only be *impertinent*, but not
 “*impious* :” But if we are firmly con-
 vinced of the *existence* of an eternal first
 cause, who made and supports the vast
 fabric of the universe; if we are convinced
 that his *greatness* transcends all our ideas,
 that his *dominion* is immense, his *power*
 absolute and uncontrollable, his *wisdom*
 boundless and unsearchable, that *all nature*
 is subject to his controul, and subsists only
 by his invigorating influence, and that
 our own *happiness* and *misery*, nay, our
 very *being*, are entirely at his disposal: If,
 I say, we *acknowledge* these plain dictates
 of reason, we ought always to entertain
 the most *grand* and *elevated* thoughts of
 God’s supreme glory and majesty. This
 is but a decent respect to so perfect and
 exalted a character; it is no more than
 treating it with *common propriety*: Which,
 if there be any *regard* at all due to *cha-*
acters,

SERM. *raeters*, in proportion to their *dignity* and
 V. *merit* (a truth that is as plain as the *distinc-*
 tion of *colours* and *sounds*) must be a ne-
 cessary and indispensable obligation. Now
 from hence it follows, “ that whatever di-
 “ rectly tends to *lessen* that profound and
 “ humble reverence, which *all creatures*
 “ owe to the universal Creator, must be
 “ highly *criminal*,” since no more heinous
 or *unnatural* an offence can be imagined,
 than to offer indignity to that most *lovely*
 and *glorious* Being, who has a rational and
 just claim to our utmost affection and
 esteem.

AND that this is the natural tendency of
 the vice, which I am now arguing against,
 will be evident on a very little reflection.
 For it is an obvious and certain truth,
 “ that things of the greatest importance
 “ and use, by being *common* and *familiar*,
 “ grow to be *less* regarded: Things of
 “ the highest estimation, by being *mixed*
 “ with *low images*, are debased and ren-
 “ dered despicable.” If therefore we take
 the liberty to mention the sacred and ve-
 nerable *name* of God on every *frivolous*
 and *slight* occasion, it is no wonder if it
 becomes

becomes a name of very little *solemnity* and *weight* with us; or if this *rashness* and *levity* of temper settle, at length, into an *habitual disregard*. On the contrary, it would be against the *course* of nature, in *all* other cases, should it happen otherwise. A *due* reverence and veneration of God can *only* be maintained, by cultivating in our minds *a constant sense* of the infinite distance between him and us, *a sense* of his incomprehensible majesty and spotless perfection, and of our own *comparative* meanness and insignificance: But it must in the end be *quite* destroyed, if we *accustom* ourselves to imprecate his displeasure, and appeal to him without having *any meaning*, in our *loosest* and *vainest* conversations; and, in short, “take such freedoms with the Almighty Sovereign of the world, as are not justifiable towards one of our own species, unless he be unquestionably our inferior.”

BUT this is not all: For this *corrupt* and *impious* practice has not only a tendency to weaken the regards due to our Maker, but is, itself, an instance of the grossest *irreverence* and *contempt* of him.

For

SERM. For what can be a more *manifest token* of
 V. disrepect, “ than to use that tremendous
 “ *name*, which all the hosts of heaven,
 “ beings of the highest order of intelli-
 “ gence, *adore* and *venerate*, to *embellish*
 “ idle discourse, and give an *air* and *co-*
 “ *lour* to our impertinence?” What a
 daring affront is it to the immaculate *pu-*
rity of God, to invoke him in the very
 scenes of our *lewdness* and *debauchery*? Or
 how, almost, is it possible for us to express
 a more *diminutive* opinion of his wisdom,
 justice, and veracity, than by appealing
 to him as a witness to the truth of *known*
 and *deliberate falsehood*? “ If this be not
 “ done in a court of *judicature*, it still
 “ retains the nature of *Perjury*, though
 “ the effects, *as to the public*, may not
 “ be the same. If it be done for our
 “ *amusement* and *diversion* only, without
 “ any intention to *hurt* our neighbour,
 “ even then the very *best* that can be said
 “ for us is, that we make a *jest* of God,
 “ and introduce him as *the principal cha-*
 “ *raeter* in a *farce*; and that we treat his
 “ displeasure, as a thing that may be
 “ *sported* with, *who* can make both hea-
 “ ven

“ven and earth to tremble.” But surely SERM.
 this ought not to be allowed, if there be V.
 any moral *order*, any *fitness* or *propriety* of
 conduct, any *connection* between just
 action, and the nature of things; for it is
 directly contrary to *all these*: It must,
 therefore, if there be any universal *rule*,
 any *standard* at all, by which to judge of
 good and evil, be in itself absolutely, and
always, immoral; and an act of *plain* and
flagrant immorality. And one might rea-
 sonably expect that it would shock the
 temper of a man (*retaining* only general
 notions of *decency*, and but *slightly* influ-
 enced by motives of *religion*) to think,
 that he has *abused* the *greatest name* in
 the universe, and the name of one to
 whom he is under *infinite obligations*,
 with such insufferable *wantonness* and *in-
 solence*.

BUT besides the *impiety* of *Swearing*
 by the name of God in our *common* dis-
 course, and on the most *trivial* occasions,
 it is likewise, in its *consequences*, very de-
 trimental to *society*. This follows in part
 from what has been already said: “For
 “ a strict regard to the *authority* of God,
 “ and

SERM. “ and *an awe* of his supreme grandeur

V. “ and dominion, *inforces* the observation
 “ of Human laws: Whatever, therefore,
 “ *lessens* this regard, must *proportionably*
 “ *weaken* the strength, and *reduce* the
 “ flourishing state of societies, by taking
 “ away one great *security* of the *civil*
 “ *rights* of mankind.”

BUT the point which I shall principally illustrate, in order to prove this beyond all contradiction, is, that the vice, which I am now exposing, has a visible tendency to *impair*, and by a gradual process quite *extinguish*, our *sense* of the sacredness and inviolable obligation of an *Oath*; with which the support of *government*, the quiet enjoyment of *property*, and the most valuable branches of *social happiness*, are inseparably connected. It is impossible, that while we allow ourselves to *trifle* with *Oaths* in the general course of our behaviour, we should respect them, considered in their own nature, as matters of *any great importance*; or that if we looked upon them as holy ties, and inviolable, we should make it *our practice* to swear to what we never intended

tended to perform, or to the truth of what we knew to be false. The necessary tendency of such a rash proceeding is to render Oaths *cheap* and *contemptible*, by *diminishing* the awe of God as our impartial judge, and the severe avenger of deceit and prevarication. And if we consider the matter thoroughly and seriously, I am perswaded we shall be able to assign no good reason, “ why a person, who has “ *habituated* himself to *vain* Swearing, “ should not, on a *strong motive* of private interest, proceed to *deliberate false* “ Swearing; or why he, who makes no “ scruple to call God to witness (when he “ is only in *jest*) in *common conversation*, “ should not think it *as lawful*, when “ some very considerable *temptation* presents itself, to do *the same* in a court of “ *judicature*?” The *fear* of civil punishment, or a *tendernefs* for his neighbours rights, may perhaps have *some* weight with him; but the *religious authority* of an *Oath*, which he has been accustomed to treat as a trifling ludicrous thing, cannot be supposed, in such cases as these, to have any powerful influence: So that men

SERM.
V.
~~~~~


SERM. being entirely left to their *natural notions* of  
 V. justice, and the *restraint* of Human laws,  
 (which, if there be no *fear* of a supreme Governour and Judge, will be too easily overborn by a prospect of unlawful gain) they must, of consequence, be *more prepared* for acts of *Perjury*: “ Which could  
 “ not have abounded so much amongst  
 “ us, if the *solemnity* of an Oath had  
 “ been carefully maintained, and not pro-  
 “ stituted and debased by *vulgar use*.”  
 And nothing more can be necessary to prove the *heinousness* of *this vice*, than the having clearly shewn that it leads to the commission of *another crime*, which renders the *security* of government, the *allegiance* due to princes, and the *possessions, characters, and lives* of their subjects, quite uncertain and precarious.

AND now, upon weighing the matter calmly, every one would imagine, that, to induce men to commit a crime of so *foul* an aspect to all who are not seasoned and hardened to the practice of it, there must be some very considerable *temptation*: And nothing can be more surprising than to find, “ that there is neither a *peculiar*  
 “ founda-

“ foundation for it in *nature*, or the de- SERM.  
 “ *sire* of *sensitive* gratification, or an irre- V.  
 “ gular private *interest*; but that 'tis mere  
 “ *unaccountable* extravagance, supported  
 “ by *custom* against *religion*, *sense*, and de-  
 “ *centy*. The *proud* or *passionate* may plead  
 “ a *propensity*, or *particular bias*s in their  
 “ complexion, to the vices which they  
 “ respectively indulge; but this vice springs  
 “ from no *constitutional instinct*; it is en-  
 “ tirely of *foreign extract*, the product of  
 “ *vanity* and *impertinence*.” If natural  
*heat* and *impetuosity* of temper be assigned  
 as the source of it: I answer, “ that there  
 “ are many *other ways* of venting excessive  
 “ passion equally *terrible*, and withal more  
 “ *adapted* to the nature of it; so that it  
 “ is only the *force* of *habit* that has di-  
 “ rected it into this channel, which men  
 “ would never have *thought of*, if they  
 “ had not *before* discarded all reverence of  
 “ God, and concern about religion.” Be-  
 sides, there can be no peculiar satisfaction,  
 but to a *prophane vitiated* fancy, in the  
*words* that compose an oath, nor in those  
 of a vile *execration*. — And as for the  
*advantages*, directly resulting from this

SERM. vice, what are they? Why, it renders a  
 V. man's character *suspected*, and frequently  
 lessens the *confidence* that would otherwise  
 be reposed in him; "scarce any are so  
 " thoroughly degenerate, as really to *esteem*  
 " him for it, but many *despise* him." So  
 that it is very astonishing that this *odd*  
 custom, the *folly* of which is equal to its  
*wickedness*, should even make its way in the  
 world, and much more that it should be-  
 come a *fashion*, and an infection which has  
 spread itself amongst all *degrees* and *orders*  
 of men, "since it is neither *reason* nor  
 " *ornament* in discourse, neither an argu-  
 " ment of *wit* or *gallantry*, and has nor  
 " *pleasure* nor *profit* attending it, nor any  
 " *original passion* in Human nature direct-  
 " ly exciting and prompting to it; but,  
 " on the contrary, is a reproach to us as  
 " *men*, as *good members* of society, as *pre-*  
 " *tenders* to virtue, *unbecoming* every wor-  
 " thy and honourable character we can  
 " form an idea of, and, in short, is one  
 " of the most *senseless*, *unnatural*, and *use-*  
 " *less* vices that was ever invented. Most  
 " *strange* indeed it is, that a man should  
 " be so *industriously* wicked; and run all  
 " the




“ the *hazard* of it to his immortal soul  
 “ hereafter, only to make *his conver-* SERM.  
 “ *sation ridiculous.*” V.  


AGAIN, common *Swearing*, and vain prophane *Curfing*, are *mean low* vices, that justly expose the offender to contempt. They “ require *no talents* in order to make “ a proficiency in them, but may be “ practised, in their utmost *extent* of im- “ piety and guilt, where there are the “ most *despicable* natural abilities, and *no* “ improvements of art. They are vices “ in which the *meanest* of the people ri- “ val the *greatest*; so that there is no *di-* “ *stinction* in them, they do not shew a “ man’s *rank*, not set him at all in a *con-* “ *spicuous* and *singular* point of view. And “ finally, they are *rude unmannerly* vices.” For all the rules of *civility* and *genteel be-* *haviour* are strong against a practice, which is esteemed *infamous* by some in almost all companies that we frequent. Men of true piety universally *protest* against it; “ and “ what reason is there, that they should “ be *liable* to receive perpetual insults from “ *rakes* and *libertines*?” It is undeniably a *clownish* behaviour (let the *external rank*

SERM. and *empty title* of the *blasphemer* be what

V. it will, it is still the behaviour of a *clown*,  
 (completely ill-bred) to treat with a contemptuous familiarity the *greatest* and *best* of Beings, in the presence of *any* who have a high veneration of him. Every one would naturally *resent* what he thought to be an indignity offered to his *father* or *friend*; and it must give, at least, equal *uneasiness* to a *virtuous* mind, to hear the *Father* of the rational universe, and his constant benefactor, treated disrespectfully: Upon which account such a conduct must be absolutely *savage*, and *inconsistent* with all just notions of *politeness*. “ All which  
 “ considerations, I would hope, may incline persons of any *refinement*, and of  
 “ generous tempers, to *reform* their conversation in this particular; even though  
 “ they have not (which were infinitely more to be desired) so much *religion*,  
 “ as to be restrained by a reverence of  
 “ God, and a dread of his displeasure.”

AND now having largely proved the unreasonableness, *infamy*, and evil consequences of *rash* and *customary* Swearing,  
 and

and imprecating the vengeance of the SERM.  
 Almighty either upon ourselves or others V.  
 (both which fall very naturally within the   
 prohibition contained in the third com-  
 mandment, of *taking the name of the LORD*  
*our God in vain*) I shall conclude this  
 part of my discourse with examining, brief-  
 ly, the weight of the several excuses which  
 are made for these *scandalous* and *horrid*  
 vices. And here I shall not insist on that  
*poor* plea, that they are an imbellishment  
 and grace to our discourse; because it is  
*so plain* “ that *Oaths* and *Curses* are gene-  
 “ rally mere blustering *expletives*, which  
 “ disturb the sense of a conversation, and  
 “ render it harsh and ungrateful; that  
 “ they who look upon them to be real  
 “ *ornaments* must be *incorrigible in their*  
 “ *stupidity*, and are not *fit to be reasoned*  
 “ *with.*” It is sufficient, likewise, just  
 to mention another excuse equally *absurd*  
 and *frivolous*, viz. that they serve to fill  
 up *blank spaces*, and so are a *help* to the  
 weakness of the speaker’s understanding,  
 and *supply*, in some measure, the poverty  
 of his invention: “ For why should per-  
 “ sons, who have no inward furniture,


SERM. “ affect to be *talkers*, when *nature* has directed them to be *silent*? And how monstrous is it, to offer this in vindication of a *flagrant* act of *impiety*, that it was necessary to enable some men to converse to no purpose, and utter their crude, trite, and indigested notions that are of no service to the world, but ought rather, in wisdom, to have been altogether *suppressed*?” Nor will it be necessary to enlarge much more on the pretence, that these vices shew *courage* and height of *spirit*; because that is best discovered by *brave* and *generous* actions: “ And it certainly argues *want* of *resolution*, a *timid*, *slavish*, *impotent* mind,” to be prevailed upon to condescend to *sinful* compliances, either to please *particular companies*, give ourselves *fashionable airs*, or serve any purposes of vanity, popularity, or secular *interest*. No man demonstrates such *true* courage, as he that *despises* all usages, however *authoritative*, and universally *prevailing*, which oppose *religion* and *common sense*. Such a one has not only *singular merit* in himself, but will probably be respected and honoured

ed even by those, who are too *base* and *poor-spirited* to imitate his noble example: SERM.  
V.

And to urge *custom*, against points of *morality*, is to set up the follies and extravagancies of men, against the infinite wisdom of God, and the immutable laws of nature. Should the licentious and prophane person plead, farther, *sudden* and *violent* passion *transporting* him beyond the due command of himself; or else *strength of habit*; neither will be a particular excuse for *these*, more than for *any other* immoralities.

Let us therefore apply it to other crimes that have a more *startling sound*, and are branded with more *universal infamy*:  
 “ Let the *adulterer*, for instance, and the  
 “ *murderer* plead, the one the *irresistible*  
 “ force of *hasty* rage and passion, the other  
 “ the *over-bearing* influence of *imperious*  
 “ habits, it will be immediately replied  
 “ to *each*: It was thy *duty* to have *cured*  
 “ these excesses of passion, to have *reformed*  
 “ *ed* these irregular and mischievous ha-  
 “ bits; and to urge *habit* in mitigation  
 “ of a bad action is making use of that  
 “ very circumstance, which is an *aggra-*  
 “ *vation* of thy guilt, as an *argument* to  
 “ extenuate

SERM. “extenuate and soften it.” Again, if such  
 V. impious offenders urge in their excuse,  
 ~~~~~ that they *intended nothing* by their impie-  
 ties; is it not a shame that the *awful name*
 of God, that comprehends in it the *highest*
 and most *important sense*, should be used
without a meaning? Besides, we are now
 talking of the *nature* of things, of the
moral good or *evil* of actions; which are
 determined by *fixed invariable* rules. And
 if there be, in nature, a *necessary difference*
 between virtue and vice, an action may be
 never the *less* wicked and disgraceful, because
 men have *no* design in it. “A *persecutor*,
 “and other criminals of an *enormous* size,
 “may go beyond *meaning nothing*; they
 “may *intend well* the promotion of God’s
 “honour, and the establishment of what
 “they think to be truth; and yet their
 “conduct may not only be repugnant to
 “principles of *religion*, but abhorrent to
 “*common humanity*.” Should it be said,
 in the last place, which, I know, is ap-
 prehended to be the most *popular* and the
shrewdest plea of all, that what I am now
 arguing against is sometimes *necessary* to
manage tempers, that by *mild* and *gentle*
 speeches

speeches are ungovernable: I answer, SERM.
 “ that this never does, nor *can* happen, but V.
 “ when we are so *addicted* to Blasphemy, 
 “ that without a volley of *Oaths* and vile
 “ *Imprecations* we are not believed to be
 “ *in earnest?*” Let it be once *known* (and
 surely it may be discovered by many other
 methods perfectly *innocent*) that we have
resolution enough to support our *authority*,
 and the *regard* due to our respective cha-
 racters; and this vice will be as *unnecessa-*
ry and *useless*, as it is *diskonourable* to God,
 and *offensive* to a sober mind. Nay, it is
 not unlikely that we shall be more ob-
 served and attended to; and that not from
terror, but from a *real respect*: Which, as
 bad as the world is, it is generally inclined
 to pay to *temperate* passions, sobriety, and
 an unaffected virtue. Besides, for want
 of such boisterous, domineering, *savage*
discourse, we shall never miss of a *proper*
regard, but on, comparatively, *trifling*
 occasions; not in the great and important
 offices of life: And surely, it cannot be
 worth the while, in order to be served
 more *expeditiously* in our *pleasures* and gay
luxurious entertainments (which, to cen-
 sure

SERM. sure with unexceptionable modesty, are
 V. of very small moment, and rebound but
 little either to our *honour* or *advantage* :)
 It cannot, I say, be worth the while, for
 so *low* an end, to indulge a practice that
 bids defiance to the Almighty, leads to
 pernicious consequences with respect to
 society, and is, on all accounts, absolutely
indefensible. By the whole of what has
 been offered, I hope it has been unanswer-
 ably demonstrated, that the particular cha-
 racter which I have endeavoured to ex-
 pose, only by representing it in its true
 colours, “ cannot be reconciled to that of
 “ a *reasonable* or *honourable*, because not
 “ of a good *moral*, man.” I need not
 attempt to prove, since the words of our
 blessed Saviour above referred to are, as to
 this point, most express and decisive, that
 it is utterly inconsistent with the character
 of a *Christian*; “ as inconsistent as *Chri-*
 “ *stian* and *Intemperate*, *Christian* and *Re-*
 “ *vengeful*, though there may be a diffe-
 “ rence in the *nature* of the crimes.” —
 So that if we would make our *profession*
 of *Christianity* correspondent with itself,
 if we reverence the voice of *reason* and of
 the

the *moral law*, if we desire to be univer- SERM.
sally agreeable, and study *affability* and V.
complaisance to mankind, we shall not al-
low ourselves, in our common conversa-
tion, to *take the name of the LORD our*
God in vain; against which all *manly, ho-*
nourable, virtuous, and christian principles
do loudly, and with united force, remon-
strate.

IN the LAST place, All *Blasphemies*, all
degrading and *irreverent* speeches concern-
ing the *Deity*, must, by a general parity
of reason, be *forbidden* by the third com-
mandment: "I say *irreverent* speeches,
" because it is essential to the idea of *Blas-*
" *phemy* as a *crime*, that it be, in the *in-*
" *tention* of the speaker, dishonourable and
" reproachful to God. "For, otherwise,
we may *all* be included under the *character*
of *Blasphemers*: Since there is no man,
who has any *erroneous conceptions* with re-
spect to the supreme Being, *i. e.* absolutely
no man at all, but who, if he commu-
nicates his *ideas* in *words*, must incur all
the *guilt* and *punishment* of *Blasphemy*,
if

SERM. if *mere speculations* be sufficient to con-

V. stitute that guilt. “ And since this way
 “ of thinking will condemn *all mankind*,
 “ however innocent and virtuous, and
 “ sincerely *reverent* of God, this is a
 “ demonstration that so severe a censure,
 “ for matters of *opinion* only, is to the
 “ last degree *absurd* and *unjustifiable* ;
 “ and may be *retorted* by opposite par-
 “ ties without end, to the extirpation of
 “ *charity*, and the scandal of *religion*.”

But if any through *pride*, *discontent*, and
stubbornness of temper, if any from a
 disposition of mind *averse* to virtue, set
 themselves to *derogate* from the perfections
 of God, and to *revile* and *calumniate* his
 providencê ; this, in the most gentle and
 favourable construction, is very *criminal*
 Blasphemy, “ the proper subject of a *mo-*
 “ *ral law*, and fitly *cognisable* at the
 “ tribunal of infinite wisdom and ju-
 “ stice.”

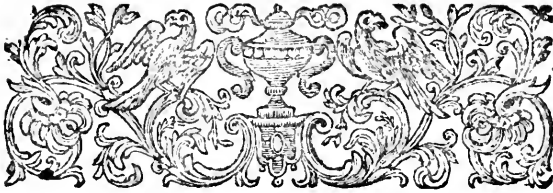
NOTHING now remains to be briefly
 spoken to but the *reason*, by which we
 are deterred from a violation of this sa-
 cred law, expressed in these words ; *The*

LORD

LORD will not hold him guiltless, that taketh SERM.
 his name in vain. The phrase here used V.
 was not intended to denote a *softening*,
 but rather, perhaps, an *aggravation* of
 the punishment. For it may amount to
 exactly the same, as if we were to say
 of any *notorious* offender, “That he shall
 “not escape unpunished;” which, in the
 general opinion of mankind, would come
 up to a direct affirmation, “That he,
 “*especially*, shall not escape unpunished.”
 And it appears from what has been so
 largely said, concerning the *malignity* of
 the crimes here referred to, that this is
 not a mere arbitrary constitution, but
 founded in *wisdom*, and solid principles
 of *equity*: For the crimes themselves are
heinous infringements of the law of rea-
 son, and of most *destructive tendency*; and
 therefore require, from the Sovereign Judge
 and Dispenser of Right, a *peculiar* and
exemplary retribution. — I shall only add,
 by way of conclusion, what this com-
 mandment supposes as the *basis* and *foun-*
dation of it, *viz.* “That we endeavour
 “to *improve*, and *raise* to the highest
 “pitch

SERM. “ pitch of *reverence* and *honour*, our ideas
V. “ of *all* the *attributes*, and especially of
“ the *moral excellencies*, and *government*
“ of God: Which will not only be an
“ effectual *check* to the impieties therein
“ prohibited, but a constant *preparative*
“ for all the duties and offices of reli-
“ gion.”





S E R M O N VI.



Of exemplary and shining Characters of Virtue.

M A T T. V. 16.

*Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good
works; and glorify your Father
who is in heaven.*



IN the fourteenth verse of S E R M. VI. this chapter, our Saviour tells his disciples, that they were *the light of the world.* This was *eminently* true of the Apostles (and in general of the Christians at that time) who were *called*, by

SERM. manifestations of an *extraordinary* providence, to be bright examples of a rational
 VI. Piety and universal Virtue in the midst
 of a degenerate age; and to *dispel* those
dark clouds of ignorance and superstition,
 with which the whole world was over-
 spread. And it is in pursuance of the
 same metaphor, that *Religion* and *Virtue*
 are, in the text, represented under the
 name of *light*; because they will abide
 the *test* of reason, and bear the most *ac-*
curate and *severe* examination: Whereas,
 vice and impunity of all kinds are things
 so *foul* and *unnatural*, that they are *ashamed*
 of being *discovered*, and of having their
 deformity *exposed* to public view. I shall
 only add farther, by way of introduction,
 that the sense of our Lord's exhortation is
 plainly this: " That the professors of his
 " Religion should endeavour, by a *well-*
 " *conducted* course of life, and an *exem-*
 " *plary strictness* of manners, to charm
 " the world to a *love* of piety and true
 " goodness, and give them *amiable* no-
 " tions of Christianity, and a strong sense
 " of the *wisdom*, and *gracious providence*,
 " of

“ of God in its design and constitution.” SERM.
In discoursing from these words VI.

I SHALL, in the FIRST place, consider what sort of an example it is, that is likely to have such a prevailing *influence* as to excite others to an *imitation* of it, and thereby to *glorify* God.

SECONDLY, Inquire into the *reasons*, why it may justly be presumed, that *good* examples will have so much *weight* and *efficacy*. And

THIRDLY, Shew more particularly how the cause of *Christianity* is *honoured*, and receives great *strength* and *support* by the exemplary *Piety* and *Virtue* of its professors: And that, without this, all our *ingenuity*, *application*, and *zeal*, will scarce be sufficient to maintain a becoming *esteem* and *veneration* of it in the world.

FIRST, I am to consider what sort of an example it is, that is likely to have such a prevailing *influence* as to excite others to an *imitation* of it, and thereby

SERM. to glorify God. — It must be an example of what is *really* virtuous and praise-worthy: — It is necessary that it be *uniform*, and extend to *all* the branches of true goodness: — That it be *easy* and *natural*, free from all appearances of *affectation* and *constraint*: — And that it be especially eminent for *those* Virtues which have a peculiar *dignity* and *beauty* attending them, and are the most *bright* and *shining* parts even of a good man's character. I shall speak somewhat distinctly, but briefly, to each of these.


VI.

AND, as the *first* and *chief* foundation of its *influence*, it must be an example of what is *really* virtuous and praise-worthy. Religion is in itself so amiable, so agreeable to all the principles of reason, and of such evident advantage to mankind, that no *plausible* objection can be made to it, when it appears in its native simplicity and purity. The principle of *conscience*, which is so universal and deeply rooted in Human nature, bears an *immediate* testimony to its truth and excellence. Its *voice* is so clear, distinct, and strong, that it will not be easily silenced

silenced by *sophistical subtilties*: And it seldom happens, that it can be quite drowned even by that, which, above all other things, darkens the understanding, and destroys the inward sense of good and evil, a course of *sensuality* and *intemperance*. Arguments *directly* levelled against the grand obligations of Virtue, instead of meeting with a ready reception, *offend* and *shock* the mind, and create a general *dislike* and *horror*; and have had this effect, not only among the *weak* and *superstitious*, but with persons of most distinguished abilities, and the most impartial inquirers into nature and the reason of things, in all ages. — “ So powerful an *advocate*, has
“ the gracious Creator and Father of the
“ universe provided in every man’s breast,
“ for what is *immutably* the supreme per-
“ fection and happiness of all intelligent
“ beings: And so great is the *force*, so
“ uncontroulable the *authority*, of pure
“ and undefiled religion.”

BUT when other things are *mixed* with it, either quite *foreign* from its true nature and design, or plainly *inconsistent* with its genuine and most important principles, its

SERM. beauty is obscured and defaced, and, for
 VI. the sake of these *corrupt additions*, prejudices are entertained against religion itself. And it is natural to fear, that such errors and blemishes will raise a *higher disgust*, when they appear in *real life*, in a *pretended pattern* of piety; in proportion as *example* exposes things in a stronger light than any mere *description*, which is comparatively *faint* and *languid*.
 “ An example of religion, therefore, that
 “ is proposed to *strike* the world around
 “ us, and engage their *imitation*, must be
 “ *discreetly* and *judiciously* conducted: It
 “ must proceed on a *right* general scheme
 “ of religion in *all* its branches: It must
 “ represent *nothing* as an *essential* part of
 “ it, but what has a *sure* foundation in
 “ reason or revelation: It must not ex-
 “ press an *equal* regard to things of a low
 “ and trifling nature, which have *no con-*
 “ *nection* with real Virtue and the good
 “ of mankind, as to the just government
 “ of the passions, and the indispensable
 “ offices of piety, justice, and mercy: It
 “ must neither be rendered *frightful* by
 “ unnecessary rigors, nor *extravagant* by
 “ high

“ high flights of enthusiasm, nor be de- SERM.
 “ based by superstition: In a word, it VI.
 “ must be an example that a *wise* man, 
 “ upon *reflection*, may approve of and
 “ imitate.” If we would comply with
 our Saviour’s exhortation, and thereby do
 honour to religion, we must conduct our
 selves so, that men may see our *good* works ;
 “ works that will *recommend themselves* by
 “ their intrinsic fitness, either as *aëts* of
 “ obedience to God, or as they are *agrecable*
 “ to the *frame* of Human nature, and *per-*
 “ *fective* of its, *faculties* ; and not *offend*
 “ and *harden* them, in a *contempt* of all
 “ religion, by our follies and excesses.”

SUFFER me to illustrate this matter
 farther by an instance or two, which will
 naturally lead to a true judgment in all
 other cases. The things I choose to men-
 tion, particularly, are *zeal* and *mortifica-*
tion. — When we see a man express
 a becoming concern for the great *truths*
 and *duties* of religion, which are of the
 utmost importance to the *present* and *fu-*
ture happiness of himself and all his fel-
 low-creatures ; when he is earnest to pro-
 pagate *worthy* and *honourable* apprehen-

SERM. VI. fions of God, and an imitation of his moral excellencies, and sets himself to oppose, by all *rational* methods, the progress of licentiousness and vice; when he shews a *principal* regard to the practice of immutable useful Virtues, and inculcates *right speculations*, and *ritual religion*, only in *subordination* to this nobler end, and is much more desirous that *true goodness* should universally prevail, than *scholastick niceties* and *party-distinctions*; when his zeal is *enlightened* and *temperate*, *cherishing*, and not *expelling*, mercy, and has no *other* effect upon him than to put him upon employing all his abilities and advantages for promoting truth and piety, and makes him undaunted and inflexible, under the bitterest reproaches and sufferings, in what he *apprehends* to be the cause of God, and of most extensive and lasting benefit to *mankind*: “ There is
 “ nothing in *all* this but what *reason must*
 “ approve, nothing *weak* and *extrava-*
 “ *gant*, nothing more than a *generous*
 “ warmth and constancy of resolution,
 “ that the *nature* of the thing itself re-
 “ quires; it is an example of *greatness* of
 “ mind




“ mind and an *enlarged* sense of things,
 “ of *gratitude* to God, and *benevolence* to
 “ men, that commands veneration and
 “ respect. Any thing *short* of this would
 “ argue *meanness* and *baseness* of spirit :
 “ It would be *stupidity* to be *indifferent*
 “ about a thing of such vast importance ;
 “ and to sacrifice the glorious cause of
 “ Truth and Virtue, for any considera-
 “ tions of *private* ease and interest, is
 “ most *despicable cowardice*.” — But, on
 the contrary, if this noble principle be
 suffered to run to an *excess*, instead of be-
 ing a *credit* and *support* to religion, it
 becomes of infinite *disservice* to it. If our
 zeal be wholly laid out on *trifles* beneath
 the *dignity* of religion ; on advancing
 schemes of *spiritual tyranny* ; on abstruse
incomprehensible points, and outward *forms*
 and *ceremonies*, more than on purity of
 heart and righteousness of life ; if it makes
 us fiery and impatient of contradiction,
 rude and insulting, and puts us upon treat-
 ing those who differ from us with *contempt*
 and *cruelty* ; “ such an example, so con-
 “ trary to every rule of justice and hu-
 “ manity, cannot fail of giving offence
 “ to

SERM. “to wise and considerate men, and af-
 VI. fords, indeed, a shrewd suspicion, that
 ~~~~~ “our religion is little less than *artifice* and  
 “*self-interest*.”

THE same general reasoning may be applied to the other instance, that of *mortification*. — To keep all the passions *calm* and *regular*, and avoid the *excesses* of unlawful pleasure, which *debase* Human nature, and necessarily introduce *confusion* and *misery*; to check and controul all *tendencies* to vice, and maintain constantly a *refined* sense of things, and a *relish* for *moral* enjoyments; in short, to sacrifice *present temporary* good, and the most *alluring* prospects of honour and carnal gratification, to the duty we owe to God, and the sacred dictates of conscience: This, which is the *only mortification* that religion requires, forms so excellent and worthy a character, as must engage universal *esteem* and *admiration*. But it will have quite another effect, when it is made to consist in *gloominess* and *solitude*, in *extirpating* the passions, and offering a perpetual *violence* to nature by restraining innocent desires, in *unreasonable* penances, *affected*

affected severities, and a reserved morose behaviour: For this, besides the folly of it, represents religion as an object of terror, discourages and damps the resolution of those who are well-disposed, and hardens the vicious. “ In these, and every other case of a like kind, where principles are carried to an extreme, and thereby become blemishes and imperfections, and things absolutely distinct from true Piety and Virtue, things hurtful, and quite repugnant, to it, are mixed and blended with it; even what is praiseworthy in an example is likely to be overlooked, and generally loses its weight and efficacy. Such examples indeed are, upon the whole, not fit to be imitated: It would neither be for the honour of God, nor for the good of mankind.”

AGAIN, the example that is likely to have such a prevailing influence as to excite others to an imitation of it, and thereby to glorify God, must be uniform, and extend to all the branches of true goodness. — It must be steady and consistent: For how can that man expect to have any regard paid to him, who appears to have

SERM. *no* principles of conduct, *no* settled rule of his actions; and whose life is a perpetual contradiction to *reason* and to *itself*?  
 VI.  The rules of *Virtue*, of *Piety*, *Justice*, and *Benevolence*, of *Temperance* and *Chastity*, are eternal and invariable; and, for that reason, ought to be *inflexibly* adhered to in all circumstances. If therefore we practise these duties only at certain *intervals*, and at *other* times are proud, censorious, uncharitable, or give a loose to sensuality, such a character is *contemptible* and *monstrous*. The same may be said, if we exemplify in our behaviour only *some* *Virtues*, and neglect *others* equally necessary and indispensable — We cannot be supposed to act, even in those instances in which our conduct *seems* to be unblameable, either from a regard to the *reason* of things, or to the *authority* of our Maker — Our goodness will be looked upon as *constitutional* only, or as the effect of *fancy* and *humour* — Our *fickleness* and *inconstancy* will make the weak and unthinking judge *lightly* of religion, and be urged by its professed enemies as *a proof*, that it is a capricious wanton



wanton thing, which has no certain foundation to support it. — Nay, an example so *partial* may have this mischievous effect, that even a man's *vices* being excused and softened, either out of deference to his *judgment*, or for the sake of his *good qualities*, they may become much more *infectious*, and of consequence much more *dangerous*, than those of the most thoroughly profligate and abandoned *libertine*.

SERM.  
VI.



THIRDLY, It is absolutely necessary that a good example, which is proposed for *imitation*, be *easy* and *natural*, free from all appearances of *affectation* and *constraint*. There are *proper seasons* for every duty; and when they fall in naturally, as *occasions* and *circumstances* require, this is the true *order* and *decorum* of a virtuous life; and an evident proof that we are religious from *principle*, and *right* inward dispositions. But if by an *over-acted* zeal and formality, if by being industrious to *display* our good works to public view, we give the world around us reason to believe that we are only *playing* a part; it is not to be imagined that they will *follow* our example,

SERM. example, any farther than their own *inclination* or *interest* direct. It is not to be expected that our example can have any solid weight, if we ourselves appear not to be *in earnest*; or the influence it will have can only be this, to engage others to practise the same *deceit* and *hypocrisy*: But it is much more probable that it will be attended with this *very bad* consequence, to make them regard religion itself as *all affectation*. And if our religion sits *uneasy* upon us, and is clearly perceived not to be the *free* service of *liberal* and *ingenuous* spirits, but the drudgery of *slaves* extorted from them by terror; this must of necessity strengthen that *common* and most *fatal* prejudice against the practice of it, *viz.* That it is a grievous imposition and *burden* upon Human nature, and inconsistent with true *liberty* and *happiness*. — Let your religion then be *cheerful*; between the two extremes of *sourness* on the one hand, and a thoughtless unbecoming *levity* on the other. Enjoy the blessings of providence with an easy thankful mind, and scruple not to *use*, within the bounds of innocence

cence and moderation, those conveniences and agreeable accommodations, which God, in his infinite goodness, hath afforded for the *delight* of Human life. For the *joyful worshipper*, who has a lively and grateful sense of God's munificence, must discharge his duty in a much more acceptable manner, than he that presumes to worship him with a *peevish* and *fretful* mind. And he will find, likewise, that he is much *better disposed* to perform kind offices to the rest of mankind, than he could possibly be, if he gave himself up to *sullenness* and *discontent*. A thoroughly virtuous man may not, indeed, have it *always* in his power to dispel an habitual *gloom*, or divert those *fears* and *despondencies*, which are the weakness and unhappiness of his constitution. "But yet, all must allow, that these are not the *natural attire* and *garb* of Virtue; they *disguise* and *veil* her excellence: And if she be really amiable, beneficent, and *Divine*, she ought to have some *brighter* distinction, and to appear in a more agreeable and *engaging* form." It must, therefore,

SERM.

VI.

SERM. fore, be the unquestionable duty of all  
 VI. the truly good, *to endeavour at least*, to  
 banish, from their *religious* manners, both  
 the solemnity and *ungraceful* stiffness of the  
*Pharisee*, and those *recluse, unsociable, de-*  
*jected* airs, which have been introduced  
 by *splenetic* and *frighted* Enthusiasts: For,  
 while these are continued, piety is quite  
 stripped of *its own proper* ornaments,  
 “ and assumes the *habit of craft, vice,*  
 “ and *ill-nature.*”

FINALLY, In order to give a good  
 example its *due* efficacy, it should be es-  
 pecially eminent for those Virtues, which  
 have a peculiar *nobleness* and *beauty* at-  
 tending them; and are the most distin-  
 guished and *shining* parts even of a *good*  
 man's character:—For a firm *integrity*,  
 that no temptations can corrupt;—for a  
 disinterested *generosity* and universal *good-*  
*will* to mankind;—for a temper of *sym-*  
*patky* and *friendship*, of *gentleness* and *con-*  
*descension*; and, to enumerate no more par-  
 ticulars, for *modesty* (in opposition to osten-  
 tation and arrogance) which, while it *de-*  
*clines* and seems least *fond* of applause, is  
 generally most *sure* of obtaining it; and  
 the


the *easy unaffected* charms of an humble SERM.  
 deportment, which strike and captivate VI.  
 every beholder. There is a certain *agree-*  
*able* manner, inseparable from true humi-  
 lity, which makes the most *indifferent*  
 actions tolerable at least, if not graceful;  
 whereas there is in the contrary conduct,  
 for the most part, a stiffness, insolence,  
 and rudeness, that renders even the *best*  
 offensive.

I NOW proceed to inquire, in the SE-  
 COND place, into the *reasons*, why it may  
 justly be presumed, that a good example  
 will have so much weight and influence:  
 — And, *First*, It shews to all mankind  
 that the duties of religion are *practicable*;  
 and therefore may justly be required by a  
 wise and merciful Governour. Men of  
 sensual inclinations, and who have con-  
 tracted habits of vice, are apt to enter-  
 tain a very *formidable* notion of the rules  
 of Virtue; as if they were too *refined* for  
 this imperfect state of things, and *above*  
 the present debilitated powers of Human  
 nature: And, was this objection *true*, it  
 would strike at the very root of all religion

SERM. and morality. But when we see *living*

VI. *examples* of a sublime piety, and regular self-government, of benevolence improved to a god-like pitch, of firmness and constancy under the forest trials, this immediately removes all such *discouraging* impressions; and affords an undeniable *demonstration*, suited to all capacities, that God has required nothing of us but what we have a *sufficient ability* to perform. And it is very obvious, what a *natural* foundation this is of a virtuous life: For when it is once proved that our duty is *possible*, its visible tendency, in every part of it, to exalt and perfect Human nature, to promote private happiness and the general good of the world, will be a sufficient argument of its truth and excellence, and universal obligation; and leave us utterly *inexcusable* if we neglect it.

BUT I may go one step further than this, and suggest another consideration to shew the great *force* and *efficacy* of good examples, *viz.* “ That when we see the  
 “ greatest and noblest acts of Virtue,  
 “ and the most severe instances of self-  
 “ denial, practised with *ease* and *freedom*;  
 “ we

“ we have the clearest evidence which SERM.  
 “ any matter of *fact* is capable of, that VI.  
 “ there is not even so much *difficulty* in   
 “ religion, as wicked men especially fright  
 “ themselves with the *apprehension* of:”

— That what *difficulty* there is, is chiefly at the *first entrance* on a virtuous course; that it is *no more* than what always attends the breaking *any other* strong habits, and fixing contrary dispositions in the mind; and that after we have been, for some time, inured to exercises of piety, we shall find them much more *natural* than any vicious pursuits; and the source of more substantial and durable satisfaction.

To all which we may add, That an exact pattern of Virtue is a much better *directory*, to the generality of mankind, how to conduct themselves in regulating the passions, and in the various offices and duties of life, than their own private reflections: For though the general principles and duties of religion are very *plain*, and may easily enough be *accommodated* to particular circumstances, if men will allow some time for consideration; yet this is a thing that the greatest part of the world

SERM. are very little *used*, and strongly *disinclined*,  
 VI. to: And to this, among other causes, it is  
 undoubtedly owing, that they run into  
 so many errors and irregularities in their  
 behaviour. Whereas when they see Vir-  
 tue, in *real life*, exemplified in the mi-  
 nutest particulars, they quickly discern  
 that it is *fit* and *reasonable*, suited to their  
*own* condition, and the proper conduct for  
*them* to follow; though their indolence,  
 habitual want of reflection, or multiplicity  
 of worldly cares, might have *prevented*  
 their forming, without this help, the same  
 just and useful conclusions.

LET it be farther observed, That there  
 is a most powerful *attraction* in a good  
 example; and that both the *dignity* of  
 Virtue which commands respect, and the  
*amiable beauties* of it which render it the  
 object of esteem and admiration, are re-  
 presented in the strongest and most en-  
 gaging light. Every one, that knows Hu-  
 man nature, must be convinced, that the  
 same *great* actions, when exhibited to our  
 view in a *living example*, strike more for-  
 cibly, and make a much more lasting im-  
 pression upon the mind, than in the most  
*artful*



*artful and moving narration.* The *courage*, for instance, and *bravery* of the primitive Martyrs (who nobly endured the most grievous sufferings, and chose rather to die than to forfeit their integrity, and desert the cause of God and of his truth) operate but *faintly* when read in *history*, in comparison of what they might be expected to do on *eye-witnesses*; and are not so likely to inspire into others the same *resolution* and *magnanimity*. So that in this respect, which is very considerable, *example* has much the advantage of mere instruction and reasoning. — And, besides, many of the *general* arguments for a religious and virtuous life are therein *delineated* in the brightest colours. — We see the blessings that *temperance* procures; *health* of body, *strength* and *vigour* of mind, and in general (if compared with its contrary vice) a *long, chearful, happy* life. — In the esteem and high regard that are paid to Virtue, we see it to be the almost unanimous sense of mankind, that it is the *perfection* of Human nature, and the foundation of public *order* and *happiness*. — In the *patience* and *resignation*

SERM.  
VI.  
~~~~~

SERM. of the good man under afflictions, we
 VI. have a most convincing and lively proof
 that religion is our *surest* support under
 the calamities of life ; and affords an
 agreeable relief when *all other* comforts
 leave us, and when a consciousness of
guilt would be a dreadful aggravation of
 our misery. And, to mention no more,
 we are taught by the *serenity* and *steady*
composure of a strictly virtuous example,
 that *wisdom's* ways are *ways of pleasant-*
ness, and *all her paths peace*. — “ These
 “ things are *realised* to us, justified and
 “ confirmed by *experience* ; it is obvious
 “ to our very *senses* that they have a
 “ foundation in *nature*, and are *certain*
 “ truths :” Which must be much better
 calculated for giving complete satisfaction
 to the mind, and influencing our conduct,
 than any mere abstracted reasonings. To
 conclude this head : A bright example of
 Piety and Virtue *reproves*, and *awes* the
 dissolute manners of the prophanes and vi-
 cious, and naturally excites *shame* and *re-*
morse ; it awakens *conscience* and *sober re-*
flexion ; it stirs up a sense of *ingenuity*,
 which a long course of wickedness may
 have

have almost extinguished ; it raises a noble spirit of *emulation*, which will put men on vigorous endeavours to break through the evil habits they have contracted, and, if it be encouraged, will carry them on to a *sublime* pitch of Virtue. They will not be contented with low attainments, but aspire after *perfection* ; and be ambitious, themselves, to exhibit the *fairest pattern* of universal rectitude and beneficence. This may suffice as a short general account of the efficacious influence of a good example.

THE LAST thing proposed was to shew, more particularly, That the cause of *Christianity* is honoured, and receives great strength and support, from the *exemplary* piety and goodness of its professors. This will appear undeniably, if we consider the *reproaches* which have been thrown upon it, and the *injury* it has *actually* suffered, on account of their irregular and vicious behaviour. And indeed to *strangers*, who know nothing of the *laws* of Christianity, and the *purity* and

SERM. *strictness* of its doctrines, such a behaviour must have a very *ill* aspect, and naturally tend to inspire a *prejudice* against it. And, even among *our selves*, some of the most *common* and *popular* objections against our holy religion have their foundation *here*. The disorders of *Christians*, especially of christian *ministers*, their insatiate *ambition* and *avarice*, *pride* and unrelenting *cruelty*, their *factions*, *crafts*, and spiritual *tyranny*; these things, I say, have been set out in the most *frightful* colours in order to sully the *honour* of Christianity itself. “It is, without doubt, an argument of a “*weak* judgment or a *perverse* disposition, “to make those very disorders *objections* “against the Christian scheme, which it “so strongly and severely *condemns*.” But as this is the real state of the case, and many *are* prejudiced, though it be upon such a frivolous and shallow foundation; this calls loudly upon us, if we have any concern for the *Credit* of the Christian name, to endeavour to put a stop to these unjust reflections, by *having our conversation as becomes the gospel of Christ*. This will

will not only *silence* all cavils of this kind, SERM.
 but *dispose* men to entertain a favourable VI.
 opinion of Christianity, and examine it
 with ingenuity and candour. — “ And
 “ if the *ministers* of the gospel would
 “ drop all *party*-views, and be concerned
 “ for the interest of religion in general;
 “ if they would be *humble* and *peaceable*,
 “ and renounce all *imposing* methods and
 “ the detestable spirit of *persecution*; if,
 “ instead of *exorbitant* claims and *high-*
 “ *flown* notions of *Church*-power, they
 “ would assert and inculcate the right of
 “ *private* judgment, and exhort their
 “ hearers to an *impartial* study of the
 “ Holy Scriptures; if, instead of pro-
 “ moting *ignorance* and *superstition* to
 “ serve ambitious and selfish views, they
 “ would, in earnest, set themselves to
 “ form in mens minds *rational* senti-
 “ ments of religion, and take them off
 “ from *angry controversies*, and a zeal for
 “ *trifling pageant ceremonies*, in order to
 “ promote an universal regard to the
 “ eternal and immutable rules of *mora-*
 “ *lity*, and, instead of *lording it over*
 “ *God's*

SERM. “ *God’s heritage, would become ensamples*
 VI. “ *to the flock* — And if all the *people*
 “ would *concur* in this most desirable re-
 “ formation, being, as Christianity directs,
 “ *patterns* of purity, peace, and love, and
 “ of a generous inflexible virtue” — Then
 we might expect that our holy religion
 would *flourish*, and *triumph* over all oppo-
 sition; and that men, being disposed to
 think favourably of it by beholding the
 blessed *effects* which it produces, in thus
refining Human nature, would submit to
 the *light* and *evidence* of truth.

THERE is a great complaint in this
 day of looseness of *principles*, and of the
 growth and progress of *infidelity*. But
 what signify *mere complaints*, to what pur-
 pose are the most *pathetic declarations*,
 without inquiring into the *origin* and *root*
 of this evil, and taking the most *effectual*
methods to remedy and put a stop to it?
 — And what are they? — Why it is
 certainly a most essential point, that we
 give a *due force* to our arguments by *prac-*
tising that universal and exalted goodness,
 which our holy religion recommends.

“ Without

“ Without this, it is pretty much indif-
 “ ferent whether we our selves are *Ma-*
 “ *hometans, Heathens, Christians,* or down-
 “ right *Atheists.*” And if there is a vi-
 sible inconsistency between our *manners*
 on the one hand, and our *solemn profes-*
sions and *studied defences* on the other, the
 cause, which we espouse, must be liable
 to continual *insults.* — “ *Particular ar-*
 “ *guments* for its truth and excellence may
 “ be never *known,* or never *considered,* by
 “ the bulk of mankind ; but *public cor-*
 “ *ruptions* are easily *aggravated,* and, with
 “ a little art, worked up into *popular* and
 “ *standing* objections against it.” — Let us
 therefore recommend Christianity, not by
endless disputes about *trifles,* and the trans-
 ports of a blind ill-directed *zeal,* but by
 the *purity* of our intentions, and a *beau-*
tiful simplicity of manners ; not by treat-
 ing its *adversaries* with rudeness and seve-
 rity, but by joining *calmness* of temper to
a persuasive clearness and *strength* of rea-
 son, and by an example of unspotted and
irreproachable integrity ; that we may re-
 present it to be (as it is in itself) “ a *doc-*
 “ *trine*

SERM.
VI.



156 *Of exemplary and shining, &c.*

SERM. “ *trine according to godliness, perfective*

VI. “ *of Human nature, and adapted, in the*
“ *highest degree, to promote peace on*
“ *earth and good-will towards men.” In*
a word, let our light so shine before men,
that they may see our good works; and
glorify our Father who is in heaven.



SERMON



S E R M O N VII.



Of Slander, and Defamation.

EXODUS XX. 16.

*Thou shalt not bear false witness
against thy neighbour.*




HIS, together with the three S E R M.
preceding precepts of the VII.
decalogue, compleat one
part of the *scheme* of mo-
ral duty; as there is con-
tained in them (either more expressly, or
by an easy and natural deduction) a prohi-
bition of all the *grosser* instances of *in-*
justice, by which mankind are capable of
annoying and hurting each other. And as
the

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SERM. the four grand branches of Human *prop-*
 VII. *erty* are, *therein*, most plainly and di-
 stinctly comprehended, so are *they* placed
 in as exact an *order* as can well be devised;
 and may serve, so far as they extend, for
 a *rule*, by which to frame a regular treatise
 of *morality*. The *Sixth* Commandment
 was intended to secure the *life* of our
 neighbour; and, in a fair method and
 train of consequential reasoning, his *per-*
son too from all unjust and cruel violence:
 The *Seventh* guards the *honour* of his *house*:
 The *Eighth* all the other *external* branches
 of his property: And the next, which is
 now to be considered, his *good name* and
 character against unrighteous accusations,
 and against the *infamy* and innumerable
mischiefs, that may derive themselves from
 this *source* of *evil*.

THE words of the text might have
 been more strictly rendered, according to
 the *Hebrew* original, *Thou shalt not answer*
against thy neighbour as a false witness:
 Which seems to imply in it, that the per-
 son *witnessing* is called upon to give his
 testimony by *public authority*, and in
 some established legal court of *judicature*.

How

How then, it may be asked, came this to SERM.
 be particularly inserted among the laws of VII.
 the decalogue, when it had been *before* 
 prohibited, in the Third Commandment,
 under the head of *perjury*? — To which
 the answer is obvious, “ That as there
 “ may, in a multitude of cases, be *per-*
 “ *jury*, where there is *no testimony*, good
 “ or bad, produced concerning another;
 “ so a man may be a notorious and scan-
 “ dalous *false witness*, where *no oath* at
 “ all is required: And the *guilt* would
 “ be exactly the same, as to the single
 “ article of *corrupt and iniquitous testi-*
 “ *mony* (to which the text directly and
 “ solely relates) if publick accusations were
 “ supported and carried on, without any
 “ form of *swearing* or solemn appeal to
 “ God, upon the *bare affirmation* of the
 “ accuser.” The things therefore are in
 their nature *distinct*, and may with the
 utmost propriety be *distinctly* forbidden:
 And though these crimes were really *coinc-*
ident in the *Jewish* state, or, in other
 words, generally went *together* (as they
 do likewise in almost all modern constitu-
 tions of government) this does not in the
 least

SERM. least hinder their being of different con-
 VII. sideration in themselves, and the proper
 subject of different *laws*. And this, I ap-
 prehend, is the true solution of the pre-
 sent case. In the Third Commandment
 the *perjury* alone is condemned, as an
 act of insolent impiety, and defiance of
 God, whether it was, or was not, com-
 mitted to maintain or confirm a wrong
 and injurious *charge* against our neighbour;
 but, in the Ninth Commandment, the
 unrighteous *testimony* is the immediate and
 only thing prohibited, without any regard
 had to the offenders *swearing falsely*, or
 taking *any oath* at all. And as I have
 already sufficiently treated of the crime
 here spoken of, in the instances where
civil justice is concerned, under the head
 of perjury, and shown its pernicious conse-
 quences to society, and to mankind in ge-
 neral; I shall offer nothing farther on
 that particular branch of the subject. And
 because the iniquity *in itself* is exactly
 the same, though the *effects* may not al-
 ways be the same, whether it be practised
 in *civil courts*, or acted more at large,
 and without reserve, on the *open theatre*
 of

of the world ; the reason of the thing not only warrants, but obliges me to point out some of the *chief* instances of it, which, be they ever so *common*, ever so *fashionable*, are of most flagrant *baseness*, and beyond expression *hurtful*.

SERM.
VII.

IN the FIRST place then, we are guilty, to a very notorious and inexcuseable degree, of *bearing false witness*, when we say things, to the disparagement and prejudice of others, which we *know* to be untruths: This is most properly stiled *calumny*; “ and “ be the occasion of it ever so *plausible*, “ whether to advance our *fortune*, esta- “ blish our *character* without a *rival*, or “ even to oppress and sink an *enemy*, it “ must be branded with signal *infamy* by “ all who retain a right and clear sense of “ the difference of good and evil, because “ it is a vile *compound* of deliberate *falsi- “ hood* and *injustice*.” — Next to this, is the *raising*, or *spreading*, scandalous and injurious reports of any without *sufficient evidence*, or upon *slight* and *improbable* grounds — such as the bad word of an enemy, or of prejudiced and interested persons, who are under a *visible bias* to

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SERM. *misrepresent* their character — such, again,
 VII. are *loose imperfect* accounts picked up by
 busy-officious *tale-bearers*, who are so eager
 to get and propagate a *new* story, that
 they are easily *deceived*, and must of ne-
 cessity lose many *material* circumstances,
 and therefore ought *never* to be *credited*
 — or, to mention no more, *common re-*
port, than which nothing is more *uncer-*
tain, variable, and inconsistent with itself;
 which frequently takes its rise from an *en-*
tire mistake of persons and circumstances;
 is sometimes mere *surmise* and *invention*;
 and generally *disguises* the *little* truth, that
 happens to be the foundation of it, under
 a heap of *fabulous* additions. Of the same
 nature is all that *Defamation*, which is
 grounded on *conjecture* and *suspicion*; for
 instance, if when a man's actions are ca-
 pable both of a good and bad interpreta-
 tion, we fix on that which is the most
unfavourable, and *represent* them, with
 such an *invidious* turn, to their great dis-
 advantage — This is a high pitch of
iniquity and *inhumanity*: For if every
 one's character may be described, accord-
 ing to the *diffidence* and *gloomy suspicions*
 of

of a jealous temper, the *best* and most SERM.
unexceptionable will be treated *unmercifully*, VII.
 and must expect to fall under very *severe*
 and *hard* censure. It is therefore one part
 of the *Psalmist's* description of that hap-
 py man, *who shall abide in the tabernacle*
of the LORD, and dwell in his holy hill, that
he taketh not up a reproach against his
neighbour. And *St. Paul* assures us, that
 christian charity *thinketh no evil*, but *be-*
lieveth all things, and *hopeth all things.* To
 which it may be added, that where this
 sublime and generous principle operates in
 its true perfection, it will *fix* this as an
 eternal and indispensable *rule* — never to
 say any *reproachful* things, on the most
 warrantable and urgent occasions, even of
 those who have *deserved* the *least* from
 us, but what we are satisfied, upon *good*
grounds, are real fact, and may be *proved*
 beyond *all contradiction.*

ANOTHER thing, which may justly
 be reckoned a branch of the vice prohibi-
 ted in the text, is *Detraction*: For we are
 most evidently guilty of bearing a *corrupt*
 and *false testimony* against our neighbour,
 when we *derogate* from his *general* worth,

SERM. or endeavour to lessen the *particular* merit of his good actions. This may be *attempted* various ways; some of which are more *gross abuses*, others more *refined* and *artful* to avoid the direct *foul* appearance of envy and ill-nature. I shall briefly hint at a few of the most considerable — As when we suggest that a man's *virtues* may proceed not from *choice* or *motives* of religion, but from other principles that either *diminish* their excellence, or render them mere pieces of *artifice* and *well-acted* hypocrisy; his temperance and chastity from *natural constitution*; his devotion and piety from a *warm, lively, and enthusiastic* temper; or that the *outward form* of virtue *only* is assumed, to promote a present *secular* interest — When we confound his *good qualities* with *vices* that bear some *resemblance* of them; calling steadiness and inflexible integrity *obstinacy*, and a strict regulation of manners, and assiduity and zeal in the duties of piety, *preciseness* and *superstition* — When, to cast an aspersion on his *general* character, we *revive* the memory of *former miscarriages*, which he has sincerely repented of and long relinquished;

quished; or else, when we hear him commended, throw in his *blemishes* to shade and eclipse his merit, or allow that his conduct upon the *whole* has been praiseworthy and honourable, but shew at the same time in what parts it might still have *excelled*; and in order to *hide* our design to *detract* from his *virtues*, and *insinuate* his *defects* the more successfully, conclude all with some *general solemn* reflections upon the *imperfection* of the world, and the *frailty* of the best of men.

LET me add once more, that if we bear *false witness* against our neighbour, when we *derogate* from the *merit* of his good qualities, we must undeniably involve ourselves in the same guilt, when we *aggravate* his *faults*: — Not making *due allowances* for the universal infirmity of Human nature, and the particular unhappiness of the offender, arising from strength of *passion*, a corrupt, loose, unguarded *education*, and the *temptations* and *difficulties* with which he is surrounded; or else hiding *all* circumstances that, in a candid construction, would be thought to

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SERM. *extenuate* his guilt, and magnifying every
 VII. little point which has an *unfavourable* aspect, and tends to his *disgrace*; or, finally, denominating his *character* from one single action which is contrary to the rules of virtue and religion, and bestowing on him, for *that*, those black and odious titles, which only belong to *habits* of vice. Thus for example, if any one, in speaking of St. *Peter*, should give this *general* account of him, that he was a *liar* and an *apostate*, because he *once* denied his master, and mention nothing at all of his *repentance*, and of the sincere and inviolable regard to *truth*, which he always discovered in the remaining part of his life; or if we say of another, that he is a *sensualist* and a *libertine*, merely from *one act* of intemperance; is not this most infamous Slander, is it consistent with *candor*, or with common *equity*? — If we *strain* thus unmercifully, and allow ourselves such an *unbounded* latitude of censure, *no* reputations can be *safe*: And if the supreme almighty Judge was to *treat* his frail creatures with the *same rigour*, which they

they are so apt to *express* towards each other, *all* mankind must be cut off from the expectation and hope of *mercy*. SERM. VII.

IT may be proper to remark farther, that all these several *kinds* and *degrees* of guilt may be contracted, not only by *directly* and *openly* assaulting our neighbour's character (which is the *fairest* method of Defamation, and has, comparatively speaking, some shew of *generosity* in it, as it gives him an opportunity of *self-defence*) not only, I say, may all this guilt be contracted by direct assaults upon our neighbour's character, but by other ways that operate in the *dark*, and privately *undermine* it, and are, therefore, both more *base* and *mischievous*: Such as close *whisperings*, by which a man's reputation may be *destroyed* before he himself knows that it is *attacked*, and the scandal is much more likely to *spread*, because there is no *alarm* given, and consequently but little *precaution* taken to prevent it; such, again, as general *hints*, sufficient to *insuse* an ill opinion of others, but withal so *indistinct*, that the person, who uses this *wicked art*,

cannot have the Calumny fastened upon

SERM. VII. him, and is at liberty to *disown* it. Farther, the more *reserved* detractor executes the vile design of *blasting* his neighbour's good name, by shewing marks of *diffidence* when he hears his character mentioned with applause; expressing, indeed, a *cold faint* hope that he is a *worthy* person, and deserves respect and honour; but strongly intimating either in his *discourse*, or by a manner of *behaviour* much more significant, that he has his reasons for *doubting* of it: Which are left to be *framed, multiplied, and aggravated* by fancy and suspicion. Or else, an *exception* is made to his excellencies; he is just, but not *generous*; honest, but not *prudent*; and it is much lamented, that he has not *these* added to his other good qualities, to render him a *finished and shining* character. Add to all this, that if these *sly* methods of abuse are accompanied "with
 " a seeming air of friendship, and ten-
 " der concern for our neighbour's repu-
 " tation," they may be reckoned the most refined, exquisite, and diabolical *art* of Defamation. The *wounds* of such a friend, who, it is taken for granted, would not
 exag-

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exaggerate, nor say the *worst*, nor the *whole*, of what he knows, strike *deep*, and are, of all others, the most *incurable*.—

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VII.

I SHALL conclude this head, with just mentioning some of the different *aggravations* of the injustice and wickedness which I am now arguing against, arising from the *principles* from whence it proceeds. The *highest* pitch of guilt is, when it springs from *envy* and inveterate *malice* against our brother. The *next* to this is, when without any formal enmity, or conceived resentment, we join in defaming him, to recommend ourselves to the *favour* of those on whom we have a dependence, and to advance our own *private advantage*. The *least* criminal of all is the *unmeaning* Slanderer, who is free with the characters of others from a mere habit of *impertinence*, or to suit himself with the *genius* of the company which he frequents, or for want of *other* subjects of discourse. And yet even *this*, who is the most innocent, has a *great* proportion of guilt: For he may be altogether as *mischievous*, and do the same fatal *execution*, as a deliberate offender. And it must
be

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SERM. be a wretched excuse for any man's in-
VII. justice, in the judgment of impartial rea-
son, to say that he *never thought*, nor
had *any concern* about the consequences of
his actions. Such persons are like *Solomon's*
madman, with this unhappy distinction,
that their madness is *voluntary*: "They
Prov. xxvi. "scatter *fire-brands, arrows and death,*
18, 19. "and say,—Are we *not in sport?*"

HAVING thus particularly and largely
specified several ways, in which we may
become justly chargeable with the viola-
tion of the precept contained in the text,
and which may oftentimes produce more
malignant and fatal effects, than even the
bearing false witness against our neighbour
in a *public court of justice*; I shall now
suggest a few considerations, besides what
have already been occasionally offered,
which will uncontestably demonstrate the
iniquity and evil of this practice.—It is
extremely *base* in itself, as an act of high
injustice, as it argues a defect of *genero-*
sity, and always springs from *mean prin-*
ciples, from the most *detestable* passions
of Human nature, and frequently from
an *evil* conscience. For those who want
soundness

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soundness and *integrity* of heart themselves, and are *inwardly convicted* of irregularities and disorders in their own conduct, are naturally *suspicious* and inclined to *censure* others; and fond of all opportunities of *publishing* and *augmenting* their faults, for fear of too narrow a *scrutiny* into their own.

SERM.
VII.
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THIS vice is, in the SECOND place, an unnatural *perversion* of the design of *speech*, which was ordained, by the great creator, to be the instrument of friendly intercourse and common happiness in society. Without it, we might indeed *herd* together as the *brutes* do, prompted by an *instinct* of nature; but should have been incapable of enjoying the most *refined* pleasures of Human life, incapable of improving each other's minds, and of communicating mutual advice and consolation. The unquestionable *design* of speech is, therefore, the *good* of mankind: So that if we abuse this noble faculty, which is elegantly stiled in scripture the *glory* of a man, in Calumny and Detraction, and consequently in doing *mischiefs* to our fellow-creatures,


we

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SERM. we contradict the *gracious intent* of the  
 VII: God of nature, and ungratefully abuse his  
 distinguished goodness in our frame and constitution.

BUT this leads me to mention the *per-  
 nicious consequences* of Defamation ; to  
 the criminal himself, the person de-  
 famed, to society, and to religion.—  
 To the *defamer* himself, as it exposes him  
 to hatred, and makes all persons shy of  
 his conversation, lessens his credit, and  
 brings embarrassments and difficulties up-  
 on him, obliging him frequently to make  
 shameful recantations, and redress the  
 grievance which his unruly tongue had  
 occasioned ; in short, as it renders him  
 the object of universal contempt, cools  
 the affection of his friends, exasperates  
 and heightens the resentment of his ene-  
 mies, naturally creates inward remorse  
 and shame, and subjects him to the dis-  
 pleasure of God, and the punishments of  
 the world to come.—The mischievous  
 consequences to the person *defamed* are,  
 loss of reputation, on which his sub-  
 sistence and comfort in a great measure  
 depend, and which by an ingenuous  
 mind



mind is held equally sacred with life; and, SERM.  
as the result of this, great inward disquiet- VII.  
tude and anxiety, a diminution of his   
business, and considerable injury in his  
worldly affairs: So that the bad effects of  
this vice may not be confined to the first  
more *immediate* sufferer, but transmitted  
down to his *posterity*.—To *society* Defa-  
mation and Slander must be extremely  
prejudicial, by destroying confidence, har-  
mony, and mutual good offices, and pro-  
ducing animosity, contention, and violence  
among the members of it.—And to reli-  
gion it may be of disservice various ways:  
By fixing in the minds of many strong  
prejudices against it, when they see that  
its professors pay so little regard to justice  
and humanity; by disclosing the secret  
failings of persons, otherwise of excellent  
characters, who are either employed to  
explain religion, or eminent supports of  
it; I shall only add, that the virulent  
terms of reproach, with which the several  
parties of Christians have loaded each other  
for trifling insignificant differences, have  
been a means of extirpating that amia-  
ble spirit of charity and unconfined be-  
nevolence,

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SERM. nevolence, which the gospel expressly stiles

VII. *the bond of perfection*, and visibly weak-

en the interest of common christianity, and expose it to insolent derision. And upon these accounts, *viz.* because *Defamation* is so vile a crime in itself, so inconsistent with all religion natural and revealed, such a monstrous abuse of speech the peculiar privilege of humanity; and for its destructive consequences with respect to private peace, the cause of virtue, and the general order and happiness of the world; for these reasons, I say, it is a very judicious observation of *Solomon*, that *he who uttereth slander is a fool*: And it is given by *St. Paul* (in a quotation from the Old Testament) as a description of most *abandoned* sinners, that *their throat is an open sepulchre—the poison of Asps is under their lips, their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness—and the way of peace they have not known.*

Prov. x.  
18.

Rom. iii.  
13, 14,  
17.

I SHALL only add, to the account which has been given of Slander, Calumny, and bearing false witness, that if we take a *pleasure* in reporting our neighbour's *real* faults, because his reputation is thereby sullied, or we imagine that our

own

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own will shine with the greater lustre; **SERM.**  
even this is *baseness* and *malice*; if we make **VII.**  
a *custom* of talking them over merely for  
our *amusement*, or suffer ourselves to be  
too highly *entertained* by such melancholy  
subjects, for the sake of some *ludicrous*  
circumstances that may happen to be  
mixed with them, we shall lose, by  
degrees, that inward *reluctance* and *hor-*  
*ror*, that ought to be, always, *strong* in  
the mind against *every* instance of vice:  
And if we allow these things to be intro-  
duced too *often*, or engross too *great* a  
part of our conversation, “ we are in  
“ eminent danger by *constant exercise*, and  
“ the *incouragement* such topics of dis-  
“ course will probably meet with from  
“ the *spleen* and *ill-nature* of the world,  
“ of contracting an *habit* of Scandal.”

LET us, then, keep our tongues from  
evil, and our lips that they speak no guile.  
Instead of employing ourselves in de-  
famatory and disgraceful accounts of our  
neighbour's *imperfections*, let us rather re-  
solve to change the strain and subject of  
conversation, and discourse of his *excellen-*  
*cies*. Let us make it our business to vin-  
dicate

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SERM. dicate *asperfed* innocence, to reclaim the

VII. *honours* due to injured merit, and illustrate the *dignity, beauty, and usefulness* of virtuous examples. This must be a truly generous and noble entertainment; the pleasures that attend it must be infinitely more solid and durable, than any that can result from *mean ill-natured* offices of Scandal; and it would withal, were it a custom universally followed, be a strong *spur* and *incentive* to virtue. Let us endeavour to discountenance, on all occasions, the *malicious* Slanderer, the *envious* Detractor, the *intermeddling vagabond* Tale-bearer, as the bane of *friendship*, and disturbers of the *public peace*. “A *steady resolution*, “in this respect, would go a great way “towards *suppressing* a practice, that is too “shameful to *support* itself, and grows “bold and licentious only by being *encouraged*.” There are innumerable topics to supply an *innocent, chearful, improving* conversation, and some of the highest importance with regard to our *duty* as men, and our *eternal hopes* as Christians: And therefore if any for want of *materials*, and to fill up *void spaces*,  
take

take refuge in *Scandal*, it must argue a pitiful *poverty* of *genius* and a most *contracted* understanding.

BUT, above all, let it be considered, that if *frothy* *vain* discourse, which leaves an impure tincture behind it, and if it be made a too frequent entertainment will beget an habitual levity of temper, be highly criminal; we shall be able to find no excuse, hereafter, for *reviling*, *disdainful*, *contumelious* speeches, or propagating *false* and *injurious* stories concerning our brethren. “ If we plead *impertinence*, it  
“ can surely be *no* extenuation of our  
“ guilt, that we have *trifled* in affairs of  
“ the greatest importance, and *sported*  
“ with our neighbour’s happiness. Should  
“ we urge, in defence of our *freedoms*  
“ used with particular characters, that it  
“ was only to try the *acuteness* and *force*  
“ of our wit; will *this* be of any avail,  
“ that we have sacrificed, to so *poor* a  
“ pretence, the obligations of *brotherly*  
“ *kindness* and of *common equity*? And as  
“ for *envy* and *malice*, the too *usual*  
“ springs of Defamation, they are among  
“ the *blackest* vices, and *themselves* deserve

178 *Of Slander, and Defamation.*

SERM. "damnation." Let us no longer, there-  
fore, by any of these methods of unjust  
and groundless censure, violate the tie of  
humanity, and the express law of God:

Jam. i.  
26.

*For if any man among you seems to be religious, and bridletb not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.* And we are assured upon the highest authority, which as Christians we acknowledge, even that of our blessed Saviour himself (reinforcing the eternal laws of *reason* and of *God*) that by our words

Matt. xii.  
37.

*we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned.*



SERMON



## S E R M O N VIII.



Of Covetousness, Envy, and  
Discontent.

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EXODUS XX. 17.

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*



Y this commandment, we are SERM.  
very clearly and distinctly in- VIII.  
formed who is *our neighbour*,  
in the sense and right con-  
struction of the *Mosaic* law. *Reason* im-  
mediately suggests that it must be every  
N 2 man,

SERM. man, with whom we are allowed to hold  
 VIII. any *correspondence*, and who is within the  
 reach of our *good* or *bad* offices; because  
 the bond of common humanity is the  
*first* and most *indissoluble* obligation, into  
 which all *accidental* affinities, all more  
*narrow* and *contracted* associations, must  
 be resolved, and *there* ultimately center;  
 and because the right of every man, and  
 his claim to justice and *beneficent* offices,  
 is *equal*, and *unalienable* from *humanity*  
 itself. *Christianity* informs us, that as the  
 contrary doctrine is abhorrent to *nature*,  
 it is no less inconsistent with *religion*.  
 We are therefore plainly taught, especially  
 in our blessed Saviour's account (whether  
 it be only a *parable*, or a *true history*) of  
 the good *Samaritan*, that the love of *our*  
*neighbour* is only another phrase for the  
 love of *all mankind*; the intercourse of  
 whose friendly offices ought never to be  
 superseded by the most inveterate *national*  
*prejudices*, nor by the *errors* and *corrup-*  
*tions* of a false religion. "The supposed  
 " *Heretic*, the *Apostate*, the *Pagan*, the  
 " *Mahometan*, must by us be regarded in  
 " the



“ the same light, as the *Jew* was by the *Samaritan.*”

S E C T I O N.  
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AND the *Jewish* law, however perverted by the *moroseness* and *sour pride* of the disdainful and supercilious Pharisee (who built his religion upon the *ruins* of nature) had the same large and generous views. For *thy neighbour*, in the intent and meaning of the text, must be *every man* without exception; unless it was only criminal in a *Jew* to *covet* the *wife* of one of the seed of *Abraham*, but not the wife of a *Gentile*: Which is so grossly an unteasable and partial scheme of morality, that none of the remains of that people, however prejudiced, will, I am persuaded, for the honour of *Moses*, think it proper to maintain it.—It farther appears, upon a general view of the precept itself, that *all* the laws of the decalogue ought not to be considered as *political* institutions; because *this* relates to the *dispositions* and *habits* of the mind, which in the nature of the things, must be exempted from the *cognizance* of *merely civil* laws. And finally we may easily see the reason why *Christ*, in his account of the command-

SERM. ments, has substituted in the place of *thou*  
 VIII. *shalt not covet*—*Thou shalt love thy neigh-*  
 Matt. xix. *bour as thyself*—because “where there  
 19. “are *no* ungoverned appetites, *no* crimi-  
 “nal desires, the current of *universal be-*  
 “*nevolence* will expand itself, and flow  
 “free and unconfinèd; and, on the  
 “other hand, a *sincere affection* to man-  
 “kind in general, and *concern* for their  
 “happiness, will extirpate the very *seeds*  
 “and *first principles* of every *unsocial* and  
 “*ungenerous* passion.” Let us now pro-  
 ceed to consider what those *vices* of the  
*mind* are, to which the text peculiarly  
 refers.

AND, in the FIRST place, what is com-  
 monly known by the name of *covetous-*  
*ness* must be one of the *principal* things  
 included. As the world is now constitut-  
 ed, to desire wealth and affluence as a  
*subordinate* good, with a becoming *sub-*  
*mission* to the wisdom of providence, and  
 in such a manner as is consistent with  
 preserving the *rectitude* of our minds, with  
 the attainment of our *supreme happiness*;  
 and the *duties* necessarily resulting from  
 society;

society; this, I say, has undoubtedly nothing *criminal* in it: But when we propose these things as our *ultimate* end, or consider them as points in any degree *essential* to our happiness, our way of thinking is become extremely *base* and *sordid*, and our desires are *irregular*, *wild*, and *unnatural*: Because,

IN the first place, all *true* happiness is seated in the *mind*; and so far as it depends on *outward* and *accidental* advantages, it can neither be substantial nor durable.

AGAIN, the greatest abundance of riches, which we can imagine any man to be possessed of, will not exempt him from the *common* misfortunes and calamities of life; nor render the afflictions which he suffers, in any measure of comparison, *so tolerable*, as natural *firmness* and *strength* of mind, *equal passions*, and a *habit* of chearful serenity and quietude will do in much more *indigent* and *depressed* circumstances. It will neither *correct* the peevishness of his temper, nor *lessen* the inward disturbance that is occasioned by his pride and anger, nor *mitigate* the remorse and insupportable horrors of a guilty conscience. So

SERM. that he who enjoys the *calm pleasures* of  
 VIII. virtue, in a *low* condition, is an inexpress-  
 〰ibly *happier* man, than another can pos-  
 sibly be, in the midst of the greatest *plenty*  
 and *pomp* of wealth, who has reason to  
 be *dissatisfied* with himself, and is a *slave*  
 to an indulged and *forced* appetite, as  
 anxious and turbulent, as it is mean and  
 ungenerous.

WE may proceed one step farther, and  
 add to this, that *superfluous* wealth, unless  
 it be employed in acts of *beneficence* and  
*sympathizing mercy*, can contribute scarce  
 the *least* proportion to the *real* accommo-  
 dation and repose of Human life. For  
 when a man has provided for the *necessi-  
 ties*, and *proper conveniences*, of his present  
 being, all besides is, in a just and wise  
 estimate, *useless*; and, as *Solomon* rightly  
 and unanswerably argues, there is no *good*  
 to the owner thereof, *save the beholding it*  
*with his eyes*. It can serve for nothing  
 but *ostentation*, and a more *eminent display*  
 of vanity, which the unthinking and un-  
 experienced are apt to *admire*, but the  
 judicious and considerate have always *de-  
 spised*.—But though riches are so wretch-  
 edly

Ecclef. v.  
 11.

edly *defective* in the essential point of communicating happiness, they bring an *additional* load of cares along with them, and occasion, often-times, most intricate and perplexing difficulties. How they are to be *expended*, how *secured*, how *improved*, are subjects of deep and uneasy speculation. And what upon the whole can be more *extravagant*, than for *mankind*, whose proper *discrimination* from mere animals is *reason* (they being in most other respects *inferior*, and less *distinguished* than the brute creatures) what, I say, can be more *extravagant* in *men*, than to sacrifice their *health*, their *ease*, and too frequently their *virtue* for a shadow, a distant vision and dream of happiness, which they may never actually *possess*; or if they possess never *enjoy*; which, in *fruition*, cannot yield half the pleasure with which it deludes and flatters in the *expectation*; and may, besides, *spoil* their tempers and *corrupt* their integrity, and so be, upon the whole, a real *evil*, and justly to be *deprecated*. For St. Paul has observed, according to the natural train and course of things, and upon the experience of all

ages,

SERM. ages, that *they that will be rich, fall into*  
 VIII. *temptation and a snare, and into many*  
 1 Tim. vi. *foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men*  
 9. *in destruction and perdition.*

ONCE more, an *eager and impatient* desire of riches, which farther demonstrates that it is contrary to *nature*, is *restless and insatiable*, and perpetually *tormenting*. “For such desires not being the  
 “ result of *reason*, but of *discontent, fancy,*  
 “ *humour* (the *varieties* of which are infinite) they must be always *growing* upon  
 “ us; and carry us on, from one pursuit  
 “ to another, in an endless circle of *vex-*  
 “ *ations and disappointments.*” He that endeavours to make the *best* of every condition, takes the *only way* to be tolerably *easy* in a world that is so subject to *rotations* and *vicissitudes*, where the scene is so *often* shifted, and so *suddenly* too, that the utmost *Human* skill and foresight cannot prevent it: And if he is thoroughly *resigned* to the conduct of providence, this will *moderate* and set *bounds* to his desires. But if he wants this principle to *balance* his mind, and keep it *fixed* and *constant* to itself; if he forms *imaginary*  
 notions

notions of happiness, and is *fretful* and *repining* for want of things that are quite out of his power; he is never likely to be *at ease*, or to have his intemperate appetites *gratified*. This holds true in all cases, but more especially with respect to the *desire* of *superfluous* wealth, which ought always to be pursued with moderation: “ Otherwise, as it is not an *original* passion in Human nature, but  
 “ arises from a *wrong* judgment of things,  
 “ and a *light unstable* temper, there is  
 “ nothing to put *a stop* to its inordinate  
 “ cravings, or to hinder its proceeding  
 “ without *measure*, and without *end*.”

IN the LAST place, no man can doubt but that it is a most *perverted* state of Human nature, to be so strongly intent on obtaining riches, as to stick not even at *injustice* and *inhumanity*, in order to secure them. For this is a *violation* of fundamental laws of *nature*, which are upon all occasions whatever indispensable. And to suppose that God has endued us with any *natural propensity* to such an *unbenevolent selfish* behaviour, is to represent him, in truth, as an *enemy* to virtue, and  
 the

SERM. the *encourager* and *patron* of iniquity.

VIII. “ Whenever we act in this manner, we  
 “ form *wild* schemes, and, in effect, make  
 “ a *constitution* and *world* of our own;  
 “ we pervert the true *state* and *order* of  
 “ things, and throw the *world* of God’s  
 “ creating into *absolute confusion*.”

BUT this, as I hinted before, is but *one* branch of that evil disposition which the text condemns—The immoderate coveting and pursuit of *pleasure*, and of all *corrupt* and *irregular* animal gratifications, is also most plainly comprehended in it; as the source of many of the most scandalous and fatal *breaches* of *social justice* and *humanity*. Animal appetites, it must be allowed, are *original* to our constitution; which, with their proper bounds, are both *innocent* and *useful*. “ But when  
 “ we make *sensual* indulgences the *main*  
 “ object of our pursuit, and prefer them  
 “ to *intellectual* and *moral* enjoyments;  
 “ when they *unfit* us for discharging the  
 “ necessary business of life by *exhausting*  
 “ our strength and spirits; when they  
 “ are the means of *perverting*, *clouding*,  
 “ *enslaving*, our rational faculties; when  
 “ they



“ they tend to bring *guilt* and *shame* up-  
 “ on the *innocent*, or more dreadful de-  
 “ grees of *mifery* and *hardnefs of heart*  
 “ upon the *vicious*; and, in fhort, when-  
 “ ever they *interfere* with the rules of  
 “ univerfal righteoufnefs and goodnefs:  
 “ In all thefe cafes, our *natural* appetites,  
 “ which by being corrected and well go-  
 “ verned might have answered moft *wife*  
 “ and *beneficial* purpofes, become *mon-*  
 “ *ftrous* and extremely *prejudicial*, and are  
 “ undeniable violations of that facred law  
 “ of God, *Thou fhalt not covet.*”

SERM.  
VIII.

FOR, in the FIRST place, they are di-  
 rectly *repugnant* to the general *complex idea*  
 and *frame* of Human nature; in which a  
*rational* principle is appointed to *prefide*  
 over the *fenfitive*, and *direct* all its mo-  
 tions and impulfes.

AGAIN, as God is *supremely* excellent,  
 and poffeffed of *absolute* and *immutable*  
 perfection, it muft be the *chief excellency*  
 of all reasonable beings to *refemble* him;  
 and in proportion as they *cultivate* their  
 internal faculties, and *improve* in virtuous  
 and good difpofitions, they advance in  
 true *honour* and *dignity*; and the more op-  
 pofite


SERM. *posite* they are, in their *temper* and the  
 VIII. *qualities* of their minds, to this most love-  
 ly and adorable Being, the more do they  
*debase* their state, and render it *vile* and *in-*  
*famous*. But the utmost imaginable *con-*  
*trariety* to the perfect nature of God is,  
 when we are so addicted to *sensuality*, as  
 to have *no taste* for those *refined* and  
*transcendent* pleasures which are peculiar  
 to intelligent orders.—“ Man then *ceases*  
 “ to be that noble and useful being, which  
 “ God *made* him — He *ceases* to be  
 “ distinguished and raised in the creation  
 “ — His schemes are *narrow* and *selfish*,  
 “ a base private pleasure is his *sole occupa-*  
 “ *tion*, the public good is *neglected* and  
 “ *violated* — Nay, he renders himself  
 “ much meaner than the *brutes* who are  
 “ *sensualists from necessity*, being *incapa-*  
 “ *ble* of the pleasures of reason and reli-  
 “ gion ; who are not *injurious* to others  
 “ of the same species ; who *observe* and  
 “ *follow* nature’s laws ; and offer *no violence*  
 “ to any *superior* faculties.”

ADD to this, that when men have con-  
 tracted such a *low* turn of mind, as that  
 they are *devoted* to intemperance and im-  
 purity,


purity, they must of necessity be indisposed for exercises of *devotion* and pleasing *contemplations* of God: For by sensuality the *mental* powers are *enfeebled* and *broken*, and we become, by degrees, utterly incapable of every *great* and *generous* impression. And nothing can be more *unnatural*, than the character of the *voluntary* and *self-corrupted* sensualist in this respect likewise, *viz.* his preferring *carnal* pleasures, which are the most empty, vain, and worthless that a reasonable being can pursue, to those of *virtue*, which are pure and sublime; which neither *fati-*guate nor decay, but, on the contrary, entertain and delight in all emergencies: Since they are not derived from any circumstance without us, that is, in its own nature, *arbitrary*, *transient*, and *mutable*, but spring from the eternal reason of things which never *alters*.

I NEED say but little, after what has been already offered, concerning the *exorbitant coveting* of distinction, preheminance, and worldly grandeur; because every one must perceive that many of the general reasonings, already made use of, are

SERM. are equally applicable to *this* as to sensuality or avarice. I shall therefore only

VIII.  observe, that the mere *outward pomp* of greatness has nothing of solid happiness in it, however it may *affect* and *transport* weak or depraved minds; and that though *power*, when *rightly* employed in succouring the innocent oppressed, and vindicating the natural rights and liberties of mankind, is a *public blessing*, and of *extensive service* to the world; yet when it is *abused* to rigor and tyranny, it evidently perverts the wise *scheme* of providence, and contradicts the *rule* of God's supreme and universal dominion, in which even *infinite power* is never exerted, but under the direction of perfect wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. If any one therefore is influenced by *ambition*, let the object of it be *real* and not *imaginary* dignity; let him take care to improve in *nobleness* and *generosity* of temper; and demonstrate, to all with whom he converses, that he is *truly great*, by *despising*, instead of eagerly coveting, the *gaudy trifles* of outward show and ostentation.

THUS

THUS have I largely considered what SERM. it is, that is more *expressly* censured and VIII. prohibited by the tenth commandment. 

—But there is another thing most obviously included in it, though not in direct terms proposed and represented to us, and that is *Envy*; which *repines* and *sickens* at our neighbour's happiness, and must therefore be the *spring* of various instances of *inordinate desire*, tending to his dishonour and grievous injury: A vice, than which none more *unnatural*, as well as none of more *malignant influence*, can possibly take place in Human nature.

FOR, in the FIRST place, it is an extremely *malicious* and absolutely *inhuman* passion, “raised and cherished without any *provocation*.” The person, against whom it is exercised, has done *me* no wrong to excite my resentment. His *superior* merit does not, in reality, detract from *mine*. I am no *loser* by his enjoying the happiness, at which I inwardly *murmur*; nor should I gain any solid *advantage* by his being deprived of it. So that there is less to be pleaded in excuse for *envy*, than for many *other*, which

SERM. are justly ranked amongst the most *infamous* and *detestable*, excesses. Even *Revenge*, one of the blackest passions of the soul, may urge, as its foundation, *injuries* either *real* or *supposed*; but the crime, which I am now arguing against, is *ill-will* to those who have never *offended* us, and who are, perhaps, *ready* to perform for us all *kind offices* of humanity and friendship; and consequently is a most corrupt and *vile* disposition; and impossible, by any stretch of invention, to be *reconciled* with that benevolence and universal good-will to mankind, which is an inviolable duty of religion. *St. Paul* therefore in his admirable description of christian charity, among many other essential and excellent *properties* of, mentions this as *one*, that *it envieth not*.—

Again, this vice is not only *cool* and *deliberate* maliciousness, indulged to the prejudice of our neighbour's *peace* and *honour*; but a constant uneasiness and *torment* to itself. For as long as there are *any* who enjoy *greater* advantages, or are raised to *superior* distinction; as long as there are *any appearances* of happiness which the

envious

1 Cor.  
xiii. 4.

Envious man wants, he is sure to be filled with anguish and disquietude. It must be a most *deplorable* circumstance in a man's condition, when the whole world *conspires*, as it were, against the *peace* and *comfort* of his mind. But thus it is where *Envy* prevails; *all mankind* being intent on pursuing their own happiness, according to their several inclinations, tempers, and prospects; and, when they cannot obtain *substantial content*, affecting by a *specious* and *deceitful* outside to *hide* their inward distress and perplexity. “ And it is possible, that Envy may sometimes have this most *exquisite* torture attending it, to be *displeas'd* and *out of conceit* with itself, and *repine* at the more *calm* and *placid* state of a benevolent and friendly mind.” So that it corrupts our *relish* of the true enjoyments of life, it preys upon the *spirits*, and, in *Solomon's* phrase, is *the rottenness of the bones*; making the body itself waste and pine away, through perpetual peevishness and anxiety. And the *wisdom* of God is eminently conspicuous in constituting Human nature in such a manner, that so *ignominious*, *base*,

SERM.  
VIII.Prov. xiv]  
30.

SERM. and *mischievous* a passion should carry its  
 VIII. *necessary plague and punishment* along with  
 it.——“ And as it is neither *suitèd* to  
 “ the *state* of man *here*, nor *fit* for the  
 “ *abodes* of the blessed *hereafter* (the *high-*  
 “ *est felicities* of which, as they are *moral*  
 “ and *social*, Envy is not capable of re-  
 “ *lishing*) nothing remains, unless the  
 “ *subject* of it could have this *grace* al-  
 “ *lowed* him, to be totally *annihilated*  
 “ and *expunged* from among the creatures  
 “ of God, but that it be consigned over  
 “ to those gloomy and dismal *mansions*,  
 “ from whence *friendliness* and *joy* are  
 “ eternally banished.”

LET me only add, that the *object* of  
 this most degenerate passion *varies* ac-  
 cording to men's particular sentiments, and  
 schemes of life ; “ some envying the *rich*,  
 “ a few the *wise*, some the *great* and  
 “ *honourable*, others the *gay* and *fantasti-*  
 “ *cal* :” Upon which account it must fre-  
 quently happen, to the everlasting scandal  
 of this vice, that it will *fix* on things  
*dishonourable* to Human nature, and of  
 very *injurious* consequence. “ And in-  
 “ deed, as *ignorance* and *pride* are generally  
 “ the



“ the *root* from whence it springs, it is not  
 “ at all to be wondered at, that it appears  
 “ *blind*, full of *extravagance*, and *irregu-*  
 “ *larly* and *capriciously* diversified.”

SERM.  
 VIII.  


BUT I dismiss this topic, and proceed to the LAST particular which I intend to mention, as included within the *view* and *scope* of the text, and that is *Discontent*; an almost universal *distemper*, and the *parent* of the far greater part of those *wild* and *unlawful covetings*, which are so injurious to our neighbour's interest, and therefore, by the express authority of God, *forbidden*. We are not indeed to affect a *sullen stupidity*, that is *insensible* of the depressions and calamities under which it is our misfortune to labour, and generally proceeds from an *untractable stubborn* spirit; nor are we to give way to an indolent temper, that never *reflects*, and *therefore* is but little *impressed* by any changes that happen in our condition. But it is our *strict* and *inviolable* duty in every station, however low and disconsolate, to maintain an *honourable* opinion of the conduct of Providence; and being satisfied that *all* its determinations are, up-

SERM. on the whole, the wisest and best, to acquiesce in them without a repining thought, or injurious aspersion. It is our *strict* inviolable duty to moderate and controul our desires, and suit our temper to our circumstances; to be free from anger and an over-sollicitous perplexity; from an unmanly dejectedness and despondency; from envy against the more fortunate; and every degree of that disorder and turbulency of mind, which will inspire designs, and put us upon attempts, to alter our condition by such methods, as religion, equity, and honour condemn. These, I say, are ever to be held by us as most holy and immutable ties. For either God hath a right to govern us, and dispose of our affairs as he sees fit; or we are entirely lawless and independent. The latter is absolutely impossible, while the relations of Creator and Creature subsist; and the consequence, therefore, is self-evident, that instead of giving way to *Discontent*, we ought to bear our lot, whatever it be, patiently, and improve it to the best moral purposes, that we may sustain our character with propriety, and merit the approbation of our judge.

LET

LET us consider, farther, that there are *wise reasons* for those *intermixtures* of prosperous and adverse occurrences, which are found in the *general scene* of Human life.—That as those, esteemed the most *happy*, meet with *disappointments* and *uneasy incidents* of various kinds; so the most *unfortunate* have a much *greater* proportion of *good* than others are apt to imagine, or than they *themselves*, too intently poring on the *dark side* of their situation, are generally *disposed* to apprehend.—That numberless evils, which they suffer, are not the *original*, immediate and necessary, scheme of things settled by the wise and gracious Author of Nature, but spring from *inconsideration*, *rashness*, *intemperate passion*, or a *distemper'd fancy*; either from the indiscretions and vices of the *sufferers* themselves, or of *those* with whom they are linked together in a *society* of *close* and *mutual* dependence; neither of which can be so far *restrained*, as to *prevent* their producing their *natural* effects, without continual and incessant *miracles*—and that *these* constitute the

SERM. *largest share* of the evils that disturb and  
 VIII. molest Human life ; for which the *Creator*  
 is not at all answerable ; they being a ma-  
 nifest contradiction to his *original plan*,  
 and the *laws established* for the moral  
 world.

SEVERAL other arguments may be  
 suggested, to prevent *criminal Discontent*  
 in every station.—As that the *original*  
*desires* and *appetites* of nature are easily  
*satisfied* ; and the *evils* men are most com-  
 monly so impatient under, being the pro-  
 duct of thoughtlessness, pride, luxury,  
 and excess, may, by the help of *cool re-*  
*flexion* and a *steady resolution*, be in a great  
*measure repaired*.—That it is the height of  
*folly* to repine at *fixed* and *unalterable* laws  
 of nature, or at any cross events which  
 it is not in our power to *rectify*.—That  
 how *grievous* soever our distress may be  
 at present, however *confused* or *intricate*  
 our condition, it is possible that, in this  
 unsettled and *revolving* state, it may in  
 time be altered, by the general *friendly*  
 course of nature, in our favour.—That  
 in our most *abject* situation we enjoy, per-  
 haps,

haps, some  *blessings*, which those, whom we are disposed to  *envy*, are entirely deprived of, and which are preferable to all the  *superficial*, but more  *glaring*, advantages of their outward plenty and splendor.—And, finally, that  *humble resignation* and  *confidence* in God  *alleviate* the cares of life, and are an eminent  *support* and  *aid* under the heaviest sufferings. Whereas an unquiet, agitated, discontented temper is not only  *indecent*, and a  *disgrace* to our character as  *men*, but  *impertinent* and  *useless*. For, by  *murmuring* against the dispensations of Providence, neither the evils we  *fear* will be  *prevented*, nor those we actually  *feel* removed, or in the least  *mitigated*, but rather increased and heightened by the  *disorder* and  *inquietude* of our minds. Nor will it be any  *relief* to us, in such cases as these, to have recourse to  *indirect* methods, in contempt and defiance of  *justice*, for the  *gratification* of a prevailing passion, or the  *supply* of urgent wants; because this is only  *shifting* the scene of misery; and exchanging outward, temporary, and perhaps  *imaginary* infelicities

SERM.

VIII.



SERM. infelicities which *may* be endured, for the  
 VIII. remorseful pangs and convulsive terrors of  
 ~~~~~ guilt: Which, unless *reason* and every  
moral sentiment be extinguished within us,
 must be a *burden insupportable*.

THE great importance of discourses on *this*, and other *moral* subjects of the same kind, appears clearly and most forcibly from the following passages in our blessed Saviour's *own* divine ministration; with which I shall conclude — *And, behold one came and said unto him, Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And he said unto him, — if thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments. He saith unto him, which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother, and (in the place—of thou shalt not covet, is added, because, as was observ'd before, unfriendliness and malignity of temper is the source of all criminal and hurtful desires) thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. — This do, and thou shalt live.*



S E R M O N IX.




The true Ground of the Argument,
from Reason, for a future State.

ECCLES. ix. 2.

All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: As is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.



HIS observation of Solomon is SERM.
the ground of one of the strong- IX.
est arguments, that the light of 
nature suggests, for a future state; in which
there

SERM. there will be a more *remarkable* distinction

IX. made betwixt good and bad men, than
 the *settled constitution* of things, and the
general laws of nature, which take place
 in the present scene of our existence, will
 possibly admit of; and a more *adequate*
 and *impartial* distribution of rewards and
 punishments. The *force* of this argument
 has been almost universally admitted, as
 having its foundation in sense and expe-
 rience: And it must be allowed, I think,
 to carry with it the utmost shew of pro-
 bability, as long as it is supposed—that
 there is in nature an *eternal difference* be-
 tween virtue and vice; that mankind are
 subject to a *moral government*; and that
 the supreme being, to whom they are ac-
 countable, is unchangeably *wise, righteous,*
 and *good*.

BUT we are too apt to destroy, in a
 great measure, the weight of our own ar-
 guments, by pushing matters to an *ex-*
treme. We attend only to the single point
 which we have immediately in our view,
 without considering—that truth is a
connected and uniform scheme, and, in all
 the parts of it, perfectly correspondent and
 harmo-

harmonious — that arguments which SERM.
contradict, must of necessity *destroy*, each IX.
 other — And that we cannot take a more
 sure and effectual method to demolish that
 very fabrick, which we are most fond of
 raising, than by building on *inconsistent*
 principles. And, if I mistake not, some-
 thing of this inconsistency too plainly ap-
 pears in the reasonings of mankind, con-
 cerning the *natural* rewards of virtue, and
 punishments of vice, in *this life*, when
 these reasonings are applied to different
 purposes: By which means, just as much
 as they gain in *one* argument, they lose in
another, perhaps, equally important; and
 either *the cause of virtue itself* is injudici-
 ously exposed, or, else, the *natural evi-*
dences of a future state of retribution are
 obscured and diminished.

THUS we find, that if the point to be
 proved be the *immutable distinction* be-
 tween moral good and evil; if the pro-
 fessed design be to evince and display the
 essential and intrinsic *excellency* of the
 former, and *malignity* of the latter; then
 the reasoner is apt to expatiate, without
 a sufficient guard, on the *present rewards*
 of

SERM. of moral rectitude, and *punishments* of sin
 IX. and impiety, as if both the one and the
 other were, in most instances at least;
real, constant, unavoidable. “ A proper di-
 stinction is not made between the *ten-*
dency of virtue, and the *actual consequen-*
ces of virtue.” These are confusedly
 mixed and blended together, as if they were
 precisely the same idea. Virtue is incau-
 tiously represented as if it was, *in fact*, its
 own reward ; and vice as if it was, *in fact*,
 its own punishment. And by thus exag-
 gerating the pleasures of the one, and the
 miseries attending the other, beyond *truth*;
 and, in a variety of causes, against *experi-*
ence ; by describing what only would be
 the *natural result* of both, if many un-
 avoidable accidents did not intervene, as
 their *certain and necessary effects* ; and by
 supposing, moreover, that the Providence
 of God *frequently*, and even in *common*
 cases, interposes in an invisible but extra-
 ordinary manner, to protect, support, and
 favour the upright, and, on the contrary,
 to bring calamities and disgraces upon the
 workers of iniquity : By such mistakes, I
 say, and confus’d representations as these,
 the

the *true condition* of Human life is considerably disguised; it has *few marks* left of its being an initiatory scene, a state of probation and discipline, and *much more of the appearance* of a state of recompence, and compleat scheme of moral government. — “ For the more *clearly* we can
“ *trace* rewards and punishments *actually*
“ annexed to virtue and vice *here*, it will
“ probably be imagined, that there is, in
“ *proportion*, the less ground to expect
“ the *distribution* of them *hereafter*.”

SERM.
IX.

Or if this should be thought, by the more considerate part of mankind, not to conclude *absolutely* (as indeed in reason it could not) against a future state of more *equal* and *full* retribution, the proofs of this important doctrine would, however, be more *perplexed* and *intricate*; *scepticks* and *infidels* might take occasion, from hence, to grow more licentious and insolent; and *weak* minds would be the more easily bewildered, and lost in a maze of uncertainty.

BUT there is *another* error, the *opposite* extreme to what I have now been speaking of, which is much more common;

“ and

SERM. “ and that is aggravating the *miserics* of
 IX. “ good men, and describing the circum-
 “ stances of virtue and piety as quite *dis-*
 “ *consolate* and *forlorn* in this life, in order
 “ to shew, in a stronger light, the ne-
 “ cessity there is of supposing it *intro-*
 “ *ductory* to another.” And this, tho’ a
 gross mistake, and, as I shall hereafter
 demonstrate, of vastly injurious conse-
 quence, is founded, among other false
 grounds, on some *perverted* passages of
 scripture; and particularly on the assertion
 of *Solomon* in the text, that *all* things come
alike to all; and that there is *one event to*
the righteous, and to the wicked. *Solomon’s*
 premises, from whence this conclusion is
 drawn, are undeniably *right*; but the
 inference itself has no manner of *relation*
 to them, and is entirely *wild* and *unnatural*.
 For this great and wise writer was only
 discoursing of those *external* events that
 happen, according to establish’d and hi-
 therto unvaried laws, in the ordinary course
 of nature and providence. He intended
 nothing more, than that the sovereign
 ruler of the world did not, in general,
 think it fit to interpose *miraculously*, in
 order

order to prevent that *promiscuous* distribution of good and evil, which, in various cases, must spring inevitably from the original constitution and frame of the universe. And as to what are the *natural* and *probable* consequences of virtue and vice, together with the *influence* which they severally have on the happiness or misery of the Human race, these are points to which he could have *no view* at all, because they are absolutely remote from the design and scope of his whole argument: Which was only to prove, that there is no way of *knowing*, certainly, *good or evil by any thing that is before us*; because such is the disposition of things, in this *probationary* state, that the same *events* happen *indiscriminately*, from fixed and necessary laws of nature; and may be brought about by *different*, nay by quite *opposite*, causes; and the very same *natural* good and evil, which are oftentimes occasioned by *moral* good and evil, must frequently also, with respect to us, be *accidental* and entirely *unavoidable*.

How fond soever therefore men may be, to support a favorite scheme, of engag-

SERM. ing *Solomon* on their side, they can never,
 IX. with the least colour of plausibility, strain
 the words of the text so far, as to make
 them speak this sense——“ that the *plea-*
 “ *asures* of virtue and vice are *equal*; and
 “ that, if we exclude the consideration of
 “ *futurity*, the *pious* man has no advan-
 “ tage above the *profane*, nor the *benevo-*
 “ *lent* man above the *malicious* and *cruel*,
 “ nor he who carefully *governs* his tem-
 “ per, and enjoys the blessing of *cool* and
 “ *regular* passions, above the dissolute and
 “ uncontrouled *libertine*.” —— This, in-
 deed, itself is going a prodigious length;
 it is, to the common reason of mankind,
 an unaccountable strain of extravagance;
 because it asserts that to be the *plan* and
design of providence, and the present *real*
 state of Human nature, which not only
 contradicts universal experience, but is in
 itself absolutely impossible. For as virtue
 and vice are, and must be, an eternal
opposition to each other; and consequently
 as the pleasures, which immediately flow
 from such inconsistent and *repugnant* prin-
 ciples, must of necessity be not only of a
 distinct, but of a *contrary*, kind: From
 hence

hence it certainly follows, that if the one deserve to be *pursued*, the other ought for the same reason to be *shunned* and *neglected*; if the one be *noble* and *excellent*, the other must be *base* and *despicable*. “ The same kind of *external* advantages may indeed, in some instances, happen to be procured both by a *strictly moral*, and by an *irregular* and *unfair*, practice; but to imagine that there can, upon the whole, be an *exact equality* between the pleasures and benefits arising from both of these, is to suppose this most flagrant absurdity, that the *effects* may, in every circumstance and every degree, be the same, where the *causes* are not only quite different, but have a direct and irreconcilable contrariety in their very nature.” So that if we attempt to establish a fundamental article of religion on such visionary and romantick fancies, on principles like this, which *confutes* and *destroys* itself, we save the *infidel* the trouble, of undermining religion by his own art and sophistry, by doing the work to his hands; because, as we build without a

SERM. *foundation, the superstructure must sink*
 IX. and fall of course.

“ OTHERS; therefore, being sensible
 “ perhaps of this error, and yet fearing
 “ that the yielding the argument, in point
 “ of *natural happiness* to the cause of vir-
 “ tue, will invalidate their reasonings for
 “ a future state of retribution, have a-
 “ voided the *inconsistency*, but by increasing
 “ the *absurdity*”—By asserting, that if
 the *term* of man’s existence is confined to
 the *present* life, the virtuous are *in general*,
 and excepting only *a few singular and emi-*
nent cases, of all persons the most *unhappy*.
 —“ A strange position; that, one would
 “ think, none who had ever known what
 “ it was to *gratify* an irregular appetite
 “ on the one hand, or who had *tasted* the
 “ refined and substantial pleasures of vir-
 “ tue on the other, could be capable of
 “ advancing and defending;” and which
 a *general* consideration of the subject, with-
 out entering minutely into the discussion
 of particulars, will be fully sufficient to
 expose.

FOR if it be true, that *moral* and *re-*
ligious men, considered without the hope
 and

and expectation of *futurity*, are more mi-
 SERM. IX.
 SERM. IX.

ferable than the *immoral* and *impious*, and that not only merely in some *extraordinary* cases, but in the *common* and *regular* course of Human life; if this, I say, be true, (which every one, for the *honour* of his nature, must at least *wish* to be false) it can only be on such principles, as will render those, who are devoted to the pursuit of virtue, more miserable than even the *brutes* themselves: I say than the *brutes* themselves, because no other principles can possibly justify so strange an assertion, but those which follow — “ That *sensual excesses*, if there
 “ be no life hereafter, yield a more *solid*
 “ and *manly* happiness, than submitting to
 “ the restraints of *reason* and *religion*;
 “ that a secret and successful *fraud* is the
 “ source of *truer* pleasure, than a strict
 “ adherence to the rules of *equity* and
 “ *honour*; and a mean degenerate *selfishness*,
 “ than *generosity* and universal *benevolence*.
 “ — And if this again be *true*, it unde-
 “ niably follows, that the pleasures of
 “ *sense*, upon the supposition that there
 “ is no other life, must be preferable to

SERM. “ *intellectual* and *moral* enjoyments ; those
 IX. “ of the *inferior*, and *less noble*, to those
 “ of the more *excellent* and *sublime* part in
 “ our composition. — And if so, *sensitive*
 “ gratifications must be *always* preferable
 “ to those of a *moral* nature. For if a
 “ life of *reason* and *virtue*, to *eternity*, be
 “ more eligible than a life of *sense*, it must
 “ be so, in itself, in every *part* and *period*
 “ of our duration ; and, on the contrary,
 “ if a *sensitive* happiness be, in itself, or ex-
 “ cepting a few rare and extraordinary
 “ instances, more valuable than a *rational*
 “ and *moral* happiness in *any* part of du-
 “ ration, it must, of necessity, be so in
 “ every part of duration, i. e. to all eter-
 “ nity : And the *man* ought for ever to
 “ be degraded, that the *brute* may be
 “ exalted.”

BESIDES, this *injurious* representation of Human life not only involves in it all these absurdities, considered as a *speculative* error, but is attended with most pernicious consequences : Of which, as a sufficient specimen to shock a serious and considerate mind, I need only mention these three. — That it weakens the principal argument,

argument, by which we can pretend to SERM.
prove, solidly, the *difference* of moral good IX.

and evil; which argument is, “ the na-
“ tural tendency of the *former*, at all
“ times, to happiness, and of the *latter* to
“ misery.”——That it gives an *unbound-*
ed scope to immorality and vice, where
men are so unhappy as not to believe
another state of existence hereafter ——
And, finally, that it lessens even the argu-
ment for a future state, which it is in-
tended to illustrate and display in a strong-
er light ; and, for the sake of which, it
so degrades and vilifies the *present* circum-
stances of Human nature, and describes
virtue itself as little better than a caprici-
ous and arbitrary constitution, and an
empty name,

“ FOR it is, principally, from what
“ we know of the *nature* of things in
“ *this* life, that we can draw just conclu-
“ sions with reference to their *design* upon
“ the *whole*. Because virtue, in what we
“ see of it here, appears to have a *tenden-*
“ *cy* to *happiness*, we fairly presume that
“ it was *originally* designed for happiness.”
And as this design fails of being *executed*,


SERM. very remarkably in *some* instances, and to
 IX. a considerable degree in *all*, by many un-
 avoidable events, against which we are un-
 able to *guard* in the situation wherein we
 are now placed ; we are led to expect,
 upon the best grounds of probability,
 that it will be *completed* hereafter. “ But
 “ if we had no proof, from our experi-
 “ ence and observation on facts, that vir-
 “ tue was appointed to be the *source* of
 “ Human happiness, or, which amounts
 “ to much the same, that the *ideas* of
 “ virtue and happiness, have in *nature*,
 “ a *connexion* with each other ; we should
 “ have much less reason to hope, than
 “ we have at present, that the maker of
 “ the world *intended* it for happiness in
 “ any scene of our existence. And if it
 “ was from itself, and from the original
 “ laws of the whole constitution, more
 “ *miserable* than vice *here* ; I can see no
 “ clear medium by which to demonstrate,
 “ that it would not be *miserable for*
 “ *ever.*”

THUS have I shewn how the account
 of the reward of virtue in this life has
 been *aggravated*, in order to demonstrate
 its

its intrinsic excellence, and how far it has been *diminished*, together with the present punishment of vice, to heighten the natural evidences of a future retribution. And now there only remain two things more, that are necessary to be insisted on, to finish what I intend upon this subject, and remove all the material difficulties relating to it. THE FIRST is, to enquire what is the *true state* of the case, in opposition to both the extremes above-mentioned; and then to shew, SECONDLY, that as this affords, on the one hand, convincing evidence of the *essential difference* of moral good and evil, by means of the *sanctions* annexed to them *at present*; it also leaves the strongest, and most cogent, probabilities of a *future* more exact and impartial recompence.

THE true state of the argument, with respect to the *natural* rewards and punishments of virtue and vice in *this* life, will, I believe, be comprehended under the following heads.—FIRST, that virtue, in general, *tends* to the *happiness*, and vice to the *misery*, of mankind. SECONDLY, that the happiness arising from virtue is of a
nobler

SERM. *nobler* kind, and more *durable* in its nature, than any that can spring from un-

IX. governed excesses. If self-complacency, and self-applause, be principal *ingredients* in the happiness of every intelligent and reflecting being, *virtue* must tend to happiness; and if self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, inward disorder, remorse, and shame, are the *necessary springs* of infelicity to the Human mind, vice must tend to *misery*. And the happiness of the former must, in itself, be as much more excellent than that of the latter, as *reason* is superior to *sense*, and *animal instinct*. From whence it plainly follows, in the THIRD place, that so far as the *natural* consequences of virtue and vice are permitted *actually* to take place, the *ballance of happiness* will undeniably lie on the side of virtue — So far, I mean, as it results *properly* and *solely* from these two different methods of conduct, and is *abstracted* from all extraneous and foreign considerations. To this, therefore, I may add, by way of corollary, “ that
 “ if we suppose the *outward advantages*
 “ of health, fortune, and the like, to be
 “ exactly *equal*, the pleasures of the good
 “ man,

“ man, even here, may justly upon the SERM.
“ whole claim the *prebeminence*.” Besides IX.
all this, virtue is undeniably necessary to
the good of mankind in general considered as a *community*, a *system* of creatures linked together by social affections and one universal interest; and, consequently, it must tend to advance the happiness of *every individual* in his *social* character; which is a very considerable, and indeed the chief, part of the *present* happiness of man. So that, in the FIFTH and LAST place, we may fairly lay down this as the sum and result of the whole, that if there were no future life it would still, in the common and regular course of things, be the *interest* of *all* mankind to be *virtuous*. And even in *extreme* exigencies, the case is not so much altered as may be generally imagined. For if a man secures his estate, or preserves his life, by *sinful* and *cowardly* compliances, the *shame* of having acted with so much *meanness* and *dishonour* may, to an ingenuous mind, be more intolerable than *tortures* or *death*. “ There may
“ be such bitter and stinging remorse,
“ where there is no fear of *punishment*,
arising

SERM. “ arising from a reflection on the *baseness*
 IX. “ of actions in themselves, as may render
 “ *even an infidel* substantially and exces-
 “ sively miserable.” And in this case I
 will venture to pronounce, that it would
 have been his *happiness* to be inflexibly
 honest, tho’ *reproach, poverty,* and even *the*
loss of life, were the certain and unavoi-
 dable consequence.

AND as the short and general account,
 which has now been given, proves, be-
 yond all reasonable exception, that there
 is an eternal and immutable *fitness* in vir-
 tue, and *malignity* in vice ; so, which is the
 next thing to be considered, it leaves the
 strongest probability, that can fairly be
 desired, of this great and important truth,
 that notwithstanding the rewards and pu-
 nishment of moral good and evil that are
 interwoven, as it were, with the universal
 constitution of nature, there yet remains a
 future state of more adequate and *unex-*
ceptionable retribution.

FOR, in the FIRST place, the evils and
 miseries to which *all* good men are ex-
 posed, from the common frailty of Hu-
 man nature and general imperfection of
 the

the world, are sufficiently *numerous* to prevent their being *completely* happy; notwithstanding it be allowed, that the pleasures resulting from *integrity* are vastly superior to those false and polluted joys, which are derived from *vice* and *sensuality*.

SERM.


IX.



SECONDLY, As virtue in this life can never of itself constitute *perfect* happiness, so there are cases supposable of intense pain and suffering, in which it can hardly be imagined to render existence here below, upon the whole, *eligible*; or, if barely eligible, no mark of the divine *delight* and *complacency* in virtue; nor what would be thought, by any one, a *suitable* reward of it. Should it be here said, that, in the most melancholy and deplorable circumstances that can be imagined, virtue will always make a man *more happy*, or rather *less miserable*, than its contrary: I answer, that this alone is not sufficient; “but it must render him more happy, if no other recompence be intended, than vice is or ever will be in any possible circumstances.” For if vice be, at any time, more happy than virtue, the conclusion, upon comparing the two cases together

SERM. together whatever they are, can be *no other*
 IX. than this, “ that *virtue* is punished, and
 “ *vice* rewarded.”

ADD to this, THIRDLY, that the natural good and evil consequences of virtue and vice are frequently *obstructed*, or *evaded*; in all which instances there is, properly speaking, *no* reward or punishment at all; and that they are neither so *remarkable* in themselves, nor so *universal*, nor so *certain* in the present life, as may reasonably be expected will *support* a firm and steady integrity under discouragements and oppressions, or counter-balance the strong allurements of worldly honour and pleasure: And further, that there is a great variety of cases, in which the calamities of good men are *notorious*, but the reward of their virtue is not *seen*; and in which the outward advantages, which wicked men enjoy, are *conspicuous* and exceedingly *remarkable*, while the punishment of their vices is entirely *concealed* and *hid* from public observation. — And, in every case of this kind, the man of virtue will be so far from being distinguished by his *superior happiness*, that he will rather appear

to be the *miserable* man. And consequent- SERM.
ly one great end of rewards and punish- IX.
ments, if their be no future life, is entirely 
frustrated, which is this ; to make such a
distinction between *all* instances of virtue
and vice, as shall enforce the former, and
discourage and restrain the latter ; as shall
excite to the one, and deter from the other,
in every *kind* and in every *degree*.

IN the LAST place, notwithstanding
the provision of *lesser* rewards and punish-
ments in this life, yet if they are not *con-*
tinued, and dispensed more *regularly* and
equitably in a future state, “ the *most vir-*
“ *tuous* of mankind will *often* be the *least*
“ rewarded, and the *most vicious* the *least*
“ punished.” I rank those among the
most virtuous, who have taken most pains,
and suffered the greatest inconveniencies,
for the advancement of religion, and the
good of their fellow creatures ; those who
bravely *suffer* and *die* in defence of virtue
and liberty ; and those among the *most*
vicious, who have so effectually stupified
their natural conscience of good and evil,
as to be abandoned of all shame and re-
morse. The *last* of these, it is plain,
avoid

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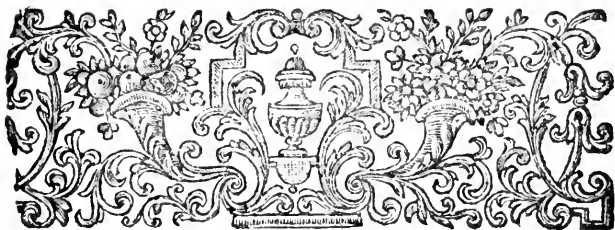
avoid the worst and most dreadful punishment of their vices *here*, by being hardened and insensible ; and are much *less* miserable, if there be no futurity, than sinners of the very *lowest* degree of guilt, who are subject to the anxious horrors of an alarmed and troubled conscience. And, on the other hand, the generous *sufferer* for truth, and for the welfare of mankind, is *less* rewarded, upon the whole, than another of *common* and far *inferior* virtue, who has not been exposed to such rigorous and severe trials.—And is not this *a demonstration*, that there must be another life to rectify such prodigious *inequalities* as these ? Does not this *certainly* follow from admitting the existence and perfections of God, and his righteous government of the moral world ? Is there any *medium* between the *denial* of this principle and downright *atheism* ? I think indeed there *cannot* be : And, moreover, that if it be *fit* to reward virtue, and punish vice, in *any* particular, it must be *fit* to do it, proportionably, in *every* particular ; and that therefore the reasoning here made use of plainly and strongly enforces

enforces a future state not only of *strict* SERM. and *impartial* retribution so far as it goes, IX. but of *universal* retribution. This seems to be most consistent with the ideas of supreme wisdom and goodness, and with the common principles of *equity*.

To conclude; the notion of a Deity, without a *Providence*, is utterly *insufficient* as to all purposes of religion and morality; a *Providence*, with respect to *man-kind*, is nothing, without *government*; nor *government* without *laws*; nor *laws* without *universal*, *certain*, and *visible sanctions*, adapted to the *entire case*, i. e. to the *capacities*, *situations*, *difficulties* and *weaknesses* of the subjects, their *reluctance* to obedience, their *inward*, whether natural or acquired, *biasses*, and their *external* temptations to deviate from the rule of *government*: Nothing of which is here *adequately* provided for. The present is, upon the whole, a promiscuous scene, of *irregular* and *confused* appearance; with very *indistinct* and *imperfect* traces of *distributive justice*: It can, therefore, be reasonably considered in no other light, than as the *beginning* of the *first step* towards, a more

SERM. perfect rational existence, the *introduction*
 IX. and *path* to immortality. — Otherwise,
 how little, by his vastly *precarious tenure*
 of life, is man advanced above the *flowers*
 of a day, and the *insects* and *animals* of a
 few months or years growth, and alternate
vicissitudes of pleasure and pain! What a
trifle is his dignity of nature! How *diminutive*
 his importance and rank in the
 creation?





S E R M O N X.



The Advantages of Consideration.

HAGGAI i. 7.

---- Thus saith the LORD of Hosts, Consider your Ways.



HE duty, here recommend- SERM.
ed, is of such plain and uni- X.
versal obligation, and so im-
mediately results from our
very frame and constitution,
that, one would think, there should be but
little need of *motives* to urge to the prac-
tice of it.—Mankind, in all ages, have
been particularly fond of the character of
rational. They seem to talk of it with
Q. *affectedness*,

SERM. *affetation*, and in the most *magnificent*
 X. strain, as the high prerogative and glory
 of Human nature, its crowning excellence, its resemblance of the Deity, and the grand mark of its *prebeminence* above the animal creation. And, surely, the *least* that can be expected from all this is, to find them employing their rational faculties in the pursuit of truth, in directing their conduct, and regulating their passions: And nothing can be more surprizing, than that, in defiance of their most *solemn professions* concerning the *dignity* of their intelligent nature, they are thoughtless and inconsiderate, giddy, rash, and unexperienced, immersed in sense, guided by fancy and appetite; and, oftentimes, as entirely destitute of *true judgment*, and serious reflection, as if they were *naturally* void of understanding.

BUT yet experience teaches us, that this not mere loose declamation, the effect of *peevishness*, *resentment*, and *contempt* of mankind; but, in a very great degree, the real state of the world. The encomiums they bestow on reason, which is but seldom consulted, are empty *compliments*, the
 workings

workings of *selfishness* and *pride*. They are fond of it as *a distinction* which flatters their *vanity*, and places them in an imagined point of *eminence*; but neglect to improve it to those valuable purposes for which it was chiefly intended, and which alone can demonstrate that it is any thing more than *a name*, and deserves to be called a *perfection*, or a *privilege*. And hence it is, that they employ their reason in difficult speculations, encourage it to grasp at things beyond the narrow extent of its capacity, to spy out, and correct, defects in the constitution of nature and course of Providence, and censure the operations of infinite wisdom: But at the same time that, forgetting its *weakness* and innumerable *errors* and *prejudices*, it takes upon it to *determine* right and wrong in cases that are absolutely *beyond* its comprehension, scarce any use is made of it within its *proper sphere*; viz. to trace out the principles and obligations of virtue and religion, fix the true rule of life, and judge of the nature and consequences of actions. And, by this preposterous abuse of it, we entirely lose the *honour* and all the *advan-*

SERM.
X.
~~~~~


SERM. *tages* of our rational frame: For it is not  
 X. the *mere faculty* of reason, but the *right*  
 ~~~~~ *exercise* and *improvement* of it, that advances us above brute creatures; and if we suffer it to be *disordered, darkened, and controuled* by sensual excesses, and the influence of ungoverned passions, it becomes our greatest *reproach* and *infamy*, and must, in the final result of things, be a heavy aggravation of our *misery*.—I intend therefore, in the following discourse, to treat of the nature, reasonableness, and eminent advantages of *Consideration*, chiefly as it relates to *religion* and *morals*: Of *Consideration*, I say, which is the *great law* of Human nature, the first principle of *wisdom* and *good conduct*, and the spring of *resolution, steadiness* and *activity*, in all the duties of life; which will carry us, with safety and honour, through the most *difficult* and *intricate* circumstances; and the want of which will betray us into many fatal *irregularities*, and bring upon us *shame, remorse, and ruin*.

To *consider our ways* must include in it just *general* notions of religion, and of our duty in all its branches, and *whatever*
 has

has a tendency to prepare for *all* events, and make us behave regularly in *all possible* circumstances; and, consequently, a great variety of reflections, besides what relate to our *present*, or the examination and review, of our *past* conduct. Suffer me to point out some of the principal subjects, about which it becomes us to employ our meditations; in order to our acting, throughout the whole of life, as *men* and *christians*.

AND I shall begin with that, which is, in the nature of the thing, a *fundamental* enquiry; viz. what is the *grand intent* and *purpose* of *our being*. “ If we survey the world around us, we shall find that every creature, even the most minute and inconsiderable, is made for some certain determinate end; and endowed with qualities and powers, particularly suited and adapted to it. And reason immediately dictates, that there must be some especial and more exalted end of man’s being; who has a peculiar nobleness and dignity of nature, and, in many respects, eminent marks of superiority to all the other parts of this lower creation.”

SERM. Now till this be clearly stated and deter-

X.  mined, the mind will be in perpetual *uncertainty*; and all its notions, about the *true rule* of life and manners, can be nothing but *darkness* and *confusion*. How, then, shall we adjust and settle this essential point, on which our knowledge of religion and morality so necessarily depends? Why by examining the *Human frame*, the *several parts* of which it is compounded, and, above all, what are its *characteristical* and *distinguishing* faculties. — Are we formed *entirely*, or *chiefly*, for the gratifications of the *animal* life? “ This *cannot* be, because *sense* and *ap-*
 “ *petite* we enjoy in *common* with the
 “ brutes; and, if we look *inward*, we
 “ shall find *reason*, *reflection*, *conscience*,
 “ which must be the greatest *absurdities*
 “ and *monsters* in nature, if they are to
 “ be controuled and kept under by the
 “ *inferior* passions: Every thing above
 “ *sense*, and the necessary *ingredients* for
 “ relishing the enjoyments of it, must,
 “ upon that supposition, be *mishapen*, and
 “ *irregular*.” And, therefore, as it cannot be denied, that we are *capable* of more
sublime

sublime exercises, of more *pure, substantial,* SERM.
 and *durable* pleasures, *these* must, of neces- X.
 sity, be the *ultimate* end of our being: And
 whatever *other* principles there are in Hu-
 man nature, which, if suffered to take their
 course, would be *inconsistent* with this great
 end, it must be the *office* of reason, if it
 has *any use at all*, to limit and restrain.
 —Again, Are we formed for *selfish* views,
 to mind only *our own* affairs, and to be in-
 different and careless about the *general state*
 of the world, any farther than our *parti-*
cular interest appears to be immediately
 concerned? “ This likewise is *impossible*,
 “ because we find *affections* of a *different*
 “ nature, *universally* implanted in man-
 “ kind, and *strongly* exciting to benefi-
 “ cence, generosity and compassion.” —
 Or was it designed, that we should pass
 our time in *luxurious ease* and *indolence*,
 and dream away life in *sloth* and *inactivi-*
ty? “ At this rate, *man* would be a be-
 “ ing entirely *useless*, a kind of *blank* in
 “ the creation;” which must be a most
 deplorable *perversion* of his nature, because
 he is evidently formed for *society*, and pos-
 sess’d of *active powers* capable of *great re-*
 finement,

SERM. finement, and advances towards Godlike
 X. perfection, and of *extensive* service. —

Or, finally, Is the *present* state the *only* scene of our existence? Were we intended just to come on the stage of life, to shew what *higher attainments* we are fitted for, and then to *disappear* for ever? “The present existence does not *look* like an entire scene, but rather like the *infancy* of Human nature; which is capable of rising to much greater *maturity*.” And, besides, as we are, in our very constitution, *moral* and *accountable*; and, in this world, there is so far from being a *strict* and *impartial* retribution, that integrity and virtue frequently *suffer*, whilst impiety, oppression, and cruelty are *flourishing* and *triumphant*: All our *natural* notions of God’s wisdom, justice, and goodness, afford a high probability, that there is some *future* state; in which such an *universal* and remarkable distinction will be made between good and bad men, as the honour of the divine perfections and government seems, *necessarily*, to require. These are plain and easy reflections, and, withal, of universal advantage: And when,

when, by serious Consideration, we are SERM,
 fully convinced that the present life is X.
 only *preparatory* for another infinitely more
 awful and important ; that there is some
general law of Human nature ; and that
 there are *certain duties*, which *all* mankind
 are obliged to perform ; the *next* step is
 to consider, more distinctly, what *these*
 duties are.

AND, here, the *reason* of our minds
 will lead us to *begin* with the *duty*, which
 we owe to *God*. As he is a being of ab-
 solute and immutable perfection, he must,
 in general, be the *worthy* object of our
supreme veneration and esteem. His in-
 finite wisdom and power demand our
reverence ; his unexhausted and universal
 goodness our *devout* and *grateful adoration*.
 As he is our Creator, the fountain of be-
 ing and happiness, our righteous governour
 and judge, and the sovereign disposer of
 all events, we are bound to *cultivate* a
 strong sense of our necessary *dependence*
 upon him ; to *worship* him with humility
 and fervency ; to be absolutely devoted to
 his *service* ; to yield an exact and willing
 obedience to his *laws* ; and *acquiesce*, with
 the

SERM. the most calm and profound submission,
 X. in *all* the determinations of his *Providence* :

~~~~~ And, being a compleat and unspotted example of all *moral beauty* and *excellence* ; it should be our chief *ambition* to be *like* him.

AGAIN, we find ourselves to stand *related*, not only to the *supreme first cause* of all, but to *various other* beings ; particularly to beings of the same *rank* and *character*, formed with the same *passions*, encompassed with the same *infirmities*, and having the same *expectations* and *dependencies* with ourselves ; who, all together, make up *one body* of *inseparable* interests : The next thing, therefore, to be considered is, what are the *general duties*, which we owe to *them*. And from our *original equality*, our *common* nature, circumstances, and wants, there necessarily results an *universal* obligation to equity, benevolence, and mercy.

BUT, to discharge the duty recommended in the text, we must go one step *farther* than this ; and as there is a vast *difference* of circumstances and relations in Human life, take care to inform ourselves  
 what



what those *dispositions* are, and what that SERM.  
*behaviour*, which are best *suit*ed to our X.  
*particular* situation and character.—Am

I, for instance, in *exalted* and *affluent* cir-  
 cumstances? Let me consider, “whether

“it *becomes* me to be dissolved in *effemi-*  
 “*nacy*, and given up to *riot* and *extra-*  
 “*vagance*, to be *insolent* and *tyrannical*,

“or affect *vain* and *useless prodigality* ;”  
 or, on the contrary, to be *regular* and

*moderate* in my desires, *gentle* and *easy* of  
 access, to treat my *inferiors* with *conde-*

*scension* and *humanity*, and employ my  
 grandeur, wealth, and influence in acts of

*generous compassion*, in communicating *re-*  
*lief* and *happiness* to the poor and misera-

ble.—Am I a *parent*? What *course* must  
 I take to *fulfil* the obligations of that

character? “Shall I *neglect* the *minds* and  
 “*manners* of my children, and, by my

“*sloth* or *profuseness*, *abandon* them to  
 “*poverty* and *contempt* ;” or *form* them

to just notions of things, *instill* into them  
 good principles, *train them up* with a strict

regard to *piety*, *virtue*, and *decency*, *watch*  
*over* them with an affectionate care, *guide*

their rash and unexperienced youth by my  
 superior

SERM. superior discretion, *dispose* of them honourably in the world, and *provide* for them a comfortable subsistence? “ Shall I *discourage*, and entirely *break*, the force and sprightliness of their tender spirits; “ by a *rough* and *arbitrary* management,” or *cherish* their resolution and activity, and *engage* them to the love and chearful practice of their duty, by a winning *affability* and *freedom*? — Or am I the *master* of a family: What are the *duties* that this relation requires? “ Not surely to govern “ with *rigour* and *inflexible* severity, not “ to leave *servants* to the *full swing* of “ their irregular inclinations, not to *debauch* their natural sense of good and “ evil, and *burden* them in wickedness, “ by a vicious example; this is both unchristian and unnatural:” But to *temper* authority with mildness, treating them as *men*, tho’ Providence, for wise reasons, has placed them in an *inferior* and *dependent* station, to *encourage* their good designs, in a friendly manner *admonish* them of their errors, and *lead them on* to virtue, to sobriety, peaceableness, and fidelity,

lity, by a constant face of religion, justice, SERM.  
 strict order, and harmony. X.

WE are to consider farther, in what manner it is proper for us to conduct ourselves, that our *virtues*, by being carried to an *excess*, may not degenerate into imperfections and blemishes; nor the *duties* of religion be made to *clash* and *interfere* with each other: “ How, for instance, “ to preserve the *dignity* of a character, “ keep it above *contempt*, and secure the “ *respect* that is *due* to it, and yet avoid “ *pride* and *moroseness*; and to maintain “ the *ballance* even between *generosity* and “ prudent *frugality*, that the one may not “ rise to *profuseness*, nor the other sink “ into *avarice*.” We should consider, likewise, not barely how we may *discharge* the immediate duties of our respective stations, but how to do it with the *most honour*, so as to recommend religion, and render our example amiable. For it is very possible that a man may act his part *well* upon the whole, and yet do it in such a *disagreeable* way, as to fall under a great deal of reproach and *censure*; by which, through the blind  
 and

SERM. and undistinguishing prejudice of the world,  
 X. *virtue* itself frequently *suffers*: But, on  
 the contrary, “ There is in the conduct of  
 “ others, a conduct for the *main* the same,  
 “ and in the same *scenes* of life too, a  
 “ *gracefulness* and *freedom*, and a certain  
 “ *nobleness* and *ingenuity* of temper, dis-  
 “ covered, that makes them *shine* and be  
 “ *distinguished* in all the offices of *social*  
 “ *life.*” And the considering *this*, toge-  
 ther with the fixing the proper *bounds* of  
 particular virtues, that *each* may keep its  
 place, and not encroach upon the *rest*; a  
 right consideration of these things, I say,  
 is one of the principal branches of religi-  
 ous wisdom, and, consequently, of the duty  
 which the text enjoins: And there is the  
 more reason that it should be *distinctly*  
 inculcated, as it is the *very point*, in which  
 the generality of mankind are notoriously  
 defective.


ANOTHER most important subject of  
 meditation is *death*, which *closes* the scene  
 of our present existence, puts an *end* to  
 all our *worldly* projects, and *imaginary*  
 schemes of happiness. There is nothing  
 that mankind, in general, have a greater  
 reluctance

reluctance and averſion to. The very thought of it *terrifies*; and therefore is diverted as much as poſſible, as too *awful* and *gloomy*, to make way for *gayer* and more *ſprightly* images: And to this it is undoubtedly owing, that ſo many behave with ſo little *decency*, ſo little of manly *firmneſs* and *courage*, under the immediate apprehenſions of it. If, without regarding the *conſequences* of death, we conſider it only as an *unavoidable* event, but at the ſame time *ſhocking to nature*, it is certainly our wiſdom to render it *intimate* and *familiar* to the mind; that the *horrors* of it being diminished by frequent and *cloſe* converſation with it, we may ſubmit, with becoming reſignation, to the appointment of an *all wiſe* providence the *universal law* of mortality. This will be an unſpeakable happineſs to *ourſelves* in that critical hour, when every thing around us has a *melancholly* aſpect, and the ſpirits are *faint* and *languid*; it is honourable to *Human nature*, and repreſents it in a *worthy* and *advantageous* light; it has a natural tendency to *encourage* and *comfort* thoſe that ſurvive us, and inſpire *them* with a gene-

SERM.  
X.



SERM. rous contempt of death. But, on the contrary, to be *unprepared* for what we know will certainly happen, and, for want of due reflection upon it, to meet it when it does happen with *trembling* and *confusion*, is an argument of weakness and pusillanimity; it debases the *dignity* of our nature, and makes it appear *despiseable*; it is a reproach to our *religion*, as if its principles were not *strong* enough to support us under those *special exigencies*, in which their influence is most desirable; and, withal, it tends to *dispirit* others, and to propagate and increase those *enslaving* fears, which render men absolutely unfit for *undertaking* and *accomplishing* many *noble* designs, of the utmost service to society. There is indeed a great deal in men's *natural* make and constitution: Some are of *bold daring* spirits, that scarce any thing can depress and controul; while others are of such *fearful* and *suspicious* tempers, as to be alarmed by every *imagination* of danger; and to such, it may be next to impossible to *compose* and *quiet* their minds, in the near views of a dissolution. But certain it is, that if any thing will

will enable them to behave, in their last SERM. moments, with tolerable calmness and re- X. signation, it is the *using* themselves to me-  ditate on their departure hence, its *neces-* sity, and the *folly* of *repining* or *struggling* against fix'd and unalterable laws of pro- vidence ; and, above all, on the glorious rewards of piety and true goodness in the future life, in comparison of which, all worldly glory and pleasure are insignificant and trifling.

BUT this leads me to mention *another* subject, that deserves our most deliberate and serious reflection, *viz.* the awful *con-* sequences of death. Not to contemplate these, with the greatest attention and concern, must argue unaccountable *stupidity*, and that we are hardened even against a sense of our own *true interest*. For the *future* state is the only *fixed* and *proper* scene of our happiness or misery ; it therefore demands our *chief* regard, if we act merely on principles of reason and common pru- dence ; and *this* life can be but of little importance, any otherwise than as, by the appointment of the wise author of nature, it is *connected* with and *preparatory* to it.

SERM. Besides our meditating, on the states of  
 X. good and bad men hereafter, will furnish  
 us with the most encouraging *motives* to the practice of religion and universal righteousness, and the most powerful *dissuaves* from vice and impurity : For we can none of us, surely, be so *rash* as to *resolve* to persist in dissolute courses, with shame and remorse, misery and ruin, *full* in our view. And nothing can so effectually *disarm* death of its terror, or administer such consolation and support in the prospect of it, as this thought, that it opens a passage for us into eternal life, and the enjoyment of blessedness and glory inconceivable.

THE duty which the text exhorts to must imply in it, besides all this, a frequent *examination* and *review* of our conduct, to see how far it has *agreed* with the rule of life, and wherein it has been *defective* ; and whether the *general principles*, on which we proceed, will continue to approve themselves as *right* and *sound* principles, as often as they are *scrutinised* and brought to the *trial*. There is the more need of this, “ because *passion* and *prejudice* are apt to insinuate themselves, and  
 “ mix



“ mix sometimes, *insensibly*, with our reasonings upon points of morality : So that *hasty* conclusions, which we made when we were in a *warm sanguine* temper, and mistook the strength of our *presumption* for a degree of *evidence*, are frequently *disallowed* by our more correct and improved judgment.”—And besides, by taking this method, we shall approve ourselves to be persons of a clear and unexceptionable integrity ; who are resolved to leave *no refuges* (not even *that* of *ignorance*) in which vice may *shelter* itself, and are only concerned for *truth* and *un-corrupted manners*.

ALL the subjects, hitherto proposed, are proper to employ our meditations as we are *men* : There are some others, peculiar to us as *Christians*. We are obliged, for instance, to consider the *grounds* of our religion, the intrinsic excellency of its doctrines, and the external evidence by which its truth and divinity are supported ; that we may not be Christians by *chance*, from the mere force of *custom*, from an implicit regard to *tradition* and *human authority*, but from *judgment* and *deliberation* ;



SERM. which distinguishes *true faith* from *credulity* and *enthusiasm*, and is the only thing that can render it more *praise worthy*, tho' it may in its consequences be more *useful*, than *infidelity* and *error*. We are likewise to consider, and examine with care, the practical rules that Christianity prescribes, its precepts relating to piety, justice, charity, and temperance, which are the perfection, and most sublime refinement, of *natural* religion; and the true nature, obligation, and *moral* tendency of its *positive* institutions. To which we must add the *peculiar* motives, that our holy religion suggests, either to the practice of virtue in *general*, or to excell in any *particular* virtues; arising from the *clear discoveries* it has made of our duty, of the perfections of God, and, especially, of his wonderful goodness in the redemption of mankind, but, above all, the *distinct account* which it gives of the future judgment, attended with a variety of engaging circumstances, worthy the majesty of God, and the excellent nature of the Human soul, and the whole calculated, in the  
highest

highest degree, to *strike* and *impress* our SERM. minds. X.

THUS have I shewn about *what things* it is necessary for us to employ our serious reflections, and would make this useful remark upon the whole ; that though consideration *always* becomes us, and be of eminent advantage in *all* circumstances, yet there are *certain seasons*, in which it is peculiarly necessary. “ As soon as we  
 “ attain to the *due* exercise of *reason*, and  
 “ set out in *moral* life, there should be a  
 “ *general solemn deliberation*, to *fix* the  
 “ principles and rule of our conduct ;  
 “ which being *corrected* upon proper oc-  
 “ casions by our more *ripened* understand-  
 “ ing, and *altered* so as to suit it to every  
 “ change of condition, will enable us to  
 “ steer our course aright, and maintain a  
 “ regular and *consistent* character, amidst  
 “ all the temptations and difficulties to  
 “ which we are exposed.” Again, confi-  
 deration is especially necessary in the  
 height of *prosperity*, which has a direct  
 tendency to *dissipate* thought, and to *ener-  
 vate* and *soften* the temper ; that we may  
 neither behave *insolently* through our pride

SERM. and vanity, nor be captivated by the bewitching charms of worldly *pomp* and *luxury*. It is necessary, likewise, in the fiery heat of *youth*; when the spirits are so gay and lively, and the passions so vehement and impetuous, that we are in danger, without *frequent exercises* of *sedate* and *cool* reason, of being hurried into great indecencies. Finally, it is highly necessary on *sudden* emergencies, in points of *singular* importance, and in all *perplexed* and *intricate* cases. Something or other, of this kind, must have fallen within *every* man's experience: And, whenever it happens, if through a natural forwardness, or too fond an opinion of his own abilities, or an aversion to close thinking, he comes to a *quick* and *hasty* conclusion; it may be attended with consequences shameful and fatal to *himself*, and very injurious to his *fellow-creatures*.

I cannot think it needful for me to propose arguments, in *form*, to prove the *reasonableness* of this duty, since it is, in truth, nothing else but the *exercise* of our *rational* powers, the discriminating property and privilege of Human nature, that advances

vances man above the lower creatures, SE<sup>r</sup>M.  
 which are guided by *sense* and *instinct*.—— X.

“ So that in the *proportion*, in which we  
 “ are destitute of *thought* and *reflection*,  
 “ we forfeit our *humanity*.” Nor need I,  
 after what has been said in the foregoing  
 discourse, expatiate farther on the *advan-*  
*tages* of consideration ; on which, very  
 highly, our satisfaction in this world, and  
 eternal peace and blessedness hereafter, de-  
 pend. Every one must be convinced, that  
 the want of *reflection* is a natural *source*  
 of vice and disorder, and gives the pas-  
 sions an *unbounded* scope : For there is  
*nothing besides* that can *stop* their career, or  
*limit* their extravagance. And after *some*  
*time* spent in irregular indulgencies, which  
 took their rise at first from an *inconsider-*  
*ate* and *heedless* temper, the sinner be-  
 comes more *afraid* of *thinking*, for fear  
 of alarming *conscience*, and filling his mind  
 with *horror*. So that all his relief, all his  
 tranquillity, springs from offering *violence*  
 to *reason*, and *suppressing* its *friendly* admo-  
 nitions : The *best* he can expect is, to be  
 in an uncertain fluctuating condition ; be-  
 twixt *self-approbation* and *dislike*, *hope* and  
*despair*,

SERM. *despair, remorse and stupidity.* Whereas  
 X. the great duty of consideration, *rightly*  
 performed, will lead us *safely* through the  
 dangerous *snares* of life; and if it does  
 not prevent *little* failings and indiscretions,  
 which are incident to *all* mankind from  
 the natural *limitation* and *weakness* of their  
 faculties, it will, at least, secure from all  
*gross* and *destructive* errors. And, to men-  
 tion nothing more, our *virtues*, being the  
 effect of a deliberate judgment, will be  
 more *excellent* in themselves, and more *ac-*  
*ceptable* to God; and the *mistakes* that  
 still cleave to us after an honest inquiry,  
 and a sincere use of means for better in-  
 formation, will be the more easily *par-*  
*doned*.

LET us all therefore be persuaded to the  
 practice of a duty, which is of such ab-  
 solute necessity and high importance; and  
 declared to be the *will* of God, in the  
 strongest manner, not only by the *Prophet*  
 in the text, but in the very *contrivance*  
 and *frame* of our nature. Let us *consider*  
 our *ways*, and *shew ourselves men*, shew  
 ourselves persons of *true discretion*, shew  
 ourselves *Christians*; the *professors* of a re-  
 ligion,

ligion, which has not only pressed it upon us, as a fundamental obligation, thus to answer the *design* of our intelligent frame, but has proposed, to our serious thoughts, the most *grand*, and *noble*, and *useful* subjects, that the *mind* of man is capable of contemplating. In order to this, we must shake off *indolence*, “ which “ *first* destroys the *habit*, and, by *degrees*, “ weakens the very *faculty* of thinking ;” and not suffer our *passions* to gain too great an ascendancy over us, which, by *excessive* gratifications, “ blind and confound “ the understanding, and destroy our *relish* of *mental* pleasures.” —— And may the merciful *Father* of our *spirits* strengthen and confirm every good resolution to *this* purpose ; that we may consider and *know* the things that belong to our *peace*, in *this* our day, before they are for ever *hid* from our eyes.







## S E R M O N XI.



Of the *Sabbath*, and the *moral*  
Ground of Public Worship.

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EXODUS XX. 8, 9, 10, 11.

*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work: Thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle; nor the stranger that is within thy gates.*


*For*

*For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day : Wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.*

SERM.  
XI.



HIS precept of the decalogue was instituted, with the same general view, as the three preceding, *i. e.* to maintain a lively sense of the allegiance and veneration that were *solely*, and *immutably*, due to the supreme Lord over all, by a *stated* and *solemn* commemoration of the effects of his stupendous wisdom and omnipotence, in the whole frame and disposition of nature. From whence it plainly follows, that tho' the law itself, relating to the *Sabbath*, should be allowed to be merely *positive*, or, in other words, not to be founded on the eternal reason and fitness of things, but to derive all its obligation from the *authority* and *will* of the legislator ; and tho', in consequence of this, its binding force as a divine law may not be

be *universal*, but limited to *particular* SERM.  
subjects; yet the end, for which it was XI.  
enacted, is undeniably *moral*, and extends   
to *all* nations of the world *equally*, and  
to *all* mankind. So that whatever diffe-  
rences of opinion may arise about the day,  
the precise determinate *time*, that is to be  
kept in honour of the infinite and eternal  
Deity, they cannot in the least affect the  
*natural* and *invariable* grounds of public  
worship; the *propriety* of which, result-  
ing from principles of *public* justice and  
gratitude, from the *relation* we stand in  
to God, and the *dependent* state of our  
being, is, and ever will be, the *same*.  
The first of these therefore is, compara-  
tively speaking, a point of inferior con-  
sequence; and to make it an article, that  
relates to the *essence* of religion, borders  
too nearly upon *superstition*. But the not  
attending *public worship*, or behaving, at  
the time when it is performed, with *ir-  
reverence* and an *indecent levity*, these, I  
say, in proportion to the *degree* of the  
neglect or the indecency committed, are  
*immoral* practices; and, as will be here-  
after shewn, may be attended with most  
injurious

SERM. injurious consequences to the *virtue* and  
 XI. *good* of mankind.

~ BUT I cannot, in a discourse on the fourth commandment, confine myself to this most useful and momentous subject, but must explain the precept itself, and endeavour to fix distinctly the *bounds* of its obligation. Before I enter upon which, I beg leave to give a short paraphrase of this ancient law, that the true *meaning*, and ultimate *scope* of it, may be the more easily apprehended.


*Remember the Sabbath-day, i. e.* “ the  
 “ day of *rest*,” (which is the real mean-  
 ing of the word *Sabbath*, and *all* that is  
 implied in it) remember *the day of rest*,  
 “ which God hath commanded thee to  
 “ observe,” *to keep it holy, i. e.* “ *distin-*  
 “ *guished* from all other days as a *festi-*  
 “ *val* instituted in honour of him, and  
 “ *separated* from laborious and servile of-  
 “ *fices.*” *Six days, or “ six days only,”*  
*shalt thou labour, and do all thy work :*  
 “ But thus it is not lawful for thee *to do*  
 “ *on the seventh day*, because it is *the*  
 “ *Sabbath of the LORD thy God ;*” *in it,*  
 therefore, *thou shalt not do any work, i. e.*  
 “ thou

“ thou shalt not *follow* thy business, nor  
 “ *employ* thyself in thine ordinary occu-  
 “ *pation*, but works of absolute *necessity*  
 “ for the preservation and regular support  
 “ of life, and acts of *charity* and *mercy*,  
 “ can never be superseded by any *positive*  
 “ law ; these therefore thou art at liberty  
 “ to perform : For it would be most *ab-*  
 “ *surdly rigid* and *impious* superstition to  
 “ make the *Sabbath* a contradiction to  
 “ *nature*, and a *foe* to *humanity*. But,  
 “ with these necessary *exceptions*, the pro-  
 “ hibition is not limited to thine *own per-*  
 “ *son*, but reaches to all that are under  
 “ thine *authority* or influence ;” to *thy son*,  
*thy daughter*, *thy man-servant*, and *thy*  
*maid-servant*, “ and, from those principles  
 “ of *lenity* and *mercy*, that utter abhor-  
 “ rence of *cruelty* which true religion al-  
 “ ways inspires,” to *thy very cattle*. “ Nor  
 “ is the native *Israelite* only included,  
 “ but every *foreigner* who is permitted by  
 “ the laws to reside amongst you,” *the*  
*stranger that is within thy gates*.——Thus  
 you see, that the *whole* of the command-  
 ment itself relates to nothing else but a  
 day of *mere rest* from secular employment

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SERM. and bodily labour, without any *explicit*  
 XI. *declaration*, at least in this most solemn  
 ~~~~~ exhibition of it, that it was *originally* con-  
 secrated, among the *Jews*, to any *other*
 or *higher* purposes of religion. And I de-
 sire that this may be particularly noted,
 because I shall have occasion to mention
 it again as a circumstance of great weight,
 to *justify* the almost universal practice of
Christians in not solemnizing the day of
 the *Jewish* Sabbath.

AND this *general idea* of the principal
 view and scope of the precept is not at all
 contradicted, but rather most evidently
 demonstrated to be the just and true idea
 of it, by the *reason* assigned as the ground
 of the appointment of this holy festival.
 —For in six days the LORD made heaven
 and earth, the sea, and all that in them is,
 and rested the seventh day (“ not as if his
 “ omnipotence, which could have framed
 “ the universe in *an instant* as easily as in
 “ ten thousand years, was *fatigued*, and
 “ stood in need of a *relaxation*; this, I
 “ say, cannot possibly be the sense of the
 “ expression; it must therefore only mean
 “ that he *ceased* from creating on the se-
 “ venth

“ *venth* day, every thing being already SERM.
“ *completely executed*, according to the XI.
“ *exact model* which his infinite wisdom 
“ had contrived :)” *Wherefore*, “ not
“ because there was any *necessary connexion*, in the nature of things, between
“ his having finished the works of crea-
“ tion in *six* days, and the religious cele-
“ bration of the *seventh* as a day of *rest* ;
“ but to answer a valuable purpose, which
“ might fitly take its *rise* from hence, he
“ did, by *positive* institution, and an act
“ of his supreme *authority*,” *blesst the Sab-*
bath-day, and hallow, or sanctify, it.

THE substance of this command plainly relates to the sanctification of the *seventh* day, and of that *alone*. And the *reason* by which it is enforced neither is, nor can *possibly* be, an enforcement of any thing else, but of an observation of the *seventh* as a day of sacred rest. For, most surely, God's *resting* the *seventh* day can be only an argument to *rest* the *same* day, according to the *order* which we observe in our *computation* whatever it be ; “ and
“ not for our resting on the *first, fourth,*
“ *sixth*, or no determinate day within the

SERM. “*seven.*” So that if this law be still *in*
 XI. *force*, our neglecting the *seventh*, and con-
 fining our *social* worship of the Deity to
 the *first*, day of the week is altogether
 unjustifiable. It is therefore of great im-
 portance to enquire *how far* the obligation
 of this law extends; whether to *mankind*
 in general; or to *Christians* in particular,
 as acknowledging the divinity of the *Mo-*
saic dispensation, and the authority of the
 books of the *Old Testament*; or whether
 it terminated only in the *Hebrew* nation.
 The last of these I apprehend to be the
 case; and shall endeavour to prove that
 it is neither an *universal* law, nor a ne-
 cessary branch of *Christian* duty, to *re-*
member the seventh day of the week to
keep it holy. And in what I have to offer,
 I shall proceed in a regular and gradual
 method, that every part of the argument
 may be the better understood, and the
 whole appear in its true light.

IN the FIRST place, then, I would
 observe, that the fourth commandment,
 which enjoins the religious celebration of
 the *seventh* day, “is not a part of the
 “*moral law.*” For if so, there must be
 an

an indisputable reason, in the *abstract nature* of the thing itself, which distinguishes *this* day from *all* others; and a reason too, that may be *universally* known without the help of *revelation*; because points of unchangeable morality are those *only*, which are discoverable by *nature's* light, and would have obliged *all* mankind, if they had not been made the subjects of any particular laws.—But will any one pretend to say, that the *sanctification* of the *seventh* day would have been a *necessary duty* of religion, if God had never *interposed* and *commanded* it to be sanctified? Or, that it was a duty *originally*, and *always*, obvious to every human understanding? Or that the most remote *Heathen* nations, amongst whom no traces can be found of the *Mosaic* account of the creation of the world, were capable of finding out, merely by their *reason*, that *in six days the LORD made heaven and earth*, and that therefore the *seventh* must be a *holy sabbath*, devoted to the solemnities of religion? These things are surely too absurd to be asserted; and yet they ought not only to be asserted, but

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~~~~~

SERM. plainly *demonstrated*, as the only *possible*  
 XI. foundation on which it can be admitted,  
 that the fourth commandment relates not  
 to a matter of *instituted* and *alterable*, but  
 of *moral* and *eternal*, duty: *i. e.* It must  
 be demonstrated, tho' it be almost in  
 terms a *contradiction*, that tho' the *reason*  
 assigned, for the appointment of the Sab-  
 bath, could never have been *known* but  
 by the help of *revelation*, yet the *duty* of  
 observing the seventh day, which is en-  
 tirely grounded on this naturally *undiscoverable*  
*reason*, might have been *found out*  
 by the *bare unassisted* faculties of the Hu-  
 man mind. Whereas, on the contrary,  
 nothing is more self-evident than this, that  
 where there neither does, nor *can*, appear  
 to be any *ground* of obligation, no obli-  
 gation either does, or can, *subsist*.

BUT perhaps it will be said, that  
 wherever the *reason* assigned for the sanc-  
 tification of the *Sabbath* is plainly pro-  
 posed, its *moral* and *universal* obligation  
 may from thence be fairly deduced. How  
 I ask does that appear?—God's *resting*  
 from the work of creation, on the seventh  
 day, is an expression most manifestly *figu-  
 rative*;

*rative*; and can *unalterable rules* of morality be inferred from *figures*, and *peculiar idioms* of speech? Reduce it to its plain and natural meaning, and it can signify nothing more than this, that the great God, the author of nature, created the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the infinite variety of creatures contained in them, within the compass of *six* days; and therefore of course, his whole scheme being compleatly finished and *absolutely perfect*, ceased from the work of creation on the *seventh* day. But would it *therefore*, if our supreme governour had never commanded it, have been our *natural* and *inviolable* duty to have kept *holy* the *seventh* day? What *necessary* connexion is there in *reason*, abstracted from, and independent on, the *positive* will of God, “between his having *compleated* the making of the world in *six* days, and the *religious observation* of the *seventh*?” And if there be no such *necessary* connexion, as most certainly there is not, the law of the decalogue, which declares the *holiness* of this particular day of the week above others, cannot belong to the

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SERM. class of *moral* laws ; the precise notion of  
 XI. which is, “ that they bind *all* mankind,  
 “ unalterably, on account of their *origi-*  
 “ *nal intrinsic* fitness, and not in virtue  
 “ of the *authority* of the legislator, and  
 “ his express *constitution*.”

I WOULD not be supposed, by any thing which I have now offered, to insinuate, that what the Almighty and supreme Lord has been pleased to assign as a *reason*, for his *positive* institution of the seventh-day Sabbath, was not a *good* and *solid* reason ; nor does the course of the argument afford the least colour for such an inference. “ For that may be a just  
 “ reason for his *ordaining* the observation  
 “ of it, which would not have been suf-  
 “ ficient to make our *voluntary* obser-  
 “ vance of it, without his direct command,  
 “ an *indispensable duty* of religion and  
 “ *moral* piety. There are undeniably *wise*  
 “ reasons for appointing *Baptism* and the  
 “ *Lord's-supper* in the *Christian* church,  
 “ as there were, likewise, for enjoining  
 “ the practice of *circumcision* among the  
 “ *Jews* ; But is the law of *circumcision*,  
 “ or

“ or the law of *baptism*, upon this ac-  
“ count, to be deemed a *moral* law? To  
“ assert this is utterly to confound the  
“ *distinction* between *moral* and *positive* ;  
“ and in effect to declare, that *all* the  
“ commands of God, because they have  
“ their foundation in justice and wisdom,  
“ are equally *moral*.” This, indeed, is a  
strong reason why *positive* laws should be  
strictly and conscientiously obeyed, as well  
as those of a *higher* nature ; but still they  
must be allowed to differ, from laws which  
are properly and absolutely *moral*, in this  
very material circumstance, that they are  
*all repealable*. And this is the first natu-  
ral step in our reasonings upon the pre-  
sent subject, and the ground-work of all  
that is to follow, *viz.* that the precept,  
which enjoined the celebration of the *se-*  
*venth* day as a sacred rest, cannot be rank-  
ed among the eternal *irreversible* rules of  
morality : From whence these conse-  
quences immediately and directly flow—  
“ That it is not an *universal* law extending  
“ to all mankind — that its *obligation*  
“ must of course cease, when the parti-  
“ cular *end* ceases, for which it was in-  
“ stituted

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LI.

SERM. “stituted — and that it may at any  
 XI. “time be *entirely abrogated*, or abrogated  
 “as to the *particular day* only, by the  
 “same authority that *enacted* it.”

I NOW proceed to another observation, and that is, that as the fourth commandment has been clearly shewn not to be obligatory as a *moral* precept; so it has no force at all at present, with respect to *men* in general, or *Christians* in particular, merely as it was delivered from mount *Sinai*, and made a part of the *Mosaic* constitution; because *no laws* can possibly oblige any, to whom they were not *given*; and therefore *that* law of the decalogue being only enjoined on *a certain people* (who are *specially* described and characterized as a people brought out of the land of *Egypt*, out of the house of bondage) it can, as such, bind *no other* people, *no other* particular persons besides them. And, farther, if *any* precept whatsoever be of *present* authority, merely as it belonged to the *Mosaic* dispensation, every precept which was delivered of God to the *Jews*, by the ministry of *Moses*; must have the same authority. On the other hand, if it  
 be

be not allowed to derive its obligation SERM.  
from its having been anciently a divine XI.  
*Jewish* law, it must now have no weight  
at all, but either as a *moral* precept (which  
we have already seen it *cannot* be) or as  
it has been recommended and enforced  
*anew* by the *Christian* religion.

HERE then, in the THIRD place, the  
hinge of the whole argument turns, and  
by this it must be finally decided. For a  
*moral* law it is not ; as a law communi-  
cated to the *Jews* it has no force ; if  
therefore it be not an *institution* of the  
gospel, there is no imaginable reason left  
to support its *obligation* ; and upon *Chri-*  
*stian* principles, it can, in these latter ages  
of the world, be neither a branch of  
*natural* nor of *revealed* religion. And the  
mere *silence* of the gospel with respect to  
it, when it is destitute of *every other*  
ground of *present* obligation, must amount  
upon the whole to much the same, as if  
it was, in *formal* and *explicit* terms, de-  
clared to be totally and for ever *abrogated*.

THERE are several other topics, from  
whence, I apprehend, the same point  
might be conclusively argued ; which to  
avoid

SERM. avoid prolixity, and from the little desire

XI. I have to engage in *controversy*, I shall but slightly mention.—And the FIRST is, that the *Sabbath*, enjoined in the fourth commandment, is entirely different from what those *Christians*, who maintain the *holiness* of the *seventh* day of the week, contend for; *their Sabbath* being a day of *religious worship*; the *Jewish*, as far as can be gathered from the words of the *precept itself*, only a day of *rest*. For there is no mention made either of *prayers*, or *moral discourses*, or *reading the scriptures* (if any of these holy books were at *that time* written;) of which exercises we likewise find scarce any *traces*, in the history of the *Jews*, till the establishment of their *synagogue-worship*; which, as I apprehend, was merely a *prudential*, and not a *divine* institution. And this day of rest seems to have been nothing more than a festival day in honour of the self-existent Deity; to maintain a reverent sense of *the maker of heaven and earth*, *i. e.* of the *true and living God*; this being his characteristical distinction, in many passages of the Old Testa-



Testament, from *unsubstantial* and *idol* SERM.  
Deities. So that as the precept does not XI.  
appear to have been calculated for the  
purposes of *religion at large*, but adapted  
to the *ultimate view* of the *Hebrew* con-  
stitution, which was to guard against *ido-*  
*latry*; and as *servants* in these eastern  
countries were *slaves*, and used with much  
greater *severity* and *oppression* than in mo-  
dern times (upon which account, in the  
circumstances of that age, it might serve  
peculiar purposes of *humanity* as well as  
*piety*) it is, at least, highly probable, that  
the Jewish *seventh-day* Sabbath was in-  
tended to be *confined* to that nation only,  
and not to continue in *force*, when the  
public state of the world was altered.

To which we may farther add, that  
St. Paul, in particular, has represented the  
*religious* observation of *days*, as well as  
the distinction between clean and unclean  
*meats*, to be quite alien from the *free* and  
*liberal* spirit of Christianity; and, conse-  
quently, under that more *rational* and *re-*  
*fin*ed institution, as a thing entirely need-  
less, and an instance of *superstitious* scru-  
pulousity. And as he has done this in most  
*universal*

SERM. *universal* terms, without making, or so much as intimating, a *single* exception, and had an undoubted reference to the customs of the *Jews*; either every day which they observed as *holy*, and of consequence the *seventh* day of the week, or *no* particular day at all must be included in that representation: And then it must be a *general* remark, which, by allowing the exclusion of every *particular*, can have no weight or meaning in it.

BUT to come to the principal point of all, the whole debate is in my opinion absolutely, and beyond contradiction, decided by the following passage; *Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days*: For, in these words, the following things are most evidently either asserted, or implied.—FIRST *absolutely*, and without any *restriction* at all, that no man is to be *judged*, *i. e.* *censured* and *condemned*, for not thinking it his duty to observe *Sabbath* days.—SECONDLY, that the observation of these *Sabbaths* was therefore, under the gospel, a matter of *perfect indifference*: For if the neglect

Coloss. ii.  
16.

neglect of it had been *a violation* of any command of God still *subsisting* and *in force*, it *might* and *ought* to have been condemned. —

THIRDLY, the *reason* why the non-observer of the *Sabbaths*, as well as of the *new moon*, was not to be charged with *irreligion* is distinctly assigned; *viz.* that they were *shadows*, or prefigurations, of *good things to come* under the kingdom and government of the *Messiah*, and therefore, that kingdom being *actually* erected, they must of necessity give place to the *substance*, which they were intended darkly to represent—

FOURTHLY, the word *Sabbath* days is an universal term, that must comprehend under it *every* Sabbath which is not particularly *excepted*, or else the scriptures and all writings are unintelligible: But the *seventh* day of the week is not particularly *excepted*, and therefore the solemn consecration of it cannot, among *Christians*, be a necessary office of *piety* — I shall add but one thing more, which is, that there is the utmost probability to induce us to believe, that by *Sabbath* days in this text the *weekly Sabbath* was more especially intended; because wherever the word

SERM. word is used, it seldom signifies any thing  
 XI. else in the writings of the *New Testa-*  
 ment; and never *once* any *other* of the  
*Jewish Sabbaths*; and when, in the *Old*  
 Testament, it is joined with *feasts* and  
*new moons*, it has generally the same im-  
 port, and was designed to specify the *se-*  
*venth-day Sabbath*, *distinct* from all others.

I EXPECT that it will be here urged, that the law of the *Sabbath* is as *old* as the creation, and, of course, must be distinct both from the *judicial* and *cere-*  
*monial* laws of the *Jews*; that being *coe-*  
*val* with Human nature itself, it may rea-  
 sonably be supposed to respect *all* man-  
 kind; or, at least, *all* in every country,  
 and in every age, who, by the light of  
*revelation*, are *acquainted* with the account  
 which *Moses* gives of the creation of the  
 world — To which I answer, that it is  
 not *expressly* affirmed by *Moses*, that the  
 Sabbath was instituted from *the beginning*,  
 and to be observed by *Adam* in paradise;  
 but his words are fairly capable of a dif-  
 ferent sense. What the historian says (*viz.*  
 Gen. ii. 3. that *God blessed the seventh day, and sancti-*  
*fied it, because that in it he had rested from*  
*all*

all his work, which God created and made) SERM.  
may only be by way of *anticipation*; and XI.  
have a reference to a law, that was not  
enacted till some ages afterwards. This  
would be easily understood by that people,  
for whom the writings of *Moses* were *ori-*  
*ginally* and more *immediately* designed;  
and the thing itself is consistent with the  
strictest propriety of historical narration.  
For suppose that an earthly prince should,  
at the distance of *many years*, institute a  
*festival* in *commemoration* of a signal and  
grand event; the historian, who writes  
his reign (notwithstanding the *institution*  
did not immediately follow the *fact*, the  
memory of which was designed to be  
perpetuated by it) may justly subjoin  
a *general* mention of it to his account  
of the event itself; tho' he intends like-  
wise to insert it in its *proper* place, and  
give it, there, a more *minute* and *full*  
description. And this is not only a *possibi-*  
*lity*, but seems to be, by far, the most  
*probable* account of the case, since in the  
whole history of the *religion* of the *Pa-*  
*triarchs*, nay in all the writings of *Moses*  
about events that happened before the

SERM. commencement of the *Hebrew* polity, there  
 XI. is not so much as the most distant *hint*  
 of a Sabbath *observed*, or *known*; tho' after the giving of the law, both *Moses*, and the subsequent Prophets, abound in passages either enforcing the *observance* of it, or complaining of its *prophanation*. This exactly suits with the *later* date of its being originally a *Judaical* law; but is very hard, if not impossible, to be reconciled with its being a law in force from the *creation*. Allowing, however, that it was so, the conclusion, upon the whole of the argument, will be much the same. For if the words of *St. Paul* above-cited amount to an *abrogation* of the seventh-day Sabbath, as it stands in the *fourth* commandment, they must, with equal weight, *abrogate* this pretended more *ancient* and *primitive* Sabbath; because both the *substance* of the precept, and the *reason* assigned for it, are precisely the *same* in both instances, without any *variation* even in the minutest article. If therefore it has *ever* been *repealed*, the very *self-same* individual command cannot remain *unrepealed*: And to suppose, what is exactly

exactly the *same* in all particulars, to be SERM.  
*annulled* as it is mentioned in the book XI.  
of *Exodus*, but to retain its *obligation* as it  
is inserted in the book of *Genesis*, is to  
make the supreme government of almighty  
God a reign of *capriciousness*, and not of  
*wisdom*.

BUT what, it may be asked, is the  
consequence of all these reasonings? —  
Is it that we are to allot *no* time for pub-  
lic worship? Are there no *public* honours,  
no *social* duties, to be paid to the Father  
of mankind, to the supreme and univer-  
sal governour — Undoubtedly there are:  
*Nature* itself directs to it, independent on  
any law of *revealed* religion, or any ar-  
bitrary or *alterable* constitution: And both  
the *ground* of *public worship* in general,  
and the *reason* of the appointed seasons of  
*Christian* worship, are either immutable  
dictates of nature, or will at least approve  
themselves to the calm and impartial judg-  
ment of all considerate men.


For, FIRST, the *public* worship of the  
Deity is, in the general consideration of it,  
most undeniably of a *moral* nature; “ or,  
“ in other words, the *propriety* and *uses* of

SERM. “ it may be argued upon principles of  
 XI. “ *reason* only, abstracted from all know-  
 ledge, or any *supposition*, of a revela-  
 tion given.”

THE *worship* of God, implying in it an acknowledgment of his supreme perfection, of our necessary dependence upon him, and infinite obligations to him, is as much a dictate of *eternal* morality, as are the most indispensable offices of *justice* and *beneficence*. The *one* as *directly* results from the relations of *creatures* and *beneficiaries* to their Creator and gracious Sovereign, as the *other* from the mutual and indissoluble relations, in which fellow-creatures stand to each other. “ It is therefore as *fit* for us to *unite* in acts of *piety*, as in the support of justice, or the promotion of common good.”

ADD to this, that *public communities* and *bodies* of men, as *such*, are *equally* under the protection and superintending care of the Deity, as the *individuals* which compose them. “ As collected in society, they are of a *distinct* consideration from the individual members of society; they have *distinct wants*, distinct



“ tinct dependencies, distinct mercies; which S E R M.  
“ ought therefore to be all *separately*, i. e. XI.  
“ in *social* worship, acknowledged:” They   
have publick *crimes* which demand a public humiliation, and public *miserics* deserved, which ought, in *reason*, to be deprecated.

AGAIN, *social worship* is a natural means of keeping alive a general veneration of God, which is one of the principal supports of government, and of the external peace and order of the world. It seems to be, indeed, in a great measure necessary to preserve the very *sense* of the Deity; the bulk of the world having either so little inclination, or capacity, or leisure for thinking, that, without a *public remembrance*, God himself might not be *in all their thoughts*. For if so small, so very small, a proportion of *piety* be found amongst mankind, tho' they enjoy, at stated seasons, the advantages of public worship; what may we naturally presume would be the consequence (judging by the ordinary course of things in *other instances*) without this help, but that a general *ignorance* and *barbarity* would be

SERM. introduced? Besides *a public union*, in  
 XI. offices of religion, is an *honour* to it, and  
 ~~~~~ *guards* the worship of God in general  
 from the attacks of Atheists and profes-
 sed libertines; who, if it was observed
 only in *single characters*, might the more
 easily bring disgrace upon it, and banish
 it out of the world; and, by that means,
 deprive all the social virtues of their most
 substantial *defence*; and so throw *Human*
nature into disorder (defacing all marks
 of its dignity) and *Human society* into
 confusion.


LET me further add, that the *united*
 devotion of a whole assembly has a natu-
 ral tendency to animate the *zeal* and *piety*
 of each particular member of it; that
 public worship, in which we more im-
 mediately celebrate a *common* Father, and
 offer reverence and homage to a *common*
universal Governour, strengthens *social af-*
fections, and enforces the principle of
benevolence to mankind: And all these
 uses, these eminent and signal advantages,
 of social piety will be, in the main, the
same in every supposeable condition of
 men; whether *innocent*, or *degenerate*;
 whether

whether *with* or *without* a revelation; SERM. XI.
and, consequently, cannot result from any mere *positive* appointment, which necessarily *presupposes* a revelation, but must spring from *nature* itself, and be raised on a *moral* ground.

WHAT has been hitherto said relates to the worship of the Deity, in the strict and proper sense of the word. And as for *public instructions*, they are undeniably useful to support the *honour* of virtue, and expose the *malignity* of vice, to impress an *efficacious* sense of morality, to correct *public enormities*, to *fortify* good resolutions, to *guard* against the dangerous snares of life, and *explain* the unchangeable rules of piety and virtue to the *untinking* and *inconsiderate* — the *great multitude*, vastly the majority in *all nations*; “ that they may retain something INTERNALLY *human, rational,* and *social*, and not degenerate into mere *savages* with the *external* form and impressions of humanity.”


SHOULD it be said, that these public instructions may indeed be very *expedient* for the *vulgar*; but that they are abso-

SERM. lutely *needless* with respect to persons of
 XI. *reflection*, and more *refined* thought: I
 answer, that this is a distinction, under
 the cover of which, almost *every* man
 may excuse himself from *attending* on
 the public solemnities of religion. For
 who *is* the *wise* man, if every man is to
 be *his own* judge, who will be *voted* the
 wise man that stands in *no need* of moral
 direction, but *himself*? Allowing, how-
 ever, this plea of *vanity* to pass for the
 present; most certainly, public lectures
 on piety and morality may bring impor-
 tant truths to the *remembrance* of the
wisest. They may represent them in a
light, in which they themselves *never* con-
 sidered them; and in a light too, that is
 the most *adapted* to their peculiar temper,
 and, consequently, the most likely to *ex-*
cite their good affections. *New* thoughts,
 of considerable moment, may also be sug-
 gested; *no* man having the absolute com-
 prehension of any subject. Every one, in
 the present state of imperfection, stands
 in need of *all* helps to *improve* his piety:
 Every member of society is *equally* ob-
 liged, whatever his *real* improvements, or
 his

his own thoughts of his improvements, are, SERM.
to join in those reverent, humble, and XI.
grateful acknowledgments of the Deity, 
which are founded on the *natural wants*
and *obligations* of society. And, finally,
his *example* may influence others, to whom
the solemn offices of public worship are
allowed to be of *use*; and may therefore,
in its *effects*, be exceedingly detrimental
to the cause of virtue, and the everlasting
good of mankind. So that this is a tie,
from which none can rationally plead an
exemption, whatever his character and
situation in the world be, or his *proficiency*
in moral knowledge.

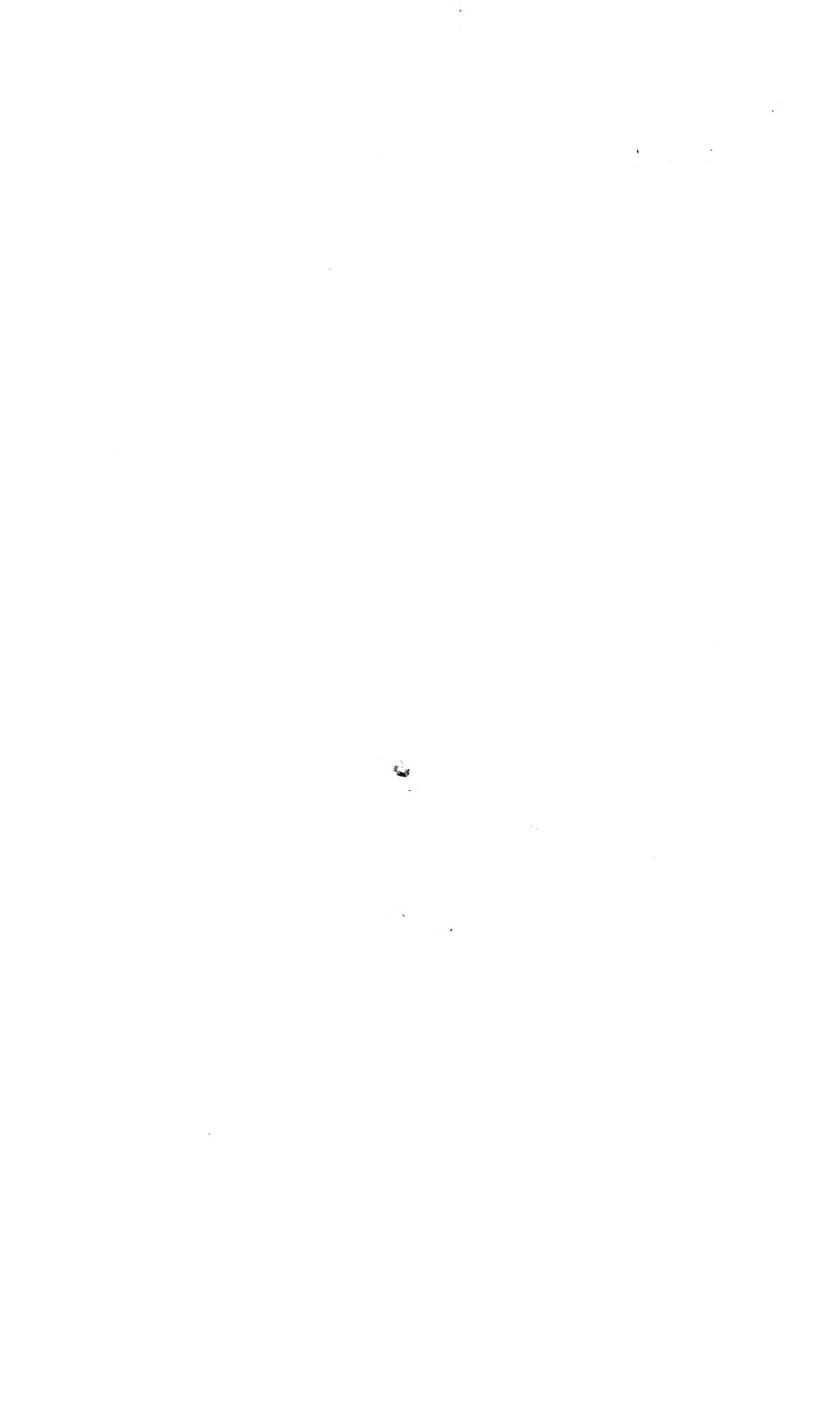
THIS, which has been already argued,
is the foundation and support of all, and
what remains will naturally and easily
follow. “ For an *obligation* to maintain
“ public worship necessarily infers, or
“ rather involves in the very idea of it,
“ an obligation to devote and consecrate
“ *some time* to public worship.” The in-
stitution of *one day in seven* has been found,
by experience, not to be attended with
the least inconvenience to the rights and
common interests of mankind : For if there
had

SERM. had been *any* inconvenience, it must have
 XI. been *felt*, it must have been *complained*
 of in every age ; but no such *sense* ap-
 pears, no such *complaints* have ever been
 made. From whence we may draw this
 certain conclusion, that this is a *portion*
 of time, against which there can be no
 solid exception. On the contrary, the ob-
 servation of it is supported, and, I think,
 with great evidence of reason, by the fol-
 lowing remarks : That one day in seven
 may be most advantageously employed in
recollecting ourselves ; and impressing an
 habitual and lively sense of *religion* upon
 our minds — that it is as *little*, almost,
 as can be allowed for the improvement of
 our understandings and our morals ; for
ease and *refreshment* to our servants ; for
 rest to our *cattle* ; and, consequently, for
 subserving the two grand purposes of
piety and *mercy* ; which are strictly united,
 and always inseparable. That the first
 day of the week, in particular, is recom-
 mended to us, for the celebration of re-
 ligious offices, by *Apostolic example*, and by
 that of the primitive Christians — that
 their *collections* for the poor were made
 upon

upon that day ; which seems to imply, SERM.
that it was the *general stated* season of XI.
their assembling for public worship — 

And, in itself, no day could be so proper for the solemnities of *Christian* worship, as that of our Lord's resurrection, that grand and *decisive* event, on which the truth of Christianity, and all the exalted hopes and glorious prospects, which we derive from thence, necessarily depend.

I SHALL only add, that in the present circumstances of the *Christian* world, if men refuse to join in the religious observation of this day, they lay themselves under a kind of necessity, in most places at least, of neglecting public worship altogether ; by which omission, they will not merely contradict the suggestions and intimations of *revealed* religion, but (as has been before largely shewn) the dictates of *nature* and *reason* itself.





S E R M O N XII.



Religion a consistent and uniform
Character.

MATTH. VI. 24.

*No man can serve two masters :
For either he will hate the one,
and love the other ; or else he
will hold to the one, and despise
the other. — Ye cannot serve
God, and Mammon.*



ALL general maxims, like SERM.
that contained in the text, XII.
must not only be justly and
distinctly stated, and by se-
rious reflection rendered ha-
bitual to the mind ; but their influence
does

SERM. does likewise, in a great measure, depend
 XII. on their being fairly and impartially *ap-
 ~~~~~ plied* to particular cases that happen in  
 human life. If a man examines his own  
 conduct by these rules, with no other view  
 than to *learn* what is right, and with an  
 honest resolution to *adhere* to it ; they  
 will help him, without much difficulty,  
 to form a just judgment of himself, and  
 to regulate all his errors. But without this,  
 he can hope to proceed no farther than  
 the mere *abstract* theory and speculation  
 of virtue ; which will be of very little  
 real advantage to him.—In observations  
 that are not *expressly* directed, nor by a  
*proper accommodation* suited, to particular  
 characters, we are all of us too apt to  
 conclude that we have no *concern*.

AND hence it arises, that the rule  
 which our blessed Saviour has prescribed  
 in the text, tho' it be frequently read, and  
 assented to, without the least hesitation,  
 as containing some *general* truth, yet  
 makes but a faint, lifeless, and *inefficacious*  
 impression upon the generality of man-  
 kind ; who would fain persuade them-  
 selves, that they can, at the same time,  
 lay

lay up treasures both on earth and in heaven, and render all due veneration and homage to the Deity, while their affections are *intensely* and *ultimately* fixed on inferior objects: As if they thought, that two distinct and *opposite* interests might be reconciled and united in *their practice*, tho' such a union be absolutely *impossible*, and a downright *contradiction*, in *reason*, and the *unchangeable nature* of things.

VICIOUS and corrupt excesses, of all kinds, are never so *dangerous*, as when they are made to contract an *alliance* and sort of *friendship* with virtue, and indulged, as it were, upon *principle*. When a man has *entirely* obliterated his natural sense of good and evil, and is become a *cool speculative* libertine, there is scarce *any ground* for a rational hope, that he will ever be *reclaimed* from his irregular and licentious courses; because he has lost all the *natural seeds* of piety and moral goodness, the *first* and *necessary* principles of amendment of life. And the case seems to differ but *little*, if he has so far debased his notions of religion, as to suppose that worldly-mindedness and the extravagant


SERM. travagant pursuits of carnal pleasure are  
 XII. *consistent* with it; and has found out a  
 way in which, as he vainly imagines, he  
 may be a sincere worshipper and servant  
 of God, while he remains the slave of  
 base and inordinate passions. For, in this  
 instance, the sense of religion which he  
 still retains is entirely *useless* to him; it  
 amounts to just the same, with respect to  
 its *influence*, as if he was a professed and  
 thorough-paced infidel: And while the  
 delusion, of which I am now speaking,  
 continues, it is next to impossible that he  
 should feel in himself any one *motive* to  
 reform; or frame a *general intention*, or  
 so much as entertain a *remote thought* of  
 it; because he *approves* of those disorders  
 in his temper and conduct, which, unless  
 they are clearly seen, condemned, and deep-  
 ly lamented, must remain for ever *incurable*.

It is indeed extremely surprising, that  
 mankind who are endowed with reason,  
 and who *boast* of their reason too, should  
 study, and take great pains, not to in-  
 form, but to *impose* upon their under-  
 standings, and *cloud* their inward light;  
 nay, further, that they should be most  
 fond

fond of being *deceived*, and of evading SERM. the force of *truth* in those points, that XII. are undeniably of the highest consequence: As if blindness of mind, and insensibility of danger, were *especially* to be desired in such cases, where an error must of necessity be *fatal*. Trifling and inconsiderate creatures! whose own conduct reproaches and condemns itself.—In affairs, in which their worldly interest is concerned, an *animal, groveling, momentary, and precarious* interest, they are *cautious* and *diffident*; but with respect to religion, a life of reason and moral rectitude, and the welfare of their souls to all eternity, *rash* and *credulous*. In the former case they *deliberate*, and weigh *discreetly*, and *minutely*, every circumstance; in the latter they are either afraid of *thinking* at all, or venture their whole interest upon *occasional* and *superficial* reflections. These, wherever they are found, are surely ill symptoms, and strong indications of a polluted and distempered mind; in which not religion and the love of God, not the improvement of our nobler faculties and securing our supreme

SERM. felicity, but the love of the world, and a  
 XII. desire of carnal gratifications, are the *pre-*  
 dominant and *governing* principles.

BUT it is yet more strange, that mankind should suffer themselves to be deluded, and infatuated, to such an excessive degree, when the general question to be decided is plain to the *meanest* rational capacity. In the course of *temporal* affairs, and the pursuit of a *worldly* interest, intricacies and confusions will frequently happen. The most judicious will be at a loss how to *resolve*, and, when they have resolved, in what manner to *execute*. Even the very *fundamental principles* of worldly wisdom are imperfect. — But nothing can be more obvious, where there is the *lowest* measure of reason, than the grand point which we are now considering, *viz.* that religion must be *one* simple, uniform, character — Nothing can be more obvious, than that the *harmony* and *beauty* of a moral character can by no means be preserved, if *virtue* and *vice* are promiscuously blended in it, which are directly and essentially *repugnant* to each other — Nothing is more obvious, than  
 the

the *general* distinctions of virtue and vice ; SERM.  
 which are clearly discerned, as soon as XII.  
 they are proposed and represented to the   
 mind — And, finally, nothing is more  
 obvious, than that it is not the perform-  
 ing *outward* acts of virtue, but the dispo-  
 sition and bent of the *mind* to virtue,  
 that denominates a virtuous man ; that  
 not assiduity, and seeming fervent zeal,  
 in external offices of devotion, but the  
 inward *habit* and *temper* of piety, con-  
 stitutes a truly religious man : And when  
 either riches or honours are the *principal*  
 object of our affection and regard, for the  
 sake of which higher and nobler pursuits  
 are neglected and sacrificed ; we may  
 justly be said (tho' we are possessed of  
*some* virtues, and abstain from more *gross*  
 and *infamous* irregularities) to have that  
*carnal mind which is enmity against God,*  
*because it is not subject to the law of God,*  
*neither indeed can be.* It is absolutely im-  
 possible, that two *opposite* interests should  
 be heartily espoused, and *ultimately* pur-  
 sued at one and the same time ; and this  
 is the foundation of what our Saviour  
 has asserted in the text, that *No man can*

SERM. *serve two masters*—Ye cannot serve God,  
 XII. *and Mammon.*

IF we are subject to *two* persons, one of whom has an *absolute* and *supreme* authority, and the other only a *dependent* and *limited* authority; and if we actually serve the one only *so far*, as his orders do not *interfere* with the will and command of the *superior* power, but, in all cases of *competition*, acknowledge the latter *alone* to have the right of jurisdiction over us; this is not, in the sense of our Lord's observation, *serviug two masters*: Nor can it, indeed, be considered in that light in the reason and nature of the thing itself, because we plainly own but *one*, to whom our obedience is *supremely* and *ultimately* due. If therefore our affections are placed on the present world, in a way that is perfectly *consistent* with the love, respect, and submission, which we owe to God, and with the strict rules of virtue, we are not properly the servants of the *world*, or of *Mammon*, but of *God* only. If, on the other hand, our concern for worldly enjoyments prevails over our regard to religion, and makes us *neglect*,

or




or directly *violate*, the unchangeable duty which we owe to our maker, we cannot be esteemed the servants of *God*, but of *Mammon* only. And between these two suppositions there is no *medium*. There is no such thing *possible*, as being half *worldly*, and half *religious*; but either to *God*, or *Mammon*, we must, of necessity, be supremely and chiefly *devoted*. The services are in themselves of an inconsistent nature, and require quite contrary dispositions; those, which religion demands from us, being far too *sublime* and *elevated* for the worldly mind, which is enslaved to mean and gross conceptions. — And where this is the case, the only true God is, in effect, degraded into a *secondary* and *subservient* Deity; and that dominion, which is his unalienable right, is *sacrilegiously* transferred to sense and appetite. But it will be of great use to us to examine the subject more at large; and, therefore,

IN the FIRST place, I shall suggest a few reflections, in order to explain farther our Saviour's general observation, that *No man can serve two masters*: And then,

SERM. SECONDLY, Consider the case, which  
 XII. he has brought both as an example, and  
 an illustration, of the general rule; *Ye cannot serve God, and Mammon.*

FIRST, I am to suggest a few hints, in order to explain, more clearly, the general observation of our blessed Saviour in the text, that *No man can serve two masters.* This proposition, tho' universally true, is here confined to religion and moral conduct; and the sense of it, upon the whole, amounts to nothing more than this—that virtue and vice, religion and sensuality, reverence and due obedience to God, and the gratification of corrupt passions, are things utterly incompatible, and that cannot subsist *together.*

THE service due to God must, in the nature of things, be supreme and absolute, or there can be *no* service at all due to him. For *who* is it, that we pretend to serve?—Is it not the *supreme* being?—Is it not the *first*, the *wisest*, the *best* of beings?—Is it not *one* infinitely exalted above *all other* beings?—Is it not *he* from whom all excellence, all power, all authority are derived?—And what

what but the *first*, the most *exalted*, and SERM.  
*supreme* honours can, with the least co- XII.  
 lour of reason and propriety, be offered   
 to the first, the most exalted, and supreme  
 power in the universe? The service which  
 we owe to him cannot be limited by any  
 other *authority*; which must, of neces-  
 sity, proceed originally from him. It can-  
 not be limited by any principles of *rea-*  
*son*; because all his laws, being dictated  
 by infinite wisdom and immutable moral  
 rectitude, must in every instance be gra-  
 cious and equitable. And to say, that  
 the service, which we are bound humbly to  
 render to the Deity, cannot be *limited*, is  
 exactly the same, and conveys an idea  
 neither greater nor less, than the saying  
 it is *unreserved* and *absolute*. And if an  
 inferior and subordinate respect of the  
 infinite creator be really not respect, but *in-*  
*dignity*, *contempt*, and *insult*; if it in effect  
 denies his supremacy, which is essential  
 to the very idea of God; it then un-  
 avoidably follows, either that he has *no*  
 right at all to our service, or that he must  
 be the *ultimate* object of it. And if he  
 is indeed, of right, the supreme object of

SERM. our reverence and homage; *all* criminal  
 XII. passions must be mortified, *all* vicious in-  
 ~~~~~ indulgencies restrained, and *every* interest,  
 that is opposite to his universal moral
 government, sincerely and entirely re-
 nounced.

BUT we may proceed one step farther,
 and represent the point in a light some-
 what different; and that is, that every
reason which can be supposed, or justly
 alleged, for virtue, and obedience to God,
 in *any* instance, must hold *equally* strong
 for virtue, and obedience, in *all* instances.
 If the *amiableness* of virtue be pleaded;
 it is, in *all* the branches of it, lovely and
 beautiful. If it is recommended as the *dig-*
nity and *perfection* of Human nature;
 there can *no* instance of it be named, to
 which these properties do not essentially
 belong——If as the most natural sub-
 stantial and exalted *happiness* of man, and
 of all other intelligent beings; this cha-
 racter, likewise, may justly be ascribed,
 and upon the same general foundation of
 truth and reason, to the moral duties of
piety towards God, the moral duties of
justice and *benevolence* to our fellow-crea-
 tures,

tures, and to all the strictly moral offices of *self-government* — sobriety, temperance, and chastity. In like manner, if the reason assigned for a particular act of obedience to God be this, that he is our Creator, this reason must hold *universally*; or if it be this, that he is our continual preserver, our supreme benefactor, and righteous governour, this also must extend, equally, to *every* instance of obedience: For if when the reason is the *same*, it does not oblige in *all* cases, it can justly oblige in *no* case at all; if it be not, in itself, *always* a sufficient motive, it can *never* be a sufficient motive. — So far then, if the reasoning has any solidity or force in it, it holds entirely for *virtue*, and absolutely against *vice*; or, in other words, against all *kinds* and *degrees* of vice, and for *every* branch and degree of virtue.

AND, on the contrary, if there are any good reasons to justify disobedience to God, and vicious gratification, in *one* instance, *these* must also *justify* disobedience, and criminal gratification, in *all* instances. If, for example, violent and inflamed

passions

SERM. passions are allowed to *plead* for it, the
 XII. plea must be of equal weight in every
 case without *exception*, where there are
 the *like* inflamed and violent passions. If
merely the false pleasures of sin, or the
 temporary advantages of sin, are a *reason-*
able motive to the practice of it, the *just*
efficacy of this motive cannot be confined
 to *single* instances, but must be admitted
universally. And if it be fit at any *time*,
 or in any *circumstance*, that God should
 be disobeyed, he can have no claim to our
 obedience in the *least* point, upon fixed
 and *invariable* rules of reason.—As
 therefore it appears, that if right reason is
at all on the side of virtue, it must hold
 universally for virtue; or if it be *at all*
 on the side of vice, it must hold univer-
 sally for vice; from hence it necessarily
 follows, that there neither are, nor *can*
be, any principles in nature, on which
 religion and disobedience to God, moral
 goodness and irregular sensual excesses, can
 form a *consistent*, a *justifiable*, or even an
excusable character. And this may suffice
 for explaining the general proposition con-
 tained

tained in the text, that *No man can serve* SERM.
two masters. XII.

I NOW proceed briefly to consider the particular case, which our Saviour has proposed as an example, and an illustration, of this general rule; which is thus expressed, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.* — To serve *Mammon* represented here, in the strong and beautiful manner of the ancients, as a *person*, a *master*, or *idol-deity*; to serve *Mammon*, I say, when it is stripped of *figure*, and reduced to its plain sense, denotes the *immoderate* desire and pursuit of riches; the being captivated and enslaved by what St. *John* styles *the lust of the eye*, so as to have *a heart exercised in covetous practices*; the having a mind so *devoted* to these worldly concerns, as to regard no *moral* obligations, no rules of *honour* or *justice*, when they stand in the way of our base and avaricious purposes; the suffering the love of the world to over-rule the principles of *generosity* and *mercy*; or, finally, the being wholly *immersed* in these low and unprofitable pursuits, and in them to *center* our affections, our desires, our supreme
and

SERM. and ultimate happiness. And that this
 XII. carnality and worldly-mindedness is utterly
 ~~~~~ inconsistent with all true religion, will  
 undeniably appear upon a little sober reflection. In general, the love of the world is founded on considerations entirely *sensitive*; the love of God on an inward lively conviction of his amiable *moral* perfections; of which, where there is a just impression, there will be an ardent desire to conform to his example as our chief honour and felicity, and, of consequence, a comparative *disesteem*, nay a generous and noble *disdain*, of every *inferior* good. The low *taste*, and base groveling *habits*, which are always contracted by a too intense application, by an entire devotedness of mind, to worldly objects, must indispose every man, who is thus unhappily sunk beneath the dignity of his nature, both for discharging the *rational duties*, and relishing the *pure* and *refined pleasures*, of religion.

BUT notwithstanding this many, who are fond of their *idol*, cannot be persuaded to discard *Mammon*, nor bear the thought of bidding open and insolent defiance



fiance to *God*; and, in this miserable perplexity, they have no other shift to have recourse to, but to *compound* matters between *God* and *Mammon*. With this view they *flatter* and *compliment*, and sometimes make *presents* to the Deity, to soothe and mollify him, and prevail with him to *indulge* them in their favourite vices. Vain effort of human folly!—to attempt to engage the wisest of beings to be as it were a party against his own *laws* and *government*; to consent that the *natural order* of things should be perverted, and the *foundations* of *virtue* undermined. No scheme of this kind has hitherto been invented, but what is palpably absurd, and will not, cannot, stand the test of a serious and sober examination. — If a man, who has gained great wealth by *fraudulent* and *unrighteous* practices, devotes part of the *spoil* to *charitable* uses, or, as in *Popish* countries, to enrich and aggrandize the *clergy*, or adorn *churches* — What has this to do with *religion*? Can *God* be honoured by *sharing* in the fruits of *oppression* and *rapine*? Will he *accept* of any offerings, that are not re-

coin-

SERM.  
XII.

SERM. commended by *true repentance*? And can  
 XII. there be true repentance, unless the *temper* of the mind be *reformed*? Or can there be a reformation of the inward temper in such cases as these, unless a man finds himself prompted to *repair* the injury he has committed, by making a suitable restitution? Such an *extorted* devotion as this has not the *resemblance*, nothing of the *air*, of true piety; but the offender only parts with *some* of the wages of his unrighteousness (like a person in a *storm*) to save the *rest*; and that he may possess it more securely without an *anxious* sense of guilt, or *fear* of future punishment. — Again, if another man refuses to apply a *proportionable* part of his wealth to the relief of the *necessitous*; if either puffed up with *pride* above the due consideration of the *friendly* regards which he owes to Human nature, or *stupidified* by indolence, or *rioting* in wanton excesses, he can behold men, like himself, oppressed, anxious, dispirited, pining away through want, and struggling hard, under the contempt and calamities of poverty, *barely* to *support*, for a little longer

longer space, a wretched and comfortless existence here: If I say he can look on such mortifying and affecting spectacles, without any *relentings* of heart, any soft emotions of *pity* and *sympathy* — to what purpose are all the *external* tokens of his *piety*? They are doubtless insignificant grimace, ridiculous ostentation, the utmost *intemperance* and *madness* of hypocrisy; attended with none of the profits of it *here*, because it is too gross to *deceive*, but, most surely, with the severest punishments that can be thought to be reserved for it hereafter. For *he that loveth God must love his brother also*: And *who-soever hath this worlds goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him*, how is it possible that the *love of God* should dwell in him? — The love of God, whose *authority* he defies, whose *creatures* he insensibly neglects, whose *example* he opposes, whose *goodness* he is determined not to imitate, and must therefore despise. In these, and all other parallel instances, where men are *only* pious, or, at least, more *affectedly* pious, because they know that

1 John iv.

21.

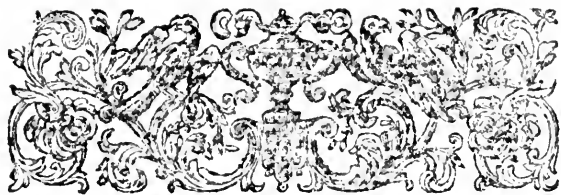
Chap. iii.

17.

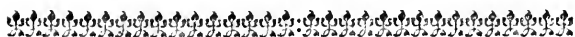
SERM. that they are *dishonest, unjust, uncharitable* ; they not only practise the most fatal arts of *self-deceit*, but make war with *religion* (itself as an *auxiliary*) against *God, reason, nature, virtue, and the universal good* of mankind.



S E R M O N



# S E R M O N XIII.



A general Discourse on the Nature  
and Use of Prayer.

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MATTH. vi. 6.

*But thou, when thou prayest, enter  
into thy closet, and when thou  
hast shut thy door, pray to thy  
Father who is in secret; and thy  
Father, who seeth in secret, shall  
reward thee openly.*




IN this chapter, we have a SERM.  
XIII.  
continuation of our Lord's  
divine sermon on the mount,  
in which he explains the  
moral law in its utmost ex-

tent and perfection; separating it from,  
VOL. IV. X and

SERM. and condemning, the traditions of the  
 XIII. *Jews*, by which they had made it void,  
 placing our duty in its true light, and directing us to the *best*, the most *rational* and *acceptable*, manner of performing it, in opposition to the corrupt doctrines and practices of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*.

AT the fifth verse, having before exposed the pride and hypocrisy of their *almf-givings*, he condemns their vain and ostentatious *prayers*, their discharging the offices of *private* devotion in places of chief resort, and in the public view of the world; and cautions every one of his disciples against imitating such examples, that had so much the air of *arrogance* and *affectation*: But *when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: For they love to pray, i. e. to perform their private prayers, standing in the synagogues* [the places appointed for *public* and *social* worship] *and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.*—They procure the *applauses* of the multitude, and the *reputation* of being persons of extraordinary *sanctity*, which is *all* the reward

reward they aimed at, or shall ever obtain. SERM.

But, as it follows in text, do thou [as XIII. ] one that dost not court the regard and empty praises of thy fellow-creatures, but art only solicitous about the approbation and favour of almighty God] do thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. — It is most evident that our blessed Saviour takes it here for granted,

“ that prayer \* is a duty incumbent on  
“ mankind, and naturally results from their  
“ derived, limited, and dependent state.”

AND indeed almost all in every age, who have acknowledged a Deity and a Providence, have concurred in the practice of it, or at least in allowing it, whatever their own practice might be, to be an important part of religion. They have thought it fit, not only by proper sentiments and affections of the mind, but by

X 2                      outward

\* N. B. I consider prayer, in this discourse, not altogether (though chiefly) in the stricter confined sense of the word; but in its common and most extensive acceptation.

SERM. *outward acts* of worship, to *acknowledge*

XIII. the absolute perfection of the supreme

eternal first cause, and *praise* him for his

excellencies; humbly to *own* their abso-

lute *dependence* upon him as their creator,

and the sovereign disposer of all events;

to *confess* their unworthiness and ill de-

serts; to *implore* his protection and favour;

and *render thanks* to him, as the great

original and author of all their comfort

and happiness, for the various benefits

which they daily receive from him —

And it may justly be asked, in what way

we can *best* account for this *general sense*

of mankind? Shall we suppose, that it

took its rise from *superstition*, and *per-*

*verted* notions of Deity? Or that it was

a custom introduced, by the art and sub-

tilty of designing men, in order to make

a base and unwarrantable advantage of

the *devotion* and *enthusiasm* of the multi-

tude? This must seem a *strange*, and, I

believe, very *unsatisfactory* solution of the

difficulty, if we consider, how next to

*universally* it has prevailed in *all* times,

even the most *enlightened*, and amongst

persons of the greatest variety of *temper*

and



and *interest*; and that it has been acknowledged as a duty by the generality of the *wisest* and most *inquisitive*, as well as by the *unthinking* and *credulous*: All which circumstances afford a fair and most plausible ground of presumption, “ that *reason*, and not *superstition*, is the foundation of it.” But as prayer, notwithstanding this, has been represented as *absurd*, *useless*, and *dishonourable* to God; and because the *general practice* cannot be admitted as a *direct* and *full* proof, that it is *really* founded on the *reason* and *nature* of things; I shall enquire into the *grounds* of it more particularly: And endeavour to vindicate the *fitness* of it by shewing, “ that there lies no solid *objection* against it, from *any thing* that we *know* of the *fixed* rules and schemes of *providence*; and that it is entirely *suitable* to the *nature* and *condition* of *man*, and the *relation* he stands in to *God*.”

THE duty of *prayer* necessarily supposes the *being* and *providence* of God, and, in my opinion likewise, that he exercises what we call a *particular* *provi-*

SERM. *dence* : *i. e.* That tho' there is an *established*  
 XIII. *constitution* and *order* of things, and the  
 ~~~~~ good and evil events, which happen in  
 the world, are generally nothing else but
 the *course of nature*, or *natural causes*
 producing their *natural effects* ; yet the
 God of *nature* can, by over-ruling and
 directing its *influences*, answer all the ends
 of a *particular* government, and make
natural causes at all times, by the unerring
 skill and uncontrollable operation of his
 infinite wisdom and power, the *instru-*
ments either of his *mercy*, or strict and
 exemplary *justice*, of the *preservation* and
happiness, or the *destruction* and *misery* of
 mankind.

THUS, for example, *fire* and *water*,
wind and *rain*, have *natural* powers and
 virtues, and are the effects of *natural*
 causes ; but *when*, or *where*, the wind
 shall *blow* or *rain fall*, at what *time*, or
 in what *proportions*, these natural powers
 shall *give* or *with-hold* their influence, this
 the Almighty reserves as his unalienable
 prerogative : And this is his *rule* and *go-*
vernment of *nature*, to serve the great
 purposes of providence with respect to the
moral

moral world. We may therefore, without SERM.
the least taint of *enthusiasm*, “pray for XIII.
“*fruitful seasons, for health and plenty,*
“for the *success* of public councils and
“negociations, and in short for *personal,*
“*family, or national* blessings, and *depre-*
“*cate* the contrary evils :” Since the su-
preme God without *departing* from the
rules of his *general* providence, and *only*
by *directing* the events of *nature*, can
crown our land with *fertility*, or *blast*
with unwholesome winds, in order to
destroy by *famine* ; he can *purge* the air,
or fill it with *pestilential* vapours ; occa-
sion *unanimity*, or *distracti*on, in public
debates ; inspire *wisdom* and *courage*, or
dispirit and *infatuate* ; and, in a word,
be the author of *all* the good or evil,
either to *individuals, families, or public*
communities, which is necessary to support,
and maintain with wisdom and equity,
his empire over the world. And thus it
appears upon the whole, that to address
the infinite and universal sovereign Lord
for *any kind* of *natural good*, or deprecate
any natural evil, cannot be *absurd*, if we
suppose that he exercises a particular pro-
vidence :

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vidence: And as we have reason to believe, that this may be done, in most cases, without breaking in upon the standing laws of nature, or altering *visibly* the settled frame and order of the universe, there must be the utmost probability that it is the *true* situation and state of things; since it gives us a more *venerable* and *magnificent* idea of God's *providence*, and renders its influence both more *efficacious* and *extensive*. * Whereas, if every thing happens in a *fixed invariable* course, without being *directed* by infinite wisdom to serve any *particular* designs (which is what those, who object against the *reasonableness* of prayer, *falsely* imagine; and it seems, indeed, to be the grand *foundation* and *strength* of their prejudice :) If this, I say, be the case, then is the idea of a providence *debased*, and its omnipotent power is *degraded* and *limited*; and it would be no wonder if, upon *admitting* a principle so *injurious* to the *honour* of the Deity, the *fitness* of prayer, or of any *other* the most evident duty of piety, should be hard to be determined. BUT

* See this subject, of a particular Providence, more largely and distinctly treated of, *Vol. 3. Sermon XIII. XIV.*

BUT let it be observed farther, that prayer not only supposes that God exercises a *natural* providence, but that he is, likewise, the *governour* of the *moral* world; and consequently that virtue, or a conformity to his perfections and laws, is a *necessary* qualification for his *favour*, and will one time or other be *rewarded*; but, on the contrary, that vice is the *proper* object of his *resentment*, and must expose the guilty offender to *disgrace* and *punishment*: And that as this Great Being is inclined, by the absolute goodness of his nature, to desire the *happiness* of *all* his reasonable creatures, he will be ready, at all times, to afford them every such degree of *assistance* as is *necessary*, and consistent with their *free agency*, in the pursuit of true wisdom and virtue. And since *these principles*, on which prayer is entirely founded, are the most *worthy* and *honourable* sentiments we can frame of God, it necessarily follows, “ that it can no
 “ more be *absurd* (considered *in itself*)
 “ to implore *his gracious aid* to enable
 “ us to surmount the difficulties of a vir-
 “ tuous course, and to be steady and per-
 “ severing

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“ severing in it, and his *special protection* and *favour* in consequence of our sincere endeavours to please him;” than it is pray for the *natural* good things of the present life, and deprecate the *incident* calamities of it; which has already been shewn to be highly *reasonable*, and beyond the reach of a *just* exception. — These things being premised, by which the *force* of the main objections against the duty of prayer is, I apprehend, entirely destroyed, I shall now enquire into the *particular reasons* of it. From whence it will appear, that the *prejudices* which men may have entertained against it, when they are not to be ascribed to a corrupted mind and an impious alienation of the heart from God, arise from a *mistaken apprehension* of its *true* nature and design.

IT is certain then, in the FIRST place, that prayer cannot be *rightly* intended for the *information* of the Deity; either to acquaint him with the sincerity of the worshipper, with the inward principles and dispositions of his mind, or with the number and greatness of his wants: Because all *these* suppositions are, in the utmost degree,

degree, *dishonourable* to the eternal God, SERM. XIII. who, having an infinite all-comprehending intellect, must be thoroughly acquainted with *every* want of his creatures, and with the *minuteſt* circumstance in their condition, and know with an infallible exactness their most *bidden* motions and designs; as well as how to act, in all *poſſible* caſes, with the moſt precise juſtice and regularity. And hence our bleſſed Saviour, in a paſſage immediately following the text, has cautioned us againſt protracting our prayers to an *unnecessary length*, by *tedious* and *indecent* repetitions; as if our maker was either at a great *diſtance* from us, or could not eaſily *underſtand* our caſe, or was determined not to hear us, unleſs we grew *rude* and *clamorous*: *But when ye pray, uſe not vain repetitions as the Heathen do: For they think that they ſhall be heard for their much ſpeaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye aſk him.*

AGAIN, SECONDLY, as the *true end* of prayer cannot be to inform and inſtruct the Deity, ſo neither is it, in a ſtrict and proper

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proper sense, to *move his compassion*: Because his kindness and mercy towards his creatures are, ever, *strong and unchangeable*; and it ought not to be imagined, since he knows every circumstance of their distress before-hand, that the most *lively and pathetic* representation of their wants can *influence* him to do *any thing*, to which he is not *inclined and prompted* by his *essential goodness*. “ *Compassion*, as “ it is a principle in *human nature*, has “ *imperfection and weakness* attending it;” which must, by no means, be attributed to the infinite and all-perfect Being.

AND as our prayers cannot be imagined to excite any *new sentiment of goodness*, any *instinct of compassion* in God, it is also impossible, that they should induce him to *alter* any of his *general purposes*, or to *recede* from that *wise scheme*, which he originally fixed, for the government of the world. We therefore entertain very low and contemptible conceptions of him, if we understand *importunity* in prayer to be a *wearying him out* with our continued addresses, and a kind of *teazing* him into a compliance; or, indeed, if we imagine
that

that it has any other *weight* with him, SERM.
than as it renders us *fit subjects* of his XIII.
mercy.

AND, finally, we are not to conceive of our maker, as if he was *backward* to do us good, and therefore wanted to be *courted* and *solicited* to it; or as a *vain* being, that delights to be *complimented*, and to hear his own excellencies *proclaimed*; and takes pleasure in the submissions and humble acknowledgments of his creatures, merely as the *pomp* and *splendid ostentation* of his supreme power and dominion: Because these things are adapted only to please *weak* minds, having nothing in them of *true* and *solid* excellence, and, of consequence, can never be approved by the *infinite wisdom* of God.

AND now, from all these premises, this is the natural and unavoidable *conclusion* — “ that the *ultimate end* of the duty “ of *prayer* does not respect *God*, but “ our *selves* ;” as indeed the *end* of all religion is not any *advantage* that can redound to him, but the *rectitude* and *happiness* of mankind, in which his glorious perfections are most eminently displayed.

Let

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Let us therefore see, whether prayer will not answer some very valuable purposes, considered in this view. And if it can be proved, that it is *a natural means* of assisting and advancing our improvement and progress in virtue, in the noblest virtues, the most sublime and amiable dispositions; it can then be no longer disputed, that it is a service founded in *reason*, and *wisely* recommended and bound upon us by the *christian revelation*. And this I shall now endeavour briefly to demonstrate.

It is unquestionably *fit*, not only that we form just and worthy notions of the divine perfections, but maintain such a *warm* and *lively sense* of *them* in our minds, as will engage us to behave towards the Deity, in all instances, with becoming veneration and respect. And this is not only our *duty*, but our *interest*; because it will naturally lead us to endeavour after the purification and refinement of our temper in *imitation* of his *moral excellencies*, and to keep ourselves within the *strictest bounds* of reason and virtue, from a regard to his *wisdom* and *authority*.

It

It must farther be allowed, that it is *fit* SERM.
in us, and the highest point of *wisdom* XIII.
we can attain to, to maintain *a strong*
sense of God as our Creator and supreme
Governour, and of our obligations to act
suitably to those relations in which he
has placed us ; and to secure his *esteem*
and *approbation*, on whom we absolutely
depend, by a life of entire resignation and
obedience to his will. It is likewise our
indispensable *duty* to preserve a *thankful*
and *affectionate* idea of the divine good-
ness : For the *goodness* of God is one of
the most noble and generous incentives
to virtue ; and while there is a grateful
remembrance of it in the mind, it will
beget an habitual supreme love of the
Deity, universal obedience to his com-
mands, and, particularly, an imitation of
this amiable perfection, by acts of bene-
ficence and mercy to our fellow-creatures.

Now prayer is *a natural means to raise*
and *confirm* all these excellent sentiments
and dispositions within us, which are such
forcible engagements to a religious and
holy life.— For what can be better
adapted to inspire the most solemn reve-
rence

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rence and veneration of God, than a *serious stated adoration* of his infinite excellencies? What can *tend* more *immediately* to fix in our minds a deep sense of our necessary dependence upon him, than a *frequent acknowledgment* of him as our almighty *creator*, and the *sovereign administrator* of all the affairs of the universe; than *confessing* our *impotence* and *insufficiency* for our own happiness; and conscientiously *imploing* his *direction*, and *gracious concurrence* with us, in every scene of life? What can afford a stronger conviction of the excellence, importance, and absolute necessity of virtue, than the *accustoming* ourselves to *pray*, that we may be *led* and *preserved* in the paths of true righteousness and goodness, as the *perfection* of our nature, and the highest *concern* and *interest* of our being? What can more effectually *charm* us to the *love* of virtue, than a *frequent exalting* the matchless beauties of God's moral character?

To which we may add, that serious and frequent addresses to the Deity, as they require an *elevation* of *thought*, and a great degree of *abstractedness* from *sense*,
naturally

naturally beget a *grandeur* and *dignity* of mind, superior to the *little* accidents and vicissitudes to which worldly affairs are subject, a noble *contempt* of unlawful advantages and irregular pleasures, an increasing *purity* of thought and affection; and transform the pious worshipper into a *divine temper* and life. They inspire an habitual *hope* and *confidence* in the mercy of God as our *Father*, who compassionates our infirmities, and will reward our integrity; and thereby *strengthen* and *invigorate* every good resolution, and help to carry it on to *perfection*. They give a fixed and rooted sense of his *omnipresence*, and of his clear and intimate *inspection* of us; which tends to make us always *circumspect*, and *regular* in our conduct. An *humble confession* of our sins, made with becoming ingenuity and remorse, naturally produces an *abhorrence* of all past errors, together with strong *purposes* to *amend* and *avoid* all vicious courses for the future. And a deliberate and thankful acknowledgment of the divine goodness has a direct aptitude to raise in us *love*, *gratitude*, and *joy* in God, and a

SERM. *cheerfulness and sublime delight in doing*
 XIII. *good. So that prayer, by its visible ten-*
 ~~~~~ *dency to establish these holy dispositions*

*in us, and make us more strictly and in-*  
*flexibly virtuous, must be “ a natural*  
*“ means (which was the thing that I un-*  
*“ dertook to prove) to render us fit ob-*  
*“ jects of our maker’s favour.” And sure-*  
*ly there can need nothing farther to be*  
*said in vindication of it: For it must be*  
*an eminent instance both of the wisdom*  
*and goodness of God, to insist upon that*  
*“ as the condition of our deriving help and*  
*“ favour from him, which, in the na-*  
*“ ture of things, prepares us for the re-*  
*“ ception of it, and disposes us in the best*  
*“ manner to improve it.”*

SHOULD it be said, that these great and  
 useful purposes may be answered by serious  
*meditation alone* ; and if so, to what end  
 is *prayer* enjoined, or how can it be shewn  
 to be a *rational and religious* obligation?  
 —I would answer to this, that the *pre-*  
*scribing* prayer as a *fixed and necessary*  
 duty must *induce* all such, as pay a con-  
 scientious regard to the authority of the  
 divine legislator, to *enter frequently upon*  
*these*

*these* useful meditations: Whereas if they were left at large, and at their full liberty, they might be inclined to *omit* them, or engage in them but *seldom*, and consequently their *use* and *efficacy* might be greatly *abated*, if not quite *destroyed*, by their being generally *neglected*. If it be urged further (and I know of nothing else that can be objected) that an express command *to meditate* often, *as often*, as it is now supposed to be our duty to *pray*, and on the very same weighty and momentous *subjects*, must be a *sufficient means* in reason, and consequently in all wise government, to prevent *this ill effect*: I answer again — that in an *immediate* and *solemn address* to our maker, our *attention* is likely to be more *close*, and our *sense* of things more *strong* and *lively* than in any *common meditation*; because we have, in a particular manner, the *awe* of an omniscient and almighty being, to restrain us from *carelessness* and *levity*. “ If “ our *discourse*, upon *all* occasions, would “ be more *aptly* and *correctly* formed, if “ it was *directly presented* to some *eminent* “ *personage*, of whose wisdom and dig-

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~~~~~

SERM. “ nity of character we had a high veneration, than can *reasonably* be expected
 XIII. “ in *a free soliloquy*, where we converse
 “ only with *ourselves* ; our *integrity*, and
 “ *concern* of mind, in the other *parallel*
 “ case (where the *heart itself* is more accurately and strictly *scanned*) must be
 “ *influenced in proportion.*” No man who knows *himself*, and the common workings of *Human nature*, can possibly *doubt* of this : “ Here is, therefore, a very great
 “ and beneficial *effect*, a *peculiar* strong
 “ *enforcement* of religion and virtue, resulting from *prayer* ; that is not *so likely*
 “ to be produced by *meditation alone.*” — And this, I think, is an unanswerable defence of its being made, by *revelation*, a *stated* and *universal* branch of instituted duty.

AND NOW as it appears from the account which has been given, of the true *nature* and *design* of prayer, that it is a *subordinate* and *instrumental* duty ; *i. e.* a duty not enjoined *for its own sake*, but with a view to some *greater* and *nobler* end : We may from hence infer,

IN the FIRST place, that our prayers SERM.
ought at *all times* to be offered up, to XIII.
the supremely gracious and omnipotent
Father of mankind, with the utmost *se-*
riousness and *solemnity*. For it must be
evident to the slightest reflection, that the
more *intensely* engaged we are in our re-
ligious addressees to the Deity, we are so
much the more *likely* to establish, in our
minds, a becoming reverence of his in-
comprehensible and infinite glories, a live-
ly conviction that his favour is our ulti-
mate felicity, and sentiments of *horror*
at the thought of his displeasure, and of
whatever has a *necessary* tendency to ex-
pose us to it. It may be laid down as a
general maxim, of undeniable truth and
certainty, “ that the *secondary* duties of
“ religion can *never*, from the *nature* of
“ things, answer their *end*, if they are
“ *slightly* and *carelessly* discharged :” For
as they have a *reference* to somewhat *be-*
yond themselves, we must always have our
minds closely attentive to that which is
their chief and most momentous *view* ;
and therefore not rest in the *outward*
means, but use them in such a manner as

SERM. is most agreeable to the *reason* of their
 XIII. *institution*. From whence it follows, that
 a *dull, heavy, unanimated* prayer, run over
 with a *confused* and *inconsiderate* forma-
 lity, is not properly speaking *prayer*; but
trifling, and most audacious *impertinence*.

THERE can *no good* be expected, from
 a *light* and *vain* mind, in *any affair* of
 Human life; much less in the *important*
concern of religion; and least of all, in
 an *immediate address* to the supreme being,
 which (if any thing in nature and reason
 can) must surely require all imaginable
 gravity and seriousness. And he who is
rash and *indeliberate* in uttering his *peti-*
tions to so *exalted*, and, to the contempters
 of his paternal grace and condescension,
 so *tremendous* a being on account of his
 power and strict justice; he who is not
 afraid to present, to absolute wisdom and
 immaculate purity, the sacrifice of *folly*
 and *insolence*; is in the direct way to have
 his mind rather *injured* and *corrupted*, than
improved by his prayers: As such rude-
 ness and disrespect argue his entertaining
 a *mean opinion* of the God whom he in-
 vocates, and must, in the end, destroy
 all

all the *seeds* of a *reverential* regard to him, SERM.
all *concern* about any offices of *piety*. In XIII.
vain therefore do we pretend to *worship*
him, if we *honour* him only *with* our
lips, whilst our *heart is far from* him.—Matth. xv.

Hypocrisy, in every instance that can be
conceived, is a most offensive and hateful
vice, and the infallible mark of a *base*
and *degenerate* mind. But to play *the hy-*
pocrite with that infinite and omniscient
Spirit, who presides solely and uncontroul-
ably over universal nature, is accompanied
with signal aggravations of *guilt*: For it
is the grossest indignity that can be offered
to *all his perfections*, a defiance of his *au-*
thority, and an *equal* contempt both of
his *mercy* and *displeasure*.
8.

AGAIN; from the *nature* and *design* of
prayer we farther learn, that it should be
frequent. For we must all know, “ that
“ an *habitual* *veneration* of God, and
“ *sense* of the obligations which we are
“ under to him, can never be attained,
“ but in the *way* that *all other habits* are
“ produced, *viz.* by *stated* and *customary*
“ *acts* of devotion and piety.” And upon
this plain foundation in the *reason* and

SERM. *truth* of things it was, that St. Paul exhorted
 XIII. the *Theſſalonians* to *pray without ceasing*,
 1 Theſſ. v. *i. e.* not only to endeavour to acquire ſuch
 27. a *ſerious and well-diſpoſed temper*, as will
 be an *habitual preparation* for prayer, but
actually to diſcharge the duty itſelf, at all
 the *proper ſeaſons and occaſions* for it; ſo
often, at leaſt, as the *nature* of the inſti-
 tution requires to render it *advantageous*
 to us, and *ſubſervient* to our perfection
 and happineſs, as well as in particular *exi-*
gencies, that may more *eſpecially* demand
 it. And tho' I will not pretend to *fix*
 for *every man*, what the *precife* times and
 ſeaſons of prayer are, becauſe this depends
 on a variety of *circumſtances*, which can-
 not *all* be reduced under *one general rule*;
 yet this I may take upon me to aſſert,
 without danger of tranſgreſſing the bounds
 of truth or modeſty — that if the bulk
 of mankind, and even of perſons *profef-*
ſing godlineſs, were more *regular and con-*
ſtant in their devotions, they would be,
 in many reſpects, *wiſer and better* than
 they are; not only more *ſubmiſſive* and
reverent, in the temper of their minds,
 towards *God*, but more *humble and peace-*
able,

able, more just and charitable, more mortified with respect to worldly vanities, *more correct* in their desires, and *more calm and decent* in all their passions. For it is the case of all the *subordinate* duties of religion, that if they are performed but *seldom*, as well as in a negligent and superficial manner, “ they in a great measure lose their *use*; and, consequently, “ as they have no *goodness* or *excellency* “ in them, but as they stand *connected* “ with their *end*, they must also lose “ their *acceptableness* and *efficacy* with “ God.”

BUT then in the THIRD place (and this indeed is clearly *implied* in what has been already offered, and *deduced* from the same general principles) we ought never to suffer our *prayers* to interfere with other *indispensable duties* of religion, or with the *necessary business* and *offices* of Human life. For there is a *natural* and *adapted* season for *every duty*; and the use of prayer, in particular is, to implant, to raise, and cherish *a moral temper*, and not to impair or undermine it. So that if any give themselves up so entirely to retire-

SERM. tirement from the world, and to *passionate*
 XIII. *flights and extasies* of devotion, as to neglect *equity and mercy*, and other *weightier matters of the law*; if they *desert* their *post* even in order to pray, when they are called upon to discharge the *incumbent offices* of their *social state*, when either the public, or private persons, *require* and stand *in need* of their *assistance*; their prayers, instead of being *helps*, are really *hinderances* to true goodness: “ In all
 “ which cases, prayer cannot be deemed
 “ a *reasonable service*; but is mere *extra-*
 “ *vagance*, if not direct *immorality*.”

UPON the same fixed and unalterable foundation in the reason of things, *viz.* because prayer is only a *secondary* and *subservient* duty, calculated and wisely adapted for promoting the *moral rectitude* of Human nature; as ever we desire or hope, that our supplications shall find access to the eternal majestic throne of him that ruleth over all, and be received with paternal indulgence and condescension, we must instantly *relinquish* all our vices, and *purge* our minds from sinful and irregular passions. If we *regard iniquity* in our
hearts,


hearts, and, as the unavoidable consequence, practise it in our lives, God will shew no favour to our *warmest, longest, or most importunate* petitions. For the *warmth*, in such cases as these, must be either raised on a *false* foundation, or be a mere *mechanic* piety, *unaccountable* as to its *origin*, and *uncertain* as to its *continuance*: It contradicts the *habitual* temper; and therefore, at best, can only be esteemed as an *accidental* swerving of nature from its *allowed* and more *usual* excesses. And as for the *length* and *importunity* of such prayers, they are rather a demonstration of the *bold* and *daring* temper, than of the *sincerity* and *humble devotion* of the petitioner; because a disobedient and stubborn child, or an habitual rebel against the incontestable dominion of his rightful prince, ought in his supplications to be *modest, concise, and diffident*, instead of affecting tedious *prolixities*, or urging his demands with an indecent *vehemence* and *assurance* of success. And if we think to atone, by the *frequency* and *enthusiastic agonies* of our devotion, for the disorders and immoralities of

SERM.
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SERM. of our conduct, our prayers must be rank-
 XIII. ed amongst the last and most heinous
 ~~~~~  
*impieties of superstition, and false religion:*  
 They are *absurd, inconsistent, unnatural,*  
*despicable,* even in the estimate of Human  
 reason.

WHO, for example, does not clearly see that it is most idle and excessive *presumption*, for any man to expect the forgiveness of his own numerous offences committed against *God*, whilst he is implacable in his resentments towards his *brethren*, and his heart is cankered with *malice* and *revenge*? The *reason* is exactly the *same*, and applicable in an *equal* latitude, to *all other* criminal habits *deliberately* cherished, to *all* immoral courses *voluntarily* pursued. — So that if we would entertain the most distant glimmerings of a probable hope, that our *prayers*, which without reformation are *disguised* impieties, will be of any greater advantage to us than our more *notorious* and *formal* impieties; we must each of us with *a resolution* maturely weighed, and that will approve itself to be fixed and upright whenever it is brought to the  
*trial*



trial, be able to say in the words of the SERM.  
*Psalmist* (in the *stile* adapted to the *Jew-* XIII.  
*ish* dispensation, but in the *general sense*   
consonant to all times) *I will wash mine* Pfal. xxvi.  
*hands in innocency : So will I compass thine* 6.  
*altar, O LORD.*

ALL these rules are of indispenfable weight, and must be strictly observed by us. And if with the *zeal*, the *wise views*, and *holy dispositions* of mind which I have now recommended, we *pray alway in the name of Christ*, — and *watch thereunto with all perseverance* ; we need not doubt of receiving, from the *free and inexhaustible* source of mercy, every *necessary and expedient* good.

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1888



## S E R M O N XIV.



The Reasonableness of that Branch  
of Prayer ; which is stiled In-  
tercession.

---

I T I M. ii. I.

*I exhort therefore that, first of all,  
supplications, prayers, interces-  
sions, and giving of thanks be  
made for all men.*



IN my last discourse, I con-  
sidered the reasonableness of  
prayer in general : In which  
it was shewn, that it is *wisely*  
enjoined upon us, as a neces-  
sary and indispensable duty, by the Chri-  
stian revelation ; and very consistently  
with God's being willing to bestow all  
good

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SERM. good things upon mankind in that way  
 XIV. which is the most *fit*, and most condu-  
 cive to the happiness of his creatures.—

I intend, at this time, to discourse concerning that part of prayer which is called *intercession*, or the petitions which we offer up to almighty God in behalf of *others*. This, we learn from the text and several other passages of the New Testament, is a duty that our holy religion expressly requires of us ; upon which account it is proper, that we should, in some measure at least, understand the *true grounds* and *reasons* of it.

AND this indeed is the more necessary, because it is pretended by some, that it cannot be accounted for upon the *reasons* which have been alledged for prayer in *general* ; since every man *sufficiently acknowledges* the sovereign dominion of the Deity, and his absolute dependence upon him, and may *impress* a *strong sense* of these things upon his mind, by begging the supplies of *his own* wants, without concerning himself with the *case* of his *fellow-creatures*. And, moreover, tho' it should be allowed, that the great God, in  
 order

order to our obtaining mercy for *ourselves*, SERM.  
 may require that we should *pray* for it, XIV:  
 because our prayers have a *natural ten-*  
*dency* to produce such a *temper* and *frame*  
 of mind, as will dispose us in the best  
 manner to *improve* it; yet it cannot be  
 imagined, that our supreme governour,  
 who is absolutely just and good, has render'd  
 his favour to his creatures so vastly  
*uncertain* and *precarious*, as to depend in  
 any degree upon the *intercession* of others;  
 and, consequently, on their *weaknesses*,  
*variable resolutions*, and *partial prejudices*;  
 but, on the contrary, is always inclined  
 to do what is *right* and *fit*, and confer  
 upon them all *necessary* good; and cannot  
 be moved, by our most earnest supplica-  
 tions, to grant any thing *farther*, any  
 thing which they do not themselves *de-*  
*sire*, and are not properly *qualified* to re-  
 ceive.

To remove this objection, against the  
 duty which we are exhorted to in the  
 text, I shall do these two things; which  
 will give me an opportunity of suggest-  
 ing such hints, as, I hope, will make the

SERM. weakness of every part of it clearly ap-  
 XIV. pear.



FIRST, I shall consider whether there be not *in general* a good *reason* to be assigned for it; whether the practice of it will not answer some very *valuable end*; and, of consequence, whether the author of our holy religion has not acted *wisely*, in making it a part of our *duty*. I shall then enquire, in the

SECOND place, *how far* it may be reasonable for us to expect, that God will be favourable to our fellow-creatures upon our *prayers* and *intercessions* in their behalf; and this will teach us, *how we* must *understand* such petitions, and *what* are the proper *restrictions* and *limitations*, with which they are to be made.

FIRST, I am to consider whether there be not a good *reason* to be assigned for this branch of prayer; whether the practice of it will not answer some very *valuable end*; and, of consequence, whether the author of our holy religion has not acted *wisely*, in making it a part of our *duty*. And in general it may be observed (though the contrary is insinuated

ated by the objection) that praying for SERM.  
*others* does really answer much the *same* XIV.  
 good purposes as praying for *ourselves*,  
 and that the *expediency* and *usefulness* of  
 it may in part be accounted for upon  
 the very same principles. Nay, it may  
 be questioned, whether it has not a ten-  
 dency to *inspire* and *impress* some useful  
 sentiments relating to the Deity, which  
 the other does not so *immediately* suggest.  
 In *both* we *equally* acknowledge the trans-  
 cendent excellence, supreme majesty, and  
 eternal perfection of the great author and  
 governour of the universe: For these things  
*all prayer* necessarily supposes. But if, in  
 those prayers which respect *ourselves*, we  
 endeavour to warm our minds with a be-  
 coming sense of almighty God as *our* cre-  
 ator, preserver, and munificent benefac-  
 tor; in those which respect *others* we con-  
 sider him as having created, and together  
 with us supporting, animating, and ex-  
 tending his goodness, to the *whole race*  
 of mankind. If in the *former*, we hum-  
 bly own *our* entire and continual depen-  
 dence upon him; in the *latter*, we ac-  
 knowledge that *all our fellow-creatures*

SERM. are equally dependent upon him for their  
 XIV. being, and every circumstance of their  
 happiness or misery. In short, if in the  
 one, we celebrate his providential care  
 of *us*, and direction of every event that  
 relates to *our particular* interest ; in the  
 other, we more *directly* represent him to  
 the view of our minds as governour of  
 the *whole rational creation*, and sovereign  
 disposer of all things ; and consequently  
 take a *larger survey* of the operations of  
 his providence, and the influences of his  
 wisdom, power, and goodness.

THIS argument might be farther in-  
 sisted on, but that I think it more pro-  
 per to shew, that there is a *particular*  
 reason for this branch of prayer, which  
 is very weighty and important ; and that  
 is, “ its tendency to *strengthen* the prin-  
 “ ciple of *universal benevolence* in us, to  
 “ make us look upon the interests of  
 “ our fellow-creatures as our own, to  
 “ excite in us an *abhorrence* of their  
 “ misery, and an *ardent generous concern*  
 “ for their happiness.” *Universal benevo-*  
*lence* so naturally results from those *kind*  
*and useful affections*, which the gracious  
 author



author of our being hath planted in us; SERM.  
 it is so suitable to our *reason*, to the *circumstances* and *necessities* of mankind, and XIV.  
 the *relations* in which they mutually stand  
 to each other; the convenience and pleasure of *private life*, and the welfare, nay the very being, of *civil societies* so necessarily depend upon the exercise of it; it is so essential to the *rectitude* and *happiness* of every intelligent mind, and has been so justly esteemed, by all who have thought *worthily* of God, to be his most adorable *perfection*, and the chief *dignity* and *beauty* of his nature; that whatever has a *tendency* to cultivate and improve it, as it must also in the same proportion *promote* the most *amiable* part of man's *moral* perfection, must be of the *greatest use*, and therefore *wisely* required, by the supreme lawgiver, as an *instrumental* duty of religion.

Now this is the case, in an eminent degree, with respect to the duty recommended in the text.—For what can be better fitted to produce an *habitual goodwill* to mankind, than the accustoming ourselves to *pray* for their *prosperity*? If

SERM. we *sincerely* and *affectionately* remember  
 XIV. *them*, when we offer up our addresses to  
 ~~~~~ almighty God for *ourselves*—Can such  
 a practice as this consist with *malice* and
ill-nature, *envy* and *revenge*; or indeed
 with an indolent and stupid *indifference*,
 whether our fellow-creatures are happy or
 miserable? The *reasonableness* and *beauty*
 of benevolence in itself must recommend
 the exercise of it to all mankind, who
 have not most wofully depraved and cor-
 rupted their nature. But when we con-
 sider, besides this, that God has by an
 express and positive command obliged us
 to *pray* for them, “ as a constant *testi-*
 “ *mony* of our *kind* and *charitable* affec-
 “ *tions*, and a *natural means* to preserve
 “ our sense of *generosity* and *goodness*
 “ *warm and lively* ;” who that has any
 regard to the *authority* of his great maker,
 of his wise and gracious governour and be-
 nefactor, can discharge this duty with
 a view to his *approbation*, and not be led
 by it to *love* his *neighbour as himself*, and
 improve his charity, by degrees, to its
utmost perfection?

LET

LET it be observed farther, that by offering up *prayers, intercessions, and supplications* for ALL men, according to the Apostle's advice in the text, we are necessarily led to consider God as the *universal parent* of mankind; who is sincerely desirous of their *happiness*, and disposed to confer upon them all *suitable* good. And what are the natural consequences of such a belief?—Why that all, who partake with us in the same *common nature*, are our *brethren*, and consequently the proper objects of our *benevolence* and *compassion*; that as we are all the *offspring* of him who is absolutely good, we cannot act so becoming the dignity of our *original*, and the *relation* we have the honour to stand in to this most perfect being, as when we are employed in *doing good*; and that the *habit* of *universal benevolence*, as it is a resemblance of his supreme perfection, conformity to his most amiable example and to the methods of his providence, must render us highly acceptable to him, and the objects of his *peculiar favour*. And can we grant these consequences without

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SERM. being *desirous* of the happiness of *all*
 XIV. *mankind*, and strongly *inclined* to promote
 it; or without endeavouring to be *actually*
 as *useful* as our capacities and circumstances will allow, that we may bear strong marks of our maker's *image*, and secure his *approbation*? This is scarce possible where there is a serious and considerate mind.

I SHALL only add, that as the duty of praying for *mankind* in general is of great advantage, as it tends to raise and enlarge the principle of *universal benevolence*; there is one particular branch of it, *viz.* praying for our *enemies*, which is not only a *natural means* of moderating *unruly anger*, and rooting out all the seeds of *revenge* and *cruelty*, but if it be accompanied with that sincere love and desire of their welfare, which a *solemn address* to omniscient goodness in their favour necessarily supposes, is the most *highly refined* and *noble* disposition of Human nature: And since this duty has a *tendency* to produce so *generous* a spirit, which is the foundation of all *social happiness*, and gives a distinguished *grace* and *lustre* to all orders and stations of human
 life ;

life; it cannot, I think, be doubted, but that it has, *equally* with prayer in general, a manifest strong foundation in the reason of things, and is *properly* recommended and enjoined, as one of the necessary offices of *Christian piety*, by the gracious institution of the gospel.—I proceed now to the

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SECOND thing proposed, which was to enquire, how far it may be *reasonable* for us to expect, that God will extend his favour to *others* upon our *prayers* and *intercessions* in their behalf; and, consequently, *how* we must understand such petitions, and what are the proper *restrictions* and *limitations*, with which they ought always to be made. The Apostle's exhortation is delivered in *general* terms; and therefore our own reason must determine, in what *cases* it is expedient for us to pray for our fellow-creatures, and for what *particular blessings*. And if there be any thing, which we have good ground to believe will not be *granted*, as being beside the *ordinary course* of providence, or *unfit* for God to bestow as the *wise*
governour

SERM. *governour* of the moral world, it must be
 XIV. impertinent and trifling to make it the
 matter of our petitions. This being pre-
 mised, I shall pursue the enquiry more
 particularly,

FIRST, with respect to our prayers for the *happiness* of *all mankind*, or for the *peace* and *welfare* of the *civil community* to which we belong.

SECONDLY, with respect to those prayers for *families*, or *private persons*, in which we petition for any *natural good*, or to avert any *natural evil*.

THIRDLY, as to prayers for the advancement and encrease of *truth* and *virtue* in *general*: And those, in the

LAST place, in which we desire *assistance* for particular persons to recover them from *error* and *vice*, and promote their *moral perfection*.

FIRST, I am to enquire concerning the *reasonableness* of praying for the *happiness* of *mankind* in general, or the *peace* and *welfare* of the *civil community* to which

we

we belong. If by the happiness of mankind we understand *their happiness upon the whole* — to pray for it cannot appear *unreasonable* to any one, who considers the *unlimited and universal* goodness of their great creator: And accordingly, the Apostle, in the fourth verse of this chapter, urges it upon us from this very consideration; that it is *good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.* Or if by the happiness of mankind we mean their *temporal prosperity*, that *liberty, peace, plenty, and good order* may prevail and flourish throughout the world, and particularly in the *civil society* of which we are members; to pray for this cannot be *absurd*, if we believe a particular providence, which, without a *miracle*, can direct and over-rule nature's influences in such a manner, as to make them subservient to all its great purposes either for the *good or hurt* of societies.

It must indeed be allowed, that the *final happiness* of mankind depends upon their *moral rectitude*; and that those *blessings,*

SERM. *sings*, which may also be considered as re-
 XIV. *wards* of providence, are only conferred
 ~~~~~ on regular and virtuous societies, in which  
*frugality, justice, probity, honour, genero-*  
*sity, and the social virtues* prevail; and  
 that disorderly communities which are ener-  
 vated by *luxury*, and abandoned to *cor-*  
*ruption* and *vice*, have reason to expect,  
 from the *king of nations*, nothing but to-  
 kens of his displeasure and vengeance.  
 Therefore as it cannot be presumed, that  
 God will *ascertain* the happiness either of  
 private persons or bodies politic, so as  
 to render it an *unavoidable* and *necessary*  
 event; as this, I say, cannot be presumed,  
 because it depends upon their *virtue*,  
 which is entirely a matter of *choice*, and  
 will admit of no *constraint*; the *general*  
*sense* of the prayers which we are now  
 speaking of can be *no more* than this—  
 “ That the almighty will do all that is  
 “ *necessary, consistent* with his *unvariable*  
 “ *perfection* of nature and the *wisdom* of  
 “ his providence, to promote the *moral*  
 “ *rectitude*, and in consequence the *su-*  
 “ *preme felicity*, of *all* his reasonable  
 “ creatures; that he will be graciously  
 pleased



“ pleased to favour all *good societies* with SERM.  
 “ his *special protection*, and crown them XIV.  
 “ with *prosperity* and *honour*; and make  
 “ use of all methods, that are *agreeable*  
 “ to the *established rules* of his govern-  
 “ ment, for the *reformation* of such as  
 “ are vicious, that these likewise may en-  
 “ joy the blessings of *order*, *peace*, and  
 “ *liberty*, and become the objects of his  
 “ kind and pleasurable regard.”

IF *this* be all, it may be said, what do  
 our *prayers* signify? Will not the friend,  
 the father, of mankind do all this, whether  
 we *petition* him or not? If we should grant  
 he would, still our *prayers* for the good  
 of mankind, and for national peace and  
 tranquility, are of unquestionable *use*, as  
 they have a *direct tendency* to *procure* the  
 things prayed for, *viz.* personal and pub-  
 lic *virtue*, and consequently private and  
 social *happiness*. For we are to consider,  
 that it is a duty not enjoined on *a few*, but  
 obligatory upon *all*; and if *all* would  
 discharge it, according to the design and  
 direction of Christianity, in a becoming  
 sense of what they *owe* to *God*, to their  
*reasonable nature*, and to *civil society*, it  
 could

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could not fail of reforming both *private* and *public* vices, and promoting a *universal zealous* cultivation and pursuit of virtue. And when there are but *a few* who make conscience of it, there is *so much*, however, *gained* to virtue's cause, and to the happiness of Human nature; which is a very important argument to persuade such piously disposed persons to *constancy*, even in the most *degenerate* times. To which we may add, that it can never be shewn to be *inconsistent* with the *wisdom* of providence, for the sake of their prayers, to *suspend*, for a while at least, the *vengeance* due to a sinful people, and grant them some *temporal* privileges.


SECONDLY, in our prayers for *families* or *private persons*, in which we petition for any *natural good*, or deprecate any *natural evil* — we must take care not to ask such things as are *beyond* the *stated course* of nature, and require a *miraculous* interposition; nor solicit the direction and assistance of the Deity in *trifling cases* that are *unworthy* of it. And if we avoid these and such like irregularities, and offer up  
our

our supplications for *temporal* blessings with *due submission* to the infinite wisdom of the all-disposing mind; it is no more *absurd* upon the notion of a particular providence (by the exercise of which *any* natural *good* may be secured, or *any* natural *evil* averted from *families* or *individuals*) to make such prayers for *others*, than it is to do it for *ourselves*. And as the blessings of the *present life* are not *always*, nor perhaps generally, bestowed on men as the *reward* of their *own virtues*; they may sometimes, for any thing we can urge to the contrary, be *wisely* granted to *one* who is himself unworthy of them, in answer to *another* man's prayers, and as a proper encouragement and reward of *his* piety.

THIRDLY, when we pray for the advancement and encrease of *truth* and *virtue* in *general* — we can scarcely doubt of the *acceptance* of the Deity, if we consider that he is an absolutely *holy* being, delighted with the *rectitude* of his own most perfect nature; and consequently one that cannot but be highly pleased, to see  
his


SERM. his *moral perfections universally imitated*,  
 XIV. Or if we represent him to our minds under the character of the *wise governour* of the rational world, nothing surely can be more *agreeable* to him than a steady pursuit of *truth* and *virtue*; which is, in other words, an *observance* of *his laws*. Or finally, as the *father* of mankind, who bears the most perfect benevolence and tender affection to his offspring, he can *approve* of nothing more than the *moral rectitude* of his reasonable creatures; with which their truest, most substantial, and lasting *happiness* is inseparably connected.

INDEED, as mankind are in a state of *trial*, their pursuit of truth and virtue must, as was before observed, be the matter of their *own choice*; and therefore it cannot be expected, since it is unsuitable to the make and condition of their nature, that they should be *necessarily* determined to goodness by an *irresistible* operation upon their minds. So that when we pray for the *advancement* of *piety* and *righteousness*; or, in the language  
 of

of that most excellent *model* of prayer SERM.  
 which our Saviour taught his disciples, XIV.  
 that God's *kingdom may come*, and his   
*will be done on earth as it is in heaven*;  
 we can mean *no more*, if we pray with  
 the *understanding*, and *agreeably* to those  
*general rules* which are established for the  
 government of the moral world, than to  
 desire of him — “ that he would afford  
 “ mankind all necessary *knowledge*, and all  
 “ proper *advantages* for the discharge of  
 “ their duty, and furnish them with *suffi-*  
 “ *cient motives* to encourage creatures,  
 “ endued with such powers and capaci-  
 “ ties, to the diligent and constant prac-  
 “ tice of it; and take the most *effectual*  
 “ methods, *consistent* with their *free a-*  
 “ *gency* and the *trial* of their *fidelity*  
 “ (whether by *secret influences* upon their  
 “ minds, or in *any other* way that to his  
 “ infinite wisdom may seem most *ex-*  
 “ *pedient*) to cause *truth* and *holiness* ge-  
 “ nerally to prevail, and triumph over  
 “ *error* and *vice.*” And tho' it should be  
 allowed, that the *rectitude*, but especially  
 the *absolute goodness*, of his nature might  
 incline him to do this without being

SERM. *petitioned* for it, in order to promote an  
 XIV. event, in which the honour of his own  
 ~~~~~ perfections and the happiness of his reason-  
 able creatures are so nearly concerned;
 the *praying* for it may still be of great
use, and consequently a *service* founded
 in *reason*, and worthy his *acceptance* whose
 nature is the *supreme* and most *perfect*
 reason, as it will *naturally* put every man,
 who performs it with a serious mind,
 upon refining his own *moral dispositions*,
 and aspiring after the *perfection* of *virtue*,
 in order to *introduce* that blessed *state* of
 things which he so *ardently desires*, when
the wickedness of the wicked shall come to
an end, and the just be established. I now
 proceed,

IN the LAST place, to consider the
reasonableness of those *prayers*, in which
 we desire *assistance* for particular persons
 to reclaim them from *error* and *vice*, and
 promote their *moral perfection*. And with-
 out doubt we may safely go so far, as to
pray in *general*——“ that the blessed
 “ God, who *desireth not* the *death* of
 “ *sinner*s, but rather that they would
 “ *repent* and *live*, would take all such
 “ *methods*

“ *methods for the recovery of those who* SERM.
 “ *are ignorant and vicious, as are not* XIV.
 “ *dishonourable to his own perfections,* 
 “ *nor contrary to the wise designs of*
 “ *his providence; and that if there are*
 “ *any means, consistent with his infinite*
 “ *wisdom and purity, which are likely*
 “ *to be more effectual than those which*
 “ *have been already afforded them, he*
 “ *would be pleased to make use of these to*
 “ *bring about so desirable an end.*”——

But to *pray* for the conversion of those who are quite abandoned to vice, and who, instead of *desiring* our prayers, ridicule and make a jest of them as weak and enthusiastical——“ this is what I can see scarce any warrant for, either in *reason* or in *revelation.*” If a sense of their sins puts such persons upon *praying for themselves*, the *thoughts* of their *hearts*, and the iniquities of their lives, may be *forgiven* them; but *without this*, the *intercessions* of others are likely to have very little effect. For men can only expect *divine assistances* to co-operate with their *natural powers*; and when any give themselves up *entirely* to the gratification of

SERM. their irregular appetites, in defiance of the
 XIV. *authority of heaven*, and the *law of their*
 reasonable nature, they are in great danger of being abandoned by God to a *reprobate mind*, and consequently to *misery and destruction*.

WHAT I have hitherto said relates only to *praying* for others, in the *strict* sense of the word. To the other branch of the duty mentioned in the text, *viz. giving of thanks*, I need say but little; because it is as evidently calculated to strengthen the *divine* principle of *universal benevolence* as *intercession*, and seems to be *natural* to a truly *charitable* and *generous* heart, that is affectionately concerned for its fellow-creatures, and rejoices in their prosperity. There is scarce any man, who does not think himself *obliged* to return *thanks* to almighty God for *family* and *national* mercies, as well as for those which are purely *private* and *personal*. Let him but *extend* his views, and he will find that *all mankind* constitute *one publick community*, who are governed by the *same laws*, and ought to pursue *one common interest*; that they have all

one father of their spirits, and are derived from the same original parent of their earthly nature: For God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth.—Let us be persuaded,

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Acts xvii.

26.

therefore, to act as becomes our generous and social frame, by a frequent and chearful discharge of this reasonable, most natural, and important duty; that we may be the better fitted to live and converse hereafter (with transporting and ineffable delight) among superior gracious spirits of most enlarged and pure benevolence, and under the eternal smiles of the God of love, whose compassions are immutable, and his tender mercies over all his works.—And as, even in the present world, we are all of us sometimes forced to converse with ourselves, it must be of the highest concernment to us to establish and improve such dispositions and habits as, when we look inward, will yield an agreeable and pleasing entertainment.—That diffused and ardent spirit of humanity, which the exhortation in the text inspires, we shall survey with continual approbation and complacency: But if this be wanting,

SERM. and we do not find ourselves *raised* above
XIV. the *corrupt* influence of a *contracted* and
selfish temper, our *own hearts* and *real*
characters will be the most *ungrateful* ob-
jects we can contemplate, and can excite
no other passions in us but *shame* and
self-abborrence.





S E R M O N XV.



Of Idolatry; and Visiting the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children.

EXODUS XX. 4, 5, 6.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.—For I the LORD, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers

upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me ; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

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HERE are *two* kinds or degrees of idolatry, plainly repugnant to the immutable law of nature, and the essential principles of revealed religion: The one is, the setting up an *idol-deity*; the other, an idolatrous manner of *worship*. To understand the ground of this distinction, we need only attend to the general account which St. Paul has given us of an *idol*, that it is *nothing in the world*; i. e. it is entirely a *chimera*, the *wild suggestion*, the *mere creature*, of a depraved judgment and licentious fancy, but has no real existence in the *nature* of things, nor foundation in *reason*. A *false* therefore, which is the same as a *non-existing*, must in the sense of this Apostle be an *idol God*: And the introducing

1 Cor. viii.

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cing unwarranted and unnatural *mediums* of worship, or irrational and improper representations of the *object* of worship, must be an *idolatrous* practice.


AND the second commandment, in different views of the prohibition contained in it, may include both of these. When the worship payed is designed to *center* in the image (as perhaps may be the case among some grossly rude and savage nations) “ the eternal and sovereign God “ is in effect *annihilated*, and an *idol* is “ permitted to *usurp* his throne as the “ object of *supreme* veneration;” if an imaginary *inferior* God (as was undeniable *fact*, in innumerable instances, among the *Heathens* of old) be served and adored through an *image*; “ the *object*, “ and the *manner*, of worship are both “ *idolatrous*.” But if the honours allotted to images be intended to *terminate* in the *true* and *living* God, the source of all perfection and power; “ then the *idolatry* respects, and is confined to, the “ *mode* of worship only.”

THIS is fully sufficient to shew, that what is forbidden in that divine law of the

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SERM. the decalogue, which we are now considering, is properly and strictly *idolatry*.

XV. And indeed, in the primary view and acceptance of the word, *idolatry* had a more immediate relation to the religious honours conferred upon senseless and impotent images; and there was scarce an act of devotion paid to an idol-deity, by the deplorably bewildered and degenerate *Pagans*, but what was performed before some *image*. — And as the offence itself founded on the most *mean* and *irreverent* apprehensions of God, and tends to the utter extirpation of *reason*, and corruption of all *moral* principles; as the *Jews*, to whom this precept was first delivered, were *surrounded* on all sides by nations addicted, and pertinaciously devoted, to the *several idolatries* therein forbidden, and were themselves *inclined* to practise the like impieties, from the impressions which they had received, too strong to be easily erased, in favour of *superstition* and a *symbolical worship*, while they resided in *Egypt*; and, finally, as a great part of the pretended *Christian* world are actually involved in the

the same error, and other communities SERM.
 more truly *christian* (at least as to XV.
 matters of *faith* and the external *form* 
 and *order* of their worship) still retain
 some *traces* of *idolatry*, and some *occa-*
sions of *scandal* by which it may be
 again introduced: Upon these accounts, I
 say, it was wise in God to institute, and
 distinguish, the law contained in the text
 as one of the most sacred in the whole
 dispensation of *Moses*; and it is highly ex-
 pedient in the present times, that it should
 be particularly explained and enforced.
 And the rather, because as the obliga-
 tion of the first commandment results
 from the *necessary existence* and *unity* of
 the supreme Being; so the reasons of
 this also, as will be demonstrated in the
 following discourse, “do not derive them-
 “ selves from any thing *peculiar* in the
 “ circumstances of the *Jewish* nation, but
 “ are equally *moral* and *invariable*.” I
 therefore now recommend, and shall con-
 sider, it as an *original* law of God, an
eternal law, a law as *extensive* as Human
 nature itself, and an indispensable branch
 of *Christian* morality, that *thou shalt not*
make

SERM. *make unto thee any graven image, or any*
 XV. *likeness of any thing that is in heaven*
 ~~~~~  
*above, or that is in the earth beneath, or*  
*that is in the water under the earth: Thou*  
*shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor*  
*serve them.*

To guard against this most destructive error to all rational piety and virtue, in every form in which it is possible for it to prevail and to be established, the precept itself is expressed in the strongest and most exclusive terms; hardly capable of being misunderstood by the most ignorant, or evaded by the most artful and sophistical reader.—*Thou shalt not make unto thee ANY graven image, or ANY likeness*—any figure, or representation. And as if this, which one would think could never be darkened by the most profound comments, was not sufficient, the *universal* prohibition is still more *distinctly* explained, to make it obvious, without the least room for hesitation, to the lowest degrees of human reason. If the expressions had been only *general*, without an enumeration of particulars, “*exceptions*” might have been *imagined* of some ob-  
 “ jects,



“jects, of singular *magnificence*, *perfection*, and *use* in the creation;” and these *speciously* represented, might have confounded weak minds, and have imposed upon the credulous. But when it is said *not any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in HEAVEN above, or that is in the EARTH beneath, or that is in the WATER under the earth*——“this comprehends minutely the whole *frame* and *scope* of nature, and *every* being, rational or irrational, animate or inanimate, that exists in it.” It includes likewise, under the phrase *any likeness*, all *pictures*, together with graven images, as unlawful and prohibited; as indeed the reason of the thing equally *condemns* both, or *justifies* both. And it is too absurd a position to need any confutation, that a *painter* may *lawfully* form *idols* to be worshipped, of men and brute animals, of stars and vegetables, and gross corporeal representations of God himself; which immediately lose their *innocence*, and become instances of heinous *impiety*, when produced or exhibited by the skill of the *engraver*. For, according to this way

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SERM. way of arguing, the command must have  
 XV. been chiefly levelled, contrary to the express  
 letter of the text and the common sense  
 of mankind, “ not against *worshipping*,  
 “ but against *carving* the image.” Such  
 wretched and ridiculous shifts as these  
 can scarce be treated in a serious manner,  
 “ which suppose the *different workman-*  
 “ *ship* of the artificer to constitute and  
 “ define *moral good and evil.*”

SOME of the most antient *Christian*  
 writers were of opinion, that the *making*  
 any image was in virtue of this command  
 criminal, abstract from all consideration  
 of the *use* or *service* to which it was ap-  
 propriated: Which notion they very prob-  
 ably learned from the *Jews*, who, in  
 the last period of their state, were so  
 averse to *idolatry*, that they ran into the  
 other extreme of, I think, *superstition*; in  
 this instance, indeed, directly *opposed* to  
 idolatry, and therefore justly denominated  
 the *other extreme*, but in many cases na-  
 turally *connected* with, and leading to it.  
 And prepossessed with this sentiment, they  
 reduced the second precept of the deca-  
 logue to three heads.—*Thou shalt not*  
 make

make *any image*—*thou shalt not bow down to it*—*thou shalt not worship it.* SERM. XV.

But it is plain, from the general scope and most natural construction of the law itself, that the making the image was only condemned in this precise and determinate quality, of *making it to be worshipped*: And the reason annexed—*I am a jealous God*—will only suit with this interpretation of it. For thou shalt not prostrate thyself, nor pay religious adoration, to inanimate images, because *I the Lord thy God am a jealous God*, this has energy and a very important meaning in it; but *I am a jealous God*, therefore thou shalt not make an image or picture for *any purpose* whatsoever, where is the *significancy*, where the *weight* and *conclusiveness* of this argument? It might as well have been said (and the inference would have been altogether as rightly drawn) *I am a faithful*, or a *merciful God*: Which shews most plainly that it is not a just deduction, because it would *equally* follow upon admitting quite *different* premises. But not to insist longer on what are, at least in my judgment, mistakes of the true meaning

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SERM. ing of this precept, I now proceed to  
 XV. specify particularly the several kinds of  
 ~~~~~ idolatry that are forbidden by it: And  
 they may all be reduced to the following heads,

FIRST, as *absolutely immoral*, the representing the everlasting and supreme God under *any material and visible similitude*.

SECONDLY, the *worshipping* images as containing *symbolical characters* of any of the perfections of the sovereign Deity, or of any persons or things, that thus *describe* and *figure* out the essential attributes of the Creator and supreme God of the universe.

THIRDLY, the using such images as *mediums* of worship, ultimately paid to the *true* God; or to *idol-gods*, or *idol-mediators*.

FOURTHLY, the paying religious honours to them as having the *supreme*, or any *inferior*, divinity *present* with them in an extraordinary way, or peculiarly *residing* in them.

FIFTHLY,

FIFTHLY, the precept in the text seems to me to forbid not only internal service, and offices of religion directed to the image, but the paying it marks of reverence and outward honour.

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AND, in the LAST place, the grossest extreme and stupidity of this kind of idolatry is, terminating the worship in the *images themselves*. Each of these propositions I shall explain, where the terms may be thought obscure, and briefly illustrate and confirm.

IN the FIRST place then, I apprehend, that the text condemns, as *absolutely immoral*, the *describing* the everlasting and supreme God under *any material and visible similitude*. That this was intended in the commandment itself, appears undeniably from the reason by which *Moses* re-inforced the observation of it on all the people of *Israel*, in the fourth chapter of the book of *Deu-* ver. 15,
teronomy. His words are exceedingly re- 16.
markable——*Take ye good heed, says he, unto yourselves,——(for ye saw no manner of SIMILITUDE on the day that the Lord*

SERM. *spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of*
 XV. *the fire) lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make*
you a graven image, the similitude of any fi-
gure: " Where the force of the argu-
" ment, for ye saw no similitude, is directly
" and immediately levelled against making
" the image, and only by consequence, and
" more remotely, against worshipping the
" image." And other sacred writers, both
among the Prophets and Apostles of our
Lord, represent this prohibition as founded
not on mere positive authority, but on reasons
that are moral and perpetual. Thus the pro-
phet Isaiah, having set forth the exalted and
super-eminent majesty of God in most grand
and lofty expressions (— as that he bath
measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
and meted out heaven with a span, compre-
hended the dust of the earth in a measure,
weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills
in a balance; and that all nations before him
are as nothing, they are counted to him less
than nothing, and vanity) — he immedi-
 Isa. xl. 18. *ately adds, to whom then will ye liken God,*
or what likeness will ye compare unto
him? — Which is the same as if he
had expressly said, " that no such at-
 " tempt


“tempt ought ever to be made, that
 “it is absolutely *unnatural* and *monstrous*
 “in itself, and a *derogation* from the
 “*matchless glory* of the supreme Divinity.”

Upon the same principles St. Paul argued, when he imputed it to the *Heathens* as an instance of most wretched infatuation and inexcusable impiety; that they *changed* Rom. i. 23.
the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

IF then *degrading* the most High be *unfit* in its own nature, at all times; and in all supposable circumstances; the representing him under the figure of any *material* being in the universe must be absolutely and eternally *immoral*. It is a shocking indignity offered to the boundless wisdom; the omnipotence, the immensity of the divine nature, to pretend to *describe* it by what necessarily involves, in the very idea of it, *folly, imperfection, weakness, and limited existence*; or “by
 “*mathematical figures, of a determinate*
 “*shape and narrow bound, to give any*
 “*notion at all, and much more an ac-*


SERM, “*curate* notion of him, who has *no*
 XV. “*shape*, and whose *essence*, *duration*,
 “ and *dominion* are *uncircumscribed*.” It
 is an offence against the light of *nature* ;
 a direct opposition to the *revealed law* of
 God ; it disgraces the *Protestant* religion,
 by its *symbolising* so grossly with the *idola-*
trous corruptions of the church of *Rome* ;
 and renders *Christianity itself*, tho’ un-
 justly, the object of contempt and insult :
 And, finally, it tends to *erase* from the
 minds of the *vulgar*, all rational ve-
 neration of God ; and to inspire such *low*
 and *carnal* apprehensions concerning him,
 as must naturally terminate either in *pro-*
phaness or *superstition*. But,

SECONDLY, the command given in
 the text forbids, farther, the *worshipping*
images, as containing *symbolical represen-*
tations of any of the perfections of the
 sublime incomprehensible Deity ; or of
 any persons or things, that thus *describe*
 and *figure* out the essential attributes of
 the sovereign God of the universe.—As
 if, for example, any should pay religious
 reverence to a *lion*, or an *elephant*, as on
 account of their strength *fitted* to repre-
 sent

sent the *power* of God ; or to the *sun* as SERM.
 the noblest *visible emblem* of that *supreme* XV.
spirit, which cheers and animates universal 
 nature. This was the defence, that some
 of the most discerning and sagacious *Hea-*
thens, of old, made for their national and
 publick *idolatries*: And though it was,
 I suppose, the *best* vindication of the
 established *superstition* of their country,
 that they could then invent—that it
 was consecrated *ultimately* to *the Father*
of Gods and Men, and not intended to
 center in the visible *idols*; yet it was in
 truth a most *absurd* and *lame* vindication,
 unbecoming the *reason* of a man, and
 much more unworthy of persons of su-
 perior penetration. For the *emblems* them-
 selves were entirely *inadequate* to, and
 infinitely *beneath*, the dignity, and glory,
 and excellence of the *object* designed to
 be *represented*; and, therefore, could not
 possibly convey any *just idea* of it. “ Re-
 “ sides, as the comparison is supposed to
 “ be made for the sake of the *common*
 “ *people* (who otherwise, it is pretended,
 “ would be able to form scarce any no-
 “ tion at all of the Deity) their *first sense*

SERM. “ of things, unused to art and subtilty,
 XV. “ would naturally lead them to think,
 “ that the objects *compared* were *alike* ;
 “ and not *vastly, totally, infinitely* diffe-
 “ rent:” And, of consequence, their ap-
 prehensions of the supreme God must
 be *debased*, and their inward reverence of
 him *lessened* and *impaired* by *all* such sym-
 bolical representations. But as this part
 of my discourse has not much relation
 to the present times, I content myself
 with having just mentioned it, as what
 naturally fell within the scope of the se-
 cond commandment ; and shall now pro-
 ceed to another head, in which *Christians*
 and *Pagans* are equally concerned. And
 that is,

IN the THIRD place, that the second
 commandment, which is the subject of
 our present consideration, forbids the
 using *images* as *mediums* of worship *ulti-
 mately* paid to the *true* God, or to idol-
Gods, or idol-*Mediators*. That this is the
 doctrine of the Old Testament, to which
 this precept more immediately belongs,
 will be unanswerably demonstrated by
 the single instance of the *Israelites* wor-
 shipping

shipping the *golden calf* in the wilder-SERM.
 ness, and the account given of it in these XV.
 sacred writings. Upon the first view of 
 that history, it must appear altogether
 extravagant to suppose, that this people
 could ever imagine the *image itself*, which
 they knew to be their own *invention*,
 and their own *workmanship*, to be the
 very *eternal* and *self-existent* JEHOVAH,
 their God, and gracious deliverer. It
 was, indeed, absolutely impossible that
 they should *thus* conceive of it, while
 they retained any sparks or glimmerings
 of reason. They therefore, in all pro-
 bability, “ only intended it as a *medium*,
 “ thro’ which to present their *supreme*
 “ veneration and respect to the *ultimate*
 “ object of it, the *God of Israel*: Upon
 “ which account the day, when this *idol*
 “ was first exhibited, is expressly stiled
 “ *a feast to the Lord*.” But notwithstand-
 ing this, it is evidently described as an Numbers xxxii. 5.
 act of *idolatry*, by the *Psalmist* in these
 words: *They made a calf in Horeb, and* Psal. cii.
worshipped the molten image; thus they 19, 20.
changed their glory into the similitude of
an ox that eateth grass. And it must be
 B b 4 entirely

SERM. entirely needless to attempt to prove, after
 XV. what has been now said, that the case
 is the same with respect to the worship-
 ing *false Gods*, or mere *imaginary Mediators*, by *images*; because it is undeniable, in all such instances, that the *object*, and the *manner*, of worship are both *idolatrous*.

IT is farther prohibited, by the second commandment, to pay religious honours to *images*, as having the *supreme*, or any *inferior*, Divinity *present* with them in an extraordinary way, or peculiarly *residing* in them. For this is what *human reason* can never *dictate*, thro' its almost absolute ignorance of the *order* and *oeconomy* of invisible worlds; it is what *revelation* has never *taught*, with respect to any images that can possibly be framed; nay, it is what it directly *discourages*, by prohibiting *image-worship* in *universal* terms, without a single exception *actually* made, or any *imaginable* exception. The *Deities* therefore, supposed to be here *residing*, can no more have a *proper substantial* existence, and must therefore as necessarily be *mere idols*, as any of the most and *irrational*

tional Deities, that were ever adored by SERM. the *Gentile* world. Besides, *St. Paul's* rea- XV. soning, addressed to the *Athenians*, with respect to the living God who made *the world and all things therein*,—that seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth, he dwelleth not in TEMPLES made with hands ACTS xvii; —must be to the full as *conclusive* a 24. proof, if there be any evidence or demonstration at all in it, “that he dwelleth not in IMAGES made with hands.”

IT seems likewise, in the FIFTH place, to be forbidden by the text, to pay to *images* any marks of *external reverence* and *honour*. For in these words, *thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them*, the *prostration* is, in the most natural and easy construction we can form of them, separated from *internal homage* and offices of religion, as a *distinct* article by itself. And the ground of this part of the prohibition was very probably this, to prevent our having the most *distant* participation in a crime, which has ever been the *bane* of *morality*, and of all *true religion*.

LASTLY,

SERM. LASTLY, the most excessive and criminal degree of the *idolatry* condemned in the text is, when the worship offered is intended to terminate in the *images themselves*. And it is to be feared, that this, however strange and unaccountable, is too often the case in the lower class of mankind, who *grovel* in their apprehensions, have but little *strength* or *compass* of thought, and are hardly capable of extending their *view*, beyond the *visible object* which engages their veneration. I shall only add, that the scriptures seem to suppose that mankind *may* be thus abandoned of *reason*, and of all *right idea* and *sentiment* of Deity: For the Prophet *Isaiah* has, in effect, drawn the exact character of this most *depressed* and *degenerate* set of *idolaters*, in the following passages—

Ifa. xiv. *He beweth him down cedars, and taketh the*
 14, 15, *cypress and the oak—be planteth an ash*
 17. *—then shall it be for a man to burn—*
he kindleth it, and baketh bread—and
the residue thereof he maketh a God, even
his graven image: He falleth down unto
it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto
it,

it, and saith, deliver me, for THOU art my GOD. SERM.
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THERE still remains another very important point to be distinctly considered and explained——and that is, *that part of the reason annexed to this commandment (to deter the Jews from imitating the customs of the neighbouring idolaters,) which asserts the LORD to be a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.*——For how, it may be asked, can such a *rigorous* proceeding as this be reconciled with the principles of eternal and most perfect wisdom, which are the basis and support of God's moral government; or with those sacred and irreversible rules of *equity*, by which it must be supposed to be, at all times, conducted? How can it be reconciled to the doctrine so strongly inculcated by the Prophet *Ezekiel*: Who when the *Jews*, in his time, represented the judge of all the earth as arbitrary and cruel, in punishing *them* for their *fathers* crimes, expressly declared, that the great and sovereign judge had an *equal* and *impartial* regard to *all* his creatures

con-

SERM. considered *merely* as his creatures; that *all*
 XV. *souls* were *his*, as *the soul of the father*, so
 Ezekiel also *the soul of the Son*; and that every
 xviii. 4. man should be rewarded or punished,
 only as he had *deserved* reward or pu-
 nishment, by his own personal behaviour?
 And God himself is described as appeal-
 ing to the *sober judgment* of his accusers,
 and their uncorrupted *sense* of morality,
 whether this standing inviolable rule and
 order of his supreme dominion was not
 strictly and unexceptionably *just*; whe-
 ther it was not absolutely the *most* wise
 and impartial, nay the *only* wise and impar-
 tial, method of proceeding, in the go-
 vernment of rational and free creatures.
 As the case now stated has been esteem-
 ed a considerable difficulty, which is
 necessary to be removed, in order to set
 God's universal *moral rule* in a worthy
 and venerable light; I shall endeavour to
 suggest some brief hints towards a full
 and satisfactory solution of it.

AND, FIRST, I apprehend that it will
 be but of little weight in clearing this
 objection to assert, what is indeed undeni-
 ably true, that by *visiting the iniquities of*
the

the fathers upon the children is meant, in SERM. the text, only “ a temporary and national XV. punishment;” because the passage, in the Prophecy of *Ezekiel*, relates to temporary and national punishments likewise. For when the *Jews* made use of this proverb concerning the land of *Israel*, that *the fathers had eaten sowre grapes, and the childrens teeth were set on edge*, it is evident almost to a demonstration, that they must have intended this, and this *only*; that they *actually* suffered as a *community*, and not that they should *hereafter* suffer as *individuals*, for the offences and corruptions of their forefathers. So that the punishment referred to in both passages being, as to *kind*, exactly one and the same, this rather encreases, than at all diminishes, what appearance there is of a *contradiction*.

SECONDLY, of as little force, with respect to the argument as it now stands to be considered, is another observation, *viz.* that the *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children* is, in this law of the decalogue, “ appropriated to the “ crime of *idolatry*.” For tho’ there

might

SERM. might be solid reasons for *guarding* against
 XV. an offence, that defeated the grand design
 of the *Jewish* constitution, by the threaten-
 ing of some most severe and remarkable
penalty; yet, if the penalty be *unjust* in
 itself, it must be so in all instances;
 and with respect to all enormities with-
 out *exception*, however heinous in their
 nature, or fatal in their consequences.
 And, besides, *Ezekiel* has expressly men-
 tioned the *son* of an *idolater*, as one that
shall not bear his father's iniquities: We
 may add to all this, that our blessed Sa-
 viour has asserted the same thing in sub-
 stance (as that which is denounced in the
 text) with respect to *other* flagrant vices;
 particularly *persecution*, and *murder*: *Be-*
 hold, says he, *I send unto you prophets, and*
wise men, and Scribes; and some of them
ye shall kill and crucify; and some of
them shall ye scourge in your synagogues,
and persecute them from city to city. That
upon you may come all the righteous blood
shed upon the earth—Verily I say unto
you, all these things shall come upon this
generation; i. e. in other words, God will
visit your wicked ancestors, as well as
your

Mat. xxiii,
 34, 35,
 36.

your own, persecutions and murders, on you their children and descendents.

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—We must therefore defend the wisdom and equity of that particular kind of punishment, which is threatned in the text, upon some more *extensive* principle, than the *peculiar* character and guilt of *Idolatry*.

I WOULD observe farther, THIRDLY, that neither the second commandment, nor *Ezekiel* in the chapter above referred to, spake “ of the *natural evil consequences* “ of vice, but of *positive* punishments.” That the command did not *intend* such consequences, provided as *penalties* in the *established frame* of things, is evident, because *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*, in this construction of the phrase, can with very little colour of reason be fixed as the *certain* punishment of *idolatry*; which considered in itself, and, as it may *possibly* be in the *nature* of things, abstracted from other *immoralities*, is not so likely to bring *temporal distress* and calamity upon nations or private persons, as *luxury*, *fraud*, and many other crimes that might be easily specified; nor,

son-

SERM. consequently, are the mischievous effects
 XV. of it, resulting from the *settled course* of
 nature, so likely to be felt by *posterity*.
 And further, this interpretation can, in
 my opinion, by no means be made to
 suit with the punishment's being restrained
 to the *third* and *fourth* generation (sup-
 posing, for the present, that expression to
 refer not to the *commencement*, but the
end, of the punishment) because the *na-
 tural consequences* of crimes are not capa-
 ble, without a miracle, of being thus *li-
 mited*; but as some of them may end
before, so others, without an extraordi-
 nary interposition of providence, will, and
 must, last much *longer*: Besides that the
 expression itself — *God's visiting for sin*
 — will be found, I believe, always to
 imply something beyond the *ordinary* and
fixed course of nature and providence.
 And it is equally improbable, on the other
 hand, that the prophet ever intended to
 declare, that children should not suffer
any evils as the *natural effects* of their
 fathers wickedness; because such a position
 as this is confuted by universal and daily
 experience.

I EXPECT now that it will be said, that SERM. this way of *explaining* renders the subject XV. rather more perplexed, and strengthens the difficulty, instead of removing it. For we may as well *account* for childrens being liable to some misfortunes and calamities, on account of the irregularities of their forefathers, as for *any* natural evils which men have not *deserved*, and *brought* upon themselves. There are several most wise and necessary punishments, inflicted on gross offenders in human government, which, in the unavoidable *connection* and *train* of events, are very injurious to their *descendants*. And, indeed, scarce any penalty can be ordained in cases of most considerable moment; scarce any penalty, I say, *adapted* to the occasion, and *sufficient* to serve the ends of government, but what may, some way or other, affect the criminal's *posterity*. This, therefore, being a *right* included in the idea of government in *general*, as *essential* to it, must be weakly and absurdly objected to the *divine* government.—But if God immediately *interposes* to inflict evils upon any for the iniquities of their *ancestors*,

SERM. evils which would not have happened in
 XV. the *natural* course of things, and which
 they have not righteously *incurred* by
 any guilt of their own; this looks like
 punishing the *innocent*, and must, conse-
 quently, be unworthy an equitable and
 beneficent governour. As therefore the
 supposing the second commandment to
 mean a *positive* punishment seems to ren-
 der the *injustice* more flagrant; so does
 it likewise the *inconsistency* between that,
 and the text quoted from *Ezekiel*: Since
 they both speak of *national* evils, and of
 evils confined to the *present life*.

But tho' the *nature* of the punishment,
 and the *scene* on which it is inflicted, be in
 both passages the *same*; yet the *subjects* of
 it are entirely *different*. The second com-
 mandment only speaks of God's *visiting*
the iniquities of the fathers on such chil-
 dren as *inherit* their vices, and *imitate*
 their bad examples; the *third and fourth*
generation of them that hate me, i. e. *con-*
tinue to manifest their contempt and
 hatred of me by persisting in their *ido-*
latries. And this is likewise agreeable to
 the general tenor of the Old Testament,
 and

and to every instance of childrens suffering from the immediate hand of God (these being always *wicked children*) for the vices of their *progenitors*. But the prophet *Ezekiel* speaks, on the contrary, of *such* of the offspring of degenerate and corrupted parents, as were themselves *good* and *virtuous*. So that, by this plain sentiment, all shadow of a *contradiction* between the two sacred writers is absolutely removed:—And all foundation likewise for complaining of *unequal distribution*, in the supreme judge of mankind. “ For
 “ as the persons supposed to *suffer* are
 “ such as might be *righteously* punished,
 “ by a *positive* infliction of the self-same
 “ evils, without any regard to or confi-
 “ deration of their *ancestors*, it necessa-
 “ rily follows, that their punishment must
 “ be absolutely just *in itself*; and there-
 “ fore no particular determination of their
 “ supreme governour *when*, or *how*, it
 “ shall be inflicted in *this life* (which is
 “ not the appointed scene of adequate
 “ retribution) can make any alteration
 “ *in the equity of the case upon the whole*.
 “ If the punishment be in *its own nature*

SERM.
 XV.
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SERM. “ righteous, it may be inflicted in *any*  
 XV. “ *way*, and at *any time*, that will best  
 “ subserve the ultimate end of divine  
 “ government.”

BUT it may still be objected, that if this be the import of the *threatning* annexed to the second commandment, it amounts to very little ; because the *wicked children* of wicked parents would be punished, by the universal governour and disposer of events, for their *own* offences. To which I answer, that this is far from being *certain*, if we confine our reasoning, as the sense of the text obliges us to do, to the *present* probationary state ; and that there are circumstances supposable, “ in which mankind might not  
 “ have been punished *here*, if they had  
 “ not been the *depraved offspring* of de-  
 “ *generate ancestors.*”

LET us imagine, for instance, a *society* to be corrupt and vicious: God may exercise *patience* towards *them*, as he does towards *private persons* (to see whether they will be *reclaimed* by *gentle* methods) before he proceeds to execute vengeance, and testify his severe displeasure against  
 their



their iniquities. This, indeed, is a *wor-*  
*thy* idea of the wisdom and clemency of  
 his government, to try if the *ruin* and  
*mifery* of a whole people may not be pre-  
 vented by their *reformation*. As the *fate*  
 of a nation is a very great and important  
 event, and its *destruction* what that most  
 benevolent and compassionate being, who  
 defires the happiness of all his creatures,  
 cannot delight in (but must rather be  
*averse* to, unless urged by *indispensable* rea-  
 sons of government) he may think it becom-  
 ing his infinite wisdom not to punish  
 the *first* offenders; to leave room for the  
*succeeding* generation to relinquish their  
 fathers vices. But if they go on in *the*  
*same* track of *impiety*, and a *reformation*  
 is not so *probable*, as when the offenders  
 retained the principles and sentiments of  
 their better education, then it may be  
 a *fit* time to *punish*; to prevent the con-  
 tagion from spreading *farther*, and from  
 being transmitted down to *posterity*. In  
 these cases (which must be at least al-  
 lowed as possible) if the generation of  
 men, who *suffer* under the severe visitations  
 of providence, had been the *first* offend-

SERM. ers, *they* might have been *spared* for the  
 XV. same reasons, that, it is supposed, their  
 fathers were. But, now, God having  
 sufficiently exercised his *patience* towards  
 them as a *society*, it may be *expedient*  
 that he should manifest his displeasure  
 against their *public* crimes, to vindicate  
 and support his royal authority, and de-  
 monstrate visibly that he is the governour  
 among the *nations*; which can only be  
 rewarded or punished as *such* in the *pre-*  
*sent* world. “ And thus the *true reason*  
 “ why they are *punished* will not be, ab-  
 “ solutely and strictly speaking, because  
 “ they are *sinners*; but because they are  
 “ the *vicious descendents* of *impious* and  
 “ *wicked ancestors* :” Nor is there any  
 thing, in this method of proceeding, in-  
 consistent with maxims of *justice*; because,  
 as was observed before, “ they have *me-*  
 “ *rited* the *whole*, of what they are *ap-*  
 “ *pointed* to suffer, by their own *perso-*  
 “ *nal* crimes.”



## S E R M O N XVI.




On the Mediation of Christ.

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I TIM. ii. 5.

— *And one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

 INTEND, in this discourse, SERM. XVI. to explain the *mediatorial* character and office of Christ; which gives such *scope* and *enlargement* to our ideas of the *oeconomy* and *order* of God's moral goverment, as unassisted nature could not attain to. The several branches of this mediatory constitution are, indeed, the principal points, by which the gospel is *distinguished* from mere natural religion; the primitive and invariable religion

SERM. religion of all mankind. And yet it will  
 XVI. be obvious to every cool and considerate  
 inquirer, that though these are, as it  
 were, the peculiar *complexion* and great  
*characteristic* of the Christian doctrine,  
 they were not intended to form a scheme  
 entirely *new*; but are all closely *connected*,  
 and *interwoven*, with the essential branches  
 of *the religion of nature*, which they  
 were originally designed to explain and  
 enforce.

THUS, for example, that God governs  
 the world with perfect wisdom and rec-  
 titude, is the clear and undepraved sense  
 of *nature*; “ which must be content  
 “ with this *general* knowledge, and can-  
 “ not pretend to fix, *precisely*, in what  
 “ *particular manner* this government is  
 “ conducted.”—Here then the gospel  
 comes in properly to the *aid* of *reason*;  
 and informs us that it is administered by  
*Jesus Christ*, invested with the authority  
 of GOD. The government is undeniably  
*one* and the *same*, whether exercised *imme-*  
*diately*, or by a *substituted* power: So  
 that in the general truth, the voice of  
*reason* and *Christianity* both concur. And  
 though

though reason could never have *discovered*,  
by its own strength and penetration, that  
the administration of this government  
was committed to *a delegate*, sufficiently  
authorised, and compleatly qualified, for  
the execution of so *vast* a design; yet it  
is equally certain, that it can produce no  
*decisive* objection against this notion of a  
*mediatorial* King and Lord of all; unless  
it be able clearly to demonstrate, “ that  
“ the *supreme* and *original* ruler of the  
“ world is under an *immutable* obligation  
“ to govern always by himself *alone*;  
“ and that *great* and *wise* purposes may  
“ not be served, by appointing a *subordi-*  
“ *nate* power.” But to assert this in  
cases, where we have no *competent* ideas,  
and scarce *any* comprehension at all of  
the subject; “ and in *a particular case*,  
“ in which we must be absolutely *un-*  
“ *qualified* to judge with certainty, un-  
“ less we have, actually before us,  
“ *all* the *possible* reasons that may render  
“ a particular oeconomy, *expedient* and  
“ *fit*, in the *infinite* government of the  
“ Almighty;” is a strain of arrogance  
and

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SERM. and presumption, as extravagantly *absurd*,  
XVI. as it is *impious*.

So, again, that God is in his nature absolutely *good*, and strongly disposed to shew *mercy*, is one of the *first* principles that *unperverted reason* teaches. But, then, though reason, unless it be terrified and quite enslaved by superstition, must look upon this as an *essential* perfection of the Deity, and as the most *illustrious* and *amiable* part of his moral character; it must also suppose, that the *exertions* and *displays* of his *mercy*, as well as those of his *power*, are, in all cases, directed and proportioned by *wisdom*. “ And what is the *fittest* and “ *propereſt* way, either of dispensing his “ mercy upon *the whole*, or with respect “ to any *particular system* of creatures, “ requires faculties of much *larger* extent, “ than those that are allotted to the *hu-* “ *man* mind, to adjust and settle.” In the *general* principle, that *God is merciful*, natural religion and revelation entirely *cor-* *respond*: But with respect to the *stated* way of distributing his *favours*, so as most effectually to subserve the ultimate end of his *moral* government, an extraordi-  
nary

nary revelation, *alone*, is capable of yielding us clear and full *satisfaction*.——

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“ Here therefore (as it was not unreasonable to suppose it *might*) the gospel has actually opened to us a new constitution, in the doctrine of *Christ the Mediator*.”



THE *general notion* of a *Mediator* is what those, who, instead of modestly exercising and improving, make an idol of human reason, are apt upon the first proposal of it, and without *knowing* or *inquiring* what it *really* means, to traduce and vilify. And indeed the *reasons* of it have been so grossly *misrepresented*, as has given too much occasion, to superficial thinkers, to load it with reproach and censure. For God, considered in himself, has been described as an object of *horror*, and absolutely *inaccessible* by his frail offending creatures.——An *unnatural* imputation, and most *absurdly blasphemous*!——“ For where can *access* be found, if not to *infinite mercy*?” To whom can the miserable, to whom can penitent sinners, so *freely* apply for *relief* and *pardon*, as to the *only* being in the universe, whose goodness is *unlimited* and strictly

SERM. strictly *immutable*? Can *communicated* mercy be more generous, condescending, and compassionate, than *original* and *eternal* mercy? Or if the supreme being be, in particular cases, *averse* to all commiseration; dare any inferior being *presume* to intercede as a Mediator? To *dictate* mercy to him that is all-perfect, to attempt to make him more *compliant*, to soothe and mollify him into greater *benignity* and *indulgence*? If God be, in himself, an unchangeable and unerring pattern of every thing that is *right* and *fit*; would not such a Mediator act an *indecent*, nay, an *immoral*, part? Would he not behave in a manner unbecoming an *intelligent* being, “ if he should *sue* for mercy, any “ *farther* than God is by *nature* merciful?” On the contrary, if any circumstances could be supposed, in which the supreme model of every thing truly worthy and noble might be imagined to be, *essentially* considered, unpropitious and inaccessible; is it not undeniably certain, “ that *the Mediator also* ought to be “ *accessible*?” Or can the Deity be *degraded* by the *exercise* of compassion, in the very  
same



same case, in which the Mediator is *ex-* SERM.  
*alted* and *dignified* by *pleading* for compas- XVI.  
*sion*? And, to add no more, must not  
our humble supplications, even when they  
are offered through *a Mediator*, be *ultimate-*  
*ly* presented to the *divine mercy*? If so, it  
then necessarily follows, that the *true*  
ground, on which the mediatorial scheme  
was established, could not be, “ that God  
“ was in himself either too *terrible*, or  
“ too *resentful*, or too *inexorable*, to be  
“ *directly* addressed and invocated ;” but  
this, and this *alone*, that some great  
and beneficial purposes might be served  
by it, with respect to the *moral world*  
considered more at large, but especially  
with respect to *mankind*, to whom the  
scheme itself appears to have a *peculiar*  
reference. And the true *Christian* doctrine  
of a Mediator, the substance of which  
is, “ that our blessed Saviour was *ap-*  
“ *pointed*, by the *supreme authority* of  
“ heaven and earth, to *reconcile* apostate  
“ and rebellious men to their offended  
“ Maker and Sovereign, and to be the  
“ *distributor* of God’s favour to mankind ;”  
I say, this primitive and unadulterated doc-  
trine

SERM. trine of the gospel, concerning the *One*  
 XVI. *Mediator*, carries not with it, in its general notion, the least shadow of a *contradiction* to any of the *truths* that *nature* inculcates; and will appear, I am persuaded, to *unite* and *harmonize* with *all* of them, in the distinct explication of its several parts.

W H E T H E R the mediatorial character of Christ may be properly said to have *commenced* till after his *resurrection*, when he had *all power* committed to him, and was constituted the *One Lord*, through *whom* are *all things*; I shall not at present minutely enquire. Thus much however may, I think, be safely affirmed, that there are several probabilities to incline us to believe, that *this* is the scheme laid down in the New Testament; and more particularly, that the *title* of *Mediator* is what Christ never *expressly* assumed to himself, during the time of his own publick ministry upon earth, nor was it ever ascribed to him till *after* his *exaltation* to regal dignity and power. But if we take his mediatorial office in the common construction

of

of it, as *beginning* with his prophetic mission, and *including* the substance of what he either *did* or *suffered*, as the faithful messenger and servant of the most High; it will still approve itself, in every branch, to the candid and unprejudiced reason of mankind.—For that God should *commission* a particular person, and furnish him with *authentic credentials*, to *revive* true religion, when it was buried, and almost quite extinguished, under a heap of *barbarous* and *hurtful* superstitions——and that he should *even appoint* for this purpose, and to promote the eternal salvation of mankind, a being of the *first rank* and *dignity* in the moral creation——neither of these, I say, can appear at all strange to us, when we consider that his mercies are infinite, and not to be measured by the narrow extent of human sensations and affections; and that the *original worth* and *former transcendent glory* of the *instrument*, employed in this generous design, had a natural tendency to conciliate greater *attention* to, and a more sublime *veneration* of, his doctrine: Which last is directly  
pointed



SERM. pointed out to us (*Matt. xxi. 37.*) as the  
 XVI. *immediate view* of providence, in this  
 surprising instance of grace and condescension. And when the same excellent person, for *opposing* the *prejudices, superstitions, and vices* of the world, was, after a long course of preparatory indignities, tortured and put to death with the utmost ignominy, contrary to all the principles of justice and gratitude; that his *resolution* and *undaunted integrity* in submitting to such undeserved cruelties, without so much as once *prevaricating* in the sacred cause of truth, should be highly *honoured* and *rewarded* by the supreme Governour and judge of mankind — is a *sentiment* perfectly agreeable to our *natural apprehensions* of his wisdom, equity, and goodness.

BUT the *death* of Christ is represented in the gospel in a different light: For we are not only told, that *God was in, or through, Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, but that we are *reconciled to him*  
 2 Cor. v. 19. *by the death of his Son*; that we have  
 Rom. v. 10. *redemption thro' his blood, the forgiveness of sins*; and that he hath *put away sin*  
 Eph. i. 7. *by*

by the sacrifice of himself.\* — And it will SERM. without doubt be asked, what is the true XVI sense of this doctrine; and how it may <sup>Heb. ix.</sup> be reconciled with the eternal principles <sup>26.</sup> of reason, and the notions, which we are led by nature to entertain of God?

To which I answer, that it is the *undeniable* doctrine of the New Testament, that the *death* of Christ was not *intended* “to render the Deity *propitious*, i. e. willing to be reconciled to his creatures upon *fit* and *honourable* terms;” because it was proposed by *himself*, and the whole *use* and *efficacy* of it springs from his *appointing* and *declaring* it to be an *accepted sacrifice*: So that it must of necessity suppose him “to have been *antede-*“*cedently propitious.*” The truth of the case therefore is, that it was “an *expe-*“*dient* originally *proceeding from the*“*mercy* of God, and not the *argument*,“*or motive*, inducing him *to be merci-*“*ful.*”—What then could it *possibly* be,“*but the properest* and *wisest* way, in“*which* he thought he could *dispense*“*his mercy?*”—“But how the *wisest?*” Not surely with respect to *any influence*

TERM. upon himself, whose mercy was *complete* and *immutable*; it could therefore *only* be on account of the *moral uses* of it, or to promote the *important ends* of God's moral government. And the *great purposes* which are evidently *served*, by the express command of God to consider the *death* of Christ under the notion and character of a *sacrifice*, are those which follow.

FIRST, that it might be a *standing memorial* of God's being *propitious*, and *inclined* to *pardon* the sins of men; and an enforcement of that fundamental principle of *all* religion, that *he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*: "A  
 " memorial co-inciding with the almost  
 " *universal sentiment* and *practice* of the  
 " world (among whom *sacrifices* were  
 " esteemed as an essential part of reli-  
 " gion) and likely, upon that account, to  
 " have a more *certain* and *powerful* in-  
 " fluence."--SECONDLY, that it might be a *standing memorial*, likewise, of the *evil* and *demerit* of sin; and, consequently, a perpetual *incentive* to *humility* and *repentance*.—And, THIRDLY, it seems to have been

been wisely appointed with this view like-  
 wise, viz. to supersede the *use* of all *fu-*  
*ture sacrifices*; which, extending even  
 to *human sacrifices*, had been the most  
*depraved* and *unnatural* branch of *Hea-*  
*then superstition*. And, therefore, that  
 it might the better produce *this effect*,  
 which was *worthy* the care of infinite  
 wisdom and goodness, we are expressly in-  
 formed, that Jesus Christ *both*, by one  
 offering, *perfected for ever them that are*  
*sanctified*. SERM.  
XVI.  
Hebr. x.  
14.

And, in the LAST place, “ there is  
 “ formed, by this *constitution*, a beauti-  
 “ ful *analogy* in a very considerable and  
 “ important point, between the *settled*  
 “ *methods* of God’s *natural providence*;  
 “ and the *extraordinary operations* of his  
 “ *grace* ;” which, perhaps, may justly be  
 esteemed as one of the *principal reasons*  
 of it.—By the *offence* of Adam in eating  
 the forbidden fruit, the *Christian* revela-  
 tion informs us, *death* was introduced in-  
 to the world, and descended from *him* to  
 all his *posterity*. Thus the Almighty ma-  
 ker of the world was pleased to *establish*  
 the *order* and *course* of *nature*, with re-

SERM. spect to mankind. And in this view of  
 XVI. the case, death to all the *race* of *Adam*  
 must be regarded as a *misfortune* only, brought upon them by the *fault* of *another* (which frequently happens in innumerable other instances) and not as a *proper punishment* of a *crime* committed by *themselves*. But *this evil*, so far as it was *entailed* upon all men by a fix'd and unalterable law of *nature*, and was not the *consequence* of their own *voluntary* transgression, is (it may not perhaps be so proper to say, *entirely remedied*, as) *counterbalanc'd*, by *restoring* mankind, through Jesus Christ, to a possibility of obtaining *eternal life*—An appointment, no more the *reward* of their own *personal* virtue and righteousness, than the original and universal law of death was, according to the scripture account of it, a *punishment* of their *personal* crimes. Here, then, there evidently appears a *correspondence* of design, and an admirable *harmony* in the divine conduct—The *whole* most *wisely* and *equitably* proportion'd.—Here we see the *mercy* of God providing a *remedy* equally extensive with the *misfortune*,



fortune, that, by his *just determination*, sin had occasion'd. And as the *first* constitution, with respect to the power of *death*, ought not to be esteemed as merely *capricious* and *arbitrary*, but was probably intended as an *awful testimony* of God's *displeasure* against sin; and as, with a view to this end, human nature was so *framed*, that the propagation of the *species* should also be the propagation of *mortality*, after it had *once* taken place: So the introduction of *life* by the *death* of Christ, considered as an *illustrious* instance of *goodness* and *compassion*, of *inflexible integrity* and *dutiful submission* to the Supreme Being, is a *bright* and *encouraging demonstration* of God's *delight* in eminent virtue, and of the *extraordinary honours* which he is disposed to confer upon it; and, consequently, a strong incentive to the *sublimest* acts of *piety* and *beneficence*. "So that the same *general*  
 " *reason* runs through *both* the parts; and  
 " the *whole* is admirably *adapted* to the  
 " *ends* of moral government."

What

SERM.

XVI.



What I have now offer'd, I take to be the proper explanation of the following passages, in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans.—That if, through the offence of one, many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace (which is by one man Jesus Christ) hath abounded unto many— That as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.—That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. And if the possibility of obtaining eternal life by all, and the actual attainment of it by the faithful servants of God, be the appointed consequence of Christ's offering himself up to death—every one must easily see, that his death might be much more properly described as a sacrifice, than any offerings of brute creatures, which had no such efficacy; and the phrases (though after all in a great measure figurative) of our being redeemed by his blood, and reconciled to God

Rom. v.  
15. 18.  
21.

God by the death of his son (with others of a like import) must appear to have a clear and very emphatical meaning. SERM. XVI.

But to dismiss this topic, on which I have not time to enlarge——The gospel has farther declared to us, that because our blessed Saviour *humbled himself, and* [in pursuance of the command of the supreme God and Father of all] *became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; therefore God also hath highly exalted him, hath committed to him all authority in heaven and in earth, and constituted him, under himself, the head over all things* for the good of his church: So that the *government* of God is now mediatorially administered, and his *goodness* mediatorially dispensed. And in the conclusion of the whole scene, Christ will still appear in his *regal* character to judge the world; according to the general tenor of that *wise constitution*, whereby the *Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.*—This is a short summary of the *mediatorial scheme*, from its *first commencement* to its *final*

See Mat. xxviii. 18.  
Philip. ii. 8, 9.  
Eph. i. 22.

SERM. *completion ; when the fates of all man-*  
 XVI. *kind being judicially decided, and conse-*  
 { *quently the ends of the mediation entirely*  
*accomplished, the kingdom shall be deli-*  
*vered up to God, even the Father ; that*  
*the Son also himself may be subject unto*  
*him who put all things under him—And*  
 I COR. XV. *God may be all in all.*  
 24. 28.

By this great and extensive scheme, the wisest and best beings in the universe are employed in offices becoming their dignity, and their exalted rank and character. God himself is represented as the original contriver and author of it, pursuing the dictates of his infallible wisdom, and prompted by his boundless goodness. The chief being after him (whose perfections of nature will admit of no comparison) is the person appointed to be the mediator. The holy spirit, as the next in rank and honour, acts as the first minister of this mediatorial government ; having for his assistants the angels ; who all unite in the glorious design of reducing mankind to the primitive paths of virtue, truth, and happiness, and in strengthening, raising, and comforting the heirs of sal-  
 2 vation.

vation. So that, by this means, there is formed as it were a *scale* of benevolence from the first source and fountain of goodness, through the various intermediate orders of superior spirits, quite down to mankind; who are taught, and strongly incited, by these examples, to practice condescension, disinterested kindness, and tender sympathy one towards another, and lenity and mercy even to inferior animals: That one actuating vigorous spirit of goodness and compassion may be diffused throughout the whole reasonable creation of God.—Nor is there any thing, in the scheme of mediation in general, but what is plainly analogous to the established system both of nature and providence. The world, according to the first plan fixed by its Almighty Sovereign, is in a great measure, and ever will be, mediatorially governed; and parents, guardians, civil rulers, friends, men in common to men, in the necessary interchanging offices of human life, are, in most instances, the intermediate instruments of that good, which originally springs from the Divine bounty. The scheme of nature,

SERM. therefore, being apparently a scheme of  
 XVI. *mediation*, the idea of a mediator cannot be *in itself* absurd, unless the constitution of nature be wrong—And, in consequence, unless direct *Atheism* must take the place of *Christianity*.

I beg leave to conclude with giving a short account of what is, in my opinion, *the true gospel of Christ*; of which the doctrine of his *mediation* is an essential and most important part. And the general substance of this divine institution is — *natural religion and virtue revived*, when the knowledge of them was in a manner erased from the minds of men, by vice and wild enthusiasm; with the addition of two or three plain *positive institutions*, guarded in the strongest manner against *superstitious abuses*, and adapted to enforce the eternal laws of morality, and a most exact and scrupulous regard to every branch of substantial and useful goodness.—But, more particularly, the principles recommended by it are these:  
 “ That there is *one God, the Father* and supreme Lord of all, who *created* and *governs* all things *by Jesus Christ* — That  
 man-


mankind are *accepted* with this infinite Being, upon whom their happiness absolutely depends, through *the righteousness of faith*, co-inciding, in the final scope of it, with the general law of *sincerity*\* ; which, at the same time, that it condemns every instance of *wilful vice*, is condescending to the *involuntary infirmities* of human nature. — That the favour of God is extended to *all* mankind ; his forgiving mercy to *all* true penitents ; but dispensed in such a way, that reason could neither *discover*, nor can justly *arraign* ; an expedient wisely pitched upon to encourage *repentance* by the hope of *mercy*, to inspire sinful men, undeserving of the Divine favour, with constant sentiments of *humility*, and to extirpate *superstition*. — That the Father of mankind is ever ready to *assist* them, in the pursuit of moral rectitude and happiness ; that he will hereafter *judge the world in righteousness* (whom he has made necessarily *subject* to his government, and *accountable* for their behaviour) by *Jesus Christ* :

SERM.

XVI.



\* See this Matter particularly and fully explained in Sermon II. Vol. III. on *Justification*.

SERM. XVI.  And that when he allots to all impenitent offenders impartial retribution, in proportion to the various degrees of their guilt, he will munificently reward his faithful and obedient servants (from the immutable pleasure he takes in virtue, and to render it finally *triumphant* and *victorious* over iniquity and vice) with immortal felicity and honour." — A scheme this, upon the whole that one would think every *considerate*, every *religious*, every truly *moral*, man must highly esteem and venerate : And all who heartily *believe* it, and allow it to have its natural and just *influence*, will *probably* be *happy* in peace and sublime joy of mind here, and, *infallibly*, in the everlasting favour of God hereafter.

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