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S E R M O N S

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V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S.

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- | | |
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| II. Sincere Obedience necessary to our acceptance with God. | XI. Of the Vanity of Man's Judgment compared with that of God. |
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| VIII. Of Godliness. | |
| IX. Of Brotherly Kindness and Charity. | |

By *JOHN ABERNETHY*, M. A.

V O L. II.

L O N D O N:

Printed for D. BROWNE, without *Temple-Bar*; T. OSBORNE, in *Grays-Inn*; and A. MILLAR, in the *Strand*.

M. DCC. LXII.

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S E R-

(1)

S E R M O N I.

Mutual Edification, the Duty of
Christians.

Rom. xv. 2.

Let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good to edification.


ST. Paul in his epistles very often re-
commends to christians a solicitous
care every one for their own edification,
and not only so, but that they should use
charitable endeavours to edify one another.
For this he shows that the sacred ministrations
were instituted, and a great variety of useful
gifts bestow'd upon the church, when our
Lord Jesus ascended up into heaven *he gave
gifts unto men, he gave some Apostles, and
some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some
Pastors and Teachers. For the perfecting of
the saints, for the work of the ministry, and
for the edifying of the body of Christ**. But,

SERM.
I.

* Eph. iv. 11, 12.

2 *Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians.*

SERM. the end cannot be answered without a due

I. use of the means, and therefore the Apostle
 prescribes a diligent and regular attendance
on the public offices in Christian assemblies ;
descending to a very minute circumstantial
regulation of them, so as they might have
their proper designed effect, to promote the
common edification, as you may see in the
14th chap. of the 1st epistle to the *Corin-*
thians: But, let no one imagine that this im-
portant affair is devolved intirely upon men
in stations of publick ministry ; every single
member of the body of Christ has it in charge
to contribute in the best manner he can to the
edification of the whole, and of every part.

To this purpose our sacred author gives
many particular directions ; he would have
us to pray for, to instruct and exhort one ano-
ther, to avoid all corrupt communications, to
give examples of sobriety, meekness, patience,
and all other virtues, *adorning the doctrine of*
God our Saviour, and to abound in all the
offices of charity, that so the body may be
edified in love. And having in the 5th chap-
ter of his 1st epistle to the *Thessalonians* men-
tioned some of the most important duties of
the christian life, such as that they should be
vigilant and sober, putting on the breast-plate
of

Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians.

3

of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation; and some of the strongest motives of christianity, as, our being appointed not to wrath, but to attain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, and his dying for us; he concludes thus at the 11th verse, Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. Pursuant to which the sequel of the chapter contains many excellent exhortations, which, if carefully put in practice, have the greatest aptitude in their own nature to edify, such as, a proper respect to the public instructions, and an esteem for such as minister them only for their work-sake, living in peace, warning the unruly, comforting the feeble-minded, supporting the weak, being patient towards all men, not rendering evil for evil, but following that which is good, praying without ceasing, in every thing giving thanks, and abstaining from all appearance of evil. The apostle even descends to matters of expediency and indifference in his rules for edification; he would have christians so much concerned for the spiritual good of their brethren, and have it so much at heart to promote their knowledge and establishment, and progress in religion, as for that end to avoid offence; that is, as he explains

SERM.

I.



4 *Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians.*

SERM. it, the weakening or stumbling of their fellow-christians, tempting them to desert christianity, or do things unbecoming the profession of it; to avoid offence, I say, not only by actions in their nature wicked, and therefore of pernicious example, but by an indiscreet use of liberty. He carries this so far as to the abstaining from certain meats, which he himself and other well-instructed christians judged might be lawfully used, but some weak persons thought otherwise; abstaining from them, I say, out of a charitable condescending regard to the weakness of such. And what can be stronger than this general comprehensive exhortation in the text, *Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.*

You will now perceive from what has been already said, that this matter of edification, and the care of it so strictly injoin'd, did not peculiarly relate to the first age of christianity. The nature of the thing, and the directions given in order to it, plainly shew that it is the common concern of christians at all times. I think, therefore, it may be usefully insisted on, as what may very well be applied to ourselves. And in this discourse, I will, *first*, endeavour to give you the true scripture account
of

Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians. 5

of what is meant by edification. In the *second* place, I will more particularly consider the direction in the text. SERM I.

First, to give the true scripture account of what is meant by edification; which I am afraid some christians do not well enough understand, and therefore have run into dangerous mistakes in judging both of their own and others edification. The expression is plainly figurative, and it leads us to consider the church of Christ, the whole collective body of his members, or believers in him, under the notion of a building, which is a very usual one with the sacred writers in describing it thus, * *Ye are God's building*. As material edifices are composed of many parts which are regularly disposed by human art so as to make an intire work, raised upon one foundation, strong in proportion to the firmness of that foundation; and so long as the parts adhere to it and to each other, subsisting in its artificial form, and under the notion of a building; the materials being united together by a cement, and the whole, if it be done by a skilful architect, form'd and finish'd according to an exact model: so our Lord

* 1 Cor. iii. 9.

6 *Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians.*

SERM. Jesus Christ has gathered together the Children

I. of God that were scattered abroad, and of Jews and Gentiles, made one beautiful church, united in himself, and by their adherence to him, according the divine plan laid in the eternal counsels of his father. God, intending in the antient *Jewish* œconomy to set forth a shadow of better things to come, commanded *Moses* to make a tabernacle in the wilderness, where he would place the tokens of his presence, and shewed him a pattern on the Mount. But, the things which were old, and indeed made to be *taken away*, are now actually vanished, giving place to a higher constitution worthy in all respects of its great founder, a spiritual building, which is the intire society of sincere christians, *an habitation of God through the spirit*. This is excellently described by the apostle *: And (ye Christians) *are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. In whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.*

The foundation being the apostles and prophets, that is their doctrine, and Jesus Christ, or the gospel scheme of which he is

* Eph. ii. 20, 21.

the author, and which centers in him, being SERM.
the chief corner stone, the support of the I.



whole building, this clearly leads us to understand the allusion. How is it that a society of men can be built upon a doctrine or Institution? It is when that doctrine or Institution is received by them, and has its proper effect upon them; when their conduct is regulated by it, and they reap the benefit of it; when the intention of it is answered in their practice, and the advantages they enjoy. But, here a difference in the similitude will obviously occur, I mean between the outward sensible figure, and the spiritual subject it is intended to represent. Every one knows that the materials of an earthly edifice can contribute nothing to the disposing of themselves in the proper form; they are wholly passive, and their order, harmony, and usefulness, are intirely owing to the skill and labour of the workman. Not so are the several parts in the spiritual house of God; they are not like inanimate and unintelligent organs, but work together with him, to their own and to the common edification. And, therefore, the apostle supplies the defect of this image by another very elegant one, of the natural human body, in which the active

8 *Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians.*


SERM. parts, by performing their several appointed

I. functions concur to the promoting of their own nourishment, and the strengthening of the whole; * *From whom (Jesus Christ) the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh encrease of the body to the edifying itself in love.*

Another difference arising from the diversity of the subjects in their nature and condition, is this, that whereas edification, in the literal sense, means only the relation of the parts as such, or, as they constitute one whole, so that it cannot be said, properly, that the stones and timber are, but the house, which is an aggregate of them, is built; in the spiritual sense, it belongs to every particular part, or member. And thus in the apostle's use of the word, every single person receives edification; as well as the whole society, as you will soon see more fully; for,

Upon the grounds already laid down, we may apprehend the point before us after this manner. The foundation being the doctrine of the gospel, which is a doctrine according to godliness, the subject being men,

* Eph. iv. 16.

intelligent and moral, but imperfect agents; SERM.
and the intention being to reform them, and I.
at last bring them to the perfection of righteousness, holiness, and charity; their edification must, consequently, be in knowledge and virtue, and in mutual good-will and peace. Accordingly, these are the very things in which St. *Paul* himself explains it. 

First, edification signifies an increase of true, useful, religious knowledge; so it is used in several passages of the 14th chapter of the 1st epistle to the *Corinthians*, where several disorders in the public ministrations are corrected, and a decent manner of performing them recommended, so that they may be profitable and edifying, that is, instructive. verse 3. *He that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification*, In the 4th and 5th verses, *he that prophesieth, edifieth the Church; and greater is he that prophesieth, than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying*. In the 12th, *forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excell to the edifying of the church*. In the 17th, *thou verily givest thanks well (in an unknown tongue) but the other is not edified*. And at the 26th, whereas there was an emulation among them,
every

SERM. every one striving for precedency in the exer-

I. cise of his gifts, which made their assemblies
 confused and tumultuous; *Every one*, says he,
of you, when you come together, hath a psalm,
hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation,
hath an interpretation; the apostle gives them
 this caution, *let all things be done to edifying.*
 In all which places, it is very evident, that
 edification signifies instruction, or improving
 men in knowledge. And indeed it is evi-
 dent in the nature of the thing, that this is
 the foundation upon which we must grow
 in every good, moral, or religious quality,
 which to their very being require understand-
 ing, and still encrease in proportion to it.
 Not but that knowlege may be separated
 from virtue, in fact it is often so, *and men de-*
tain the truth in unrighteousness, trespassing
 against the light and conviction of their own
 minds, which makes the worst of characters;
 particularly, according to the doctrine of the
 new testament, *knowledge without good dis-*
positions and a good practice is unprofitable,
 and an increase of it far from edification in the
 christian sense; for, says the apostle, * *Know-*
ledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And,
if any man think that he knoweth any thing,

* 1 Cor. viii. 1, 2.

he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know; SERM.
that is, if he be conceited of his knowledge I.
in the christian religion, as a reputable ac-
complishment, considering it only as a science,
or speculation, he has not yet attained to any
right understanding of it, so as to answer its
true intention. Yet still knowledge is neces-
sary, and without it we can make no pro-
gress in religion; for as by the vanity of their
thoughts darkening their understanding, the
Gentiles were alienated from the life of God,
so it is by revealing the father to men, giving
them just notions of God and of their duty
that our saviour reforms them; they are re-
newed in their minds, after the divine Image,
first in knowledge, and thereby in righteouf-
ness and true holiness; and it is by the *unity*
of faith, and knowledge of the Son of God, that
the whole body of his sincere disciples *grow*
up to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature
of the fulness of Christ.

Secondly, we must be built up, and build
up ourselves in our most holy faith, according
to St. *Jude's* direction, in the 20th verse of
his epistle; whether that expression means
the divine system of christianity, as the faith
signifies in the 3d verse of the same epistle,
or the principle of faith in us, it amounts to
the

SERM. the same thing ; for the doctrine of the gospel can have no effect on us to form our tempers and conversation, which is its proper end, unless it be believed. Taking faith in the first and most obvious sense, for an assent of the mind to truth, it can, no more than knowledge, be profitable, without good affections ; and therefore St. *James*, in the 2d chapter of his epistle, very justly exposes the folly of those who trust to such an insufficient and dead faith, as he calls it ; it is no better than the devil's believing, which only produces a confounding dread and horror. Yet still even an assent to the truths of the gospel is absolutely necessary ; and we should endeavour to be more firmly rooted and grounded in it, that it may produce good fruits, and we may encrease in every good work. To this end, as all that by the frame of our nature we are capable of, is a diligent impartial examination of the evidence of truth, it is all that God requires ; and the more we consider with upright hearts the grounds of the great christian verity, and search the scriptures, the more we shall be satisfied concerning it. But faith seems, at least very often, in the New Testament, to signify, not barely an assent, but indeed obedience

dience to the gospel, and to comprehend all those affections and dispositions of mind which are the immediate principles of conformity to its laws: It is in this sense that faith is enjoined as a very important and comprehensive duty; indeed the whole of that duty which is indispensably necessary to our acceptance with God and our salvation; as on the other hand, disobedience to the gospel and unbelief, in the stile of the apostles, mean the same thing. It follows according to this sense, that edification in faith, is in effect, edification in all the christian virtues, and all the fruits of the spirit; in love to God and men, in meekness, patience, sobriety and righteousness. Thus *St. Paul* explains edification, * *Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith.* The character of edifying in faith, is, that it is godly, or the edification of God, as the words are strictly translated. God is the object and the end of it; it is the knowledge, love and fear of him, which comprehends all religion. At the same time we see what kind of instruction it is which has this tendency, not trifling unnecessary things, remote from the

* 1 Tim. i. 4.

14 *Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians.*

SERM. life of godliness, and points of curious speculation, which are the occasions and the subjects of fierce contention, directly contrary to the true design and genius of christianity; these teachers and all christians ought to avoid if they would promote edification, applying themselves principally to those doctrines which have a direct tendency to promote good affections and a good life.

Thirdly, christian edification is in charity, as appears from the sequel of the apostle's words last cited; for having warn'd *Timothy* against those curious unprofitable speculations which minister contentious debate, not godly edifying, he immediately subjoins, verse 5, as in direct opposition to them, *Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.* Plainly intimating, that as charity from these principles is the end of the gospel, edification in it, is godly edifying which is in faith; and in *Eph. iv. 16*, he expressly says, *that the edifying of the body of Christ, is in love.* You will remember what I observed before, that to understand this subject right, we ought to consider christians either as in their relation to one another and to Christ their head, as members of the same
body


body, or in their private and personal capa-
city, in both which respects they receive edi-
fication. The former has been already ex-
plain'd, it being only single persons who are
the subject of knowledge, of faith and virtue;
but a general peace, that is, concord and har-
mony, as the result of prevailing love, be-
longs to a society as such. This the apostle
evidently means in several passages of his epi-
stles on the subject of edification, as * *Edify*
one another, or edify yourselves into one, so that
you may be one body or society, beautiful, and
strong by your union. And in the 14th chap-
ter of this epistle, and 19th verse; *Let us fol-
low after the things that make for peace, and
wherewith one may edify another, or wherewith
one may be edified to others,* more firmly united
in the bond of mutual affection and peace.

Such is the intimacy of that relation which
subsists between christians, by virtue of their
adherence to Christ, their common head and
the center of their unity, that the safety
and prosperity of every one is the safety and
prosperity of the whole; and the interest of
the whole, is the interest of every part.
Like the members of the natural body which
have no interests separate from that of the


* 1 Thef. v. 11.

SERM. body itself, and of each other ; for, *whether*
 I. *one suffer, all suffer with it ; or, if one is ho-*
 noured, all rejoice with it *. The head and feet, the hands and eyes, have a mutual sympathy, and under the direction of one principle contribute their good offices on every occasion to the whole ; so is the body of Christ, and so ought all the members in particular to be disposed. As the members of the natural body discharge their several functions by a necessity of nature, in such a manner (pursuant to the wise constitution of its author) as to preserve the union, and promote the advantage of the whole, so christians, being *by one spirit baptized into one body*, ought to be solicitous for the common prosperity, and for the good of every one of their fellows in particular, as they have opportunity. And the truth is, by doing so, they serve themselves in the best manner, and most effectually promote their own truest and highest interest. It is a most undoubted truth, as will appear to every one who thoroughly examines it, that virtue, which consists in good-will to other moral agents, has a necessary connection with private happiness ; which is a most satisfying argument to induce us to the practice of it, and demonstrates

* 1 Cor. xii. 26.

that the Author of our beings designed us for SERM.
it. And christianity, the glory of which is, I.
that it is an institution design'd to restore the 
integrity of the human nature, and raise us to
the perfection of virtue, has just taught us
the same thing in the point now before us,
namely, that public and private edification are
most strictly connected; that we can no way
so effectually secure and advance our own
greatest good as by a hearty benevolence, with
the proper fruits of it, to our fellows, and a zealous
attachment to the common interest. Only,
let us always endeavour to have just notions
of the true public, and of the body of Christ;
that it comprehends *all who in every place
call on his name*, and is not confin'd to the
particular parties into which christians have
subdivided themselves, to their own unspeakable
disadvantage, and the dishonour of their
religion. Let us follow *peace with all men*,
and do good to them as we have opportunity:
let us have a sincere regard to all the disciples
of the Lord *Jesus* our Saviour; *instructing the
ignorant, warning the unruly, comforting the
feeble-minded, bearing with the infirmities
of the weak; so fulfilling the royal law of
love.* Thus shall we comfort ourselves, and
edify one another. I have now given you what I

SERM. take to be the true scripture account of edification, and I proceed in the

I.  *Second* place to consider more particularly the direction in the text. *Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.* In order to this, we must reflect a little on the case refer'd to in the preceding chapter, which was shortly this. The christians at *Rome* were of different opinions, and therefore different practices about lesser things, as it is always to be expected christians will be, in this imperfect state. Some had still such a respect for Judaism in which they had been educated, as to observe the distinction of days and meats which was appointed by the law of *Moses*, or introduced by the tradition of the elders. Others, with the apostle, were persuaded that the distinction was abrogated, and that there is nothing now *unclean of itself*. But, notwithstanding this difference, union must be preserved, not upon the foot of a perfect agreement in all things (an agreement in their opinions is contrary to the supposition and the true fact; and an agreement in outward professions and practices, against the real sentiments of some, would on their part be hypocritical, and such as no one can imagine is at all becoming a religious society) but their

union the apostle would have preserv'd on quite another principle, namely, that of mutual forbearance and condescending charity. SERM.
I.

And here the apostle strikes at the very root of division, which is a narrow selfish spirit. When men only regard their ownelves, the gratifying of their own private inclinations, and fulfilling the desires of *the flesh and of the mind*, what can be expected among them but strife, and confusion, and every evil work? while such a spirit prevails, how to avoid offences, and edify our neighbours will not be the question. And when all conduct themselves thus, their interests, which are so narrow and particular, will interfere with each other, and the church be filled with offence and discord. But, *charity which seeketh not her own*, will determine us to pursue constantly the benefit of others, and to please them, to make them easy, and give them satisfaction as far as it is in our power, and as it appears to be for their real good. Charity is, I say, a true cement which will preserve the union of the church, it is, as the apostle calls it, *the bond of perfectness*.


The design of pleasing men, even our fellow christians, is not to be pursued universally, and without any limitation; they have

SERM. their weaknesſes about them, not only miſtakes, which however involuntary and tolerable, the man who is differently minded cannot conſent to with ſincerity; but they have alſo ſinful paſſions and froward diſpoſitions, which, tho' they ought to be forgiven, and pitied, muſt not give laws to their neighbours, nor is the rule of pleaſing them to be ſo underſtood. It can never be reaſonably thought that the ſervants of Chriſts are put in a ſtate of ſervile ſubjection to the humours and caprices of their fellows; nay, as the apoſtle ſays elſewhere, *if we ſo pleaſed men, we ſhould not be the ſervants of Chriſt.* The neceſſary expreſs limitation is this, that we ſhould pleaſe our neighbours, ſo far only as tends to their edification, that is, as I have ſhewn you, to their inſtruction, or encrease in religious knowledge, to their eſtabliſhment in the faith and profeſſion of chriſtianity, to their growth in virtue, and the promoting of concord and peace on truly ſcriptural foundations. Except in that caſe, the precept does not take place; and in that caſe, the deſign of pleaſing his neighbour is the moſt generous and worthy that a man can poſſibly have. It is, as the apoſtle repreſents it in the text, a noble imitation of our Lord *Jeſus Chriſt*, who
for

for the love he had to his church, his body, SERM.
purchased by his own blood, *pleased not him-* I.
self. He did not gratify the most innocent
demands of nature, the desire of reputation,
of ease, or even of self-preservation; he de-
nied all, and gave them up a sacrifice for
our redemption. This should inspire his
followers with a resolution to thwart and deny
every selfish, corrupt inclination which may
stand in the way of their serving the end of his
death, and promoting the salvation of his people.

But, the text has a special reference to
the restraint of liberty, in the use of in-
different things for the good of our neigh-
bour, to edification; which *St. Paul*, by
his example and express exhortation, recom-
mends it to christians voluntarily to submit to.
When some were so weak as to judge some
meats unclean, which were really not so in
themselves, nor by any law of God then in force,
he would have the christians who were
strong, that is, who better understood their
liberty, to condescend to their weaker bre-
thren, at least for a time, by abstaining from
such meats, 'till they should be better in-
structed. And the reason was, that the weak,
seeing their brethren, of whose knowledge in
christianity they had a high opinion, use li-

SERM. berty in that case, they were offended; that is, ei-

I. ther tempted to think that the christian institution itself indulged men in the profane violation of a standing divine law, (for they thought the law prohibiting certain meats was still binding) and so might be shock'd in the belief of it; or else they were tempted in imitation of the strong, especially influenc'd by a regard to their superior knowledge, to use the same freedom, yet with a gainfaying conscience, which was in them a very heinous guilt. The apostle sets this in a very strong light*. The case indeed he there treats of is different, but so far parallel, that it relates to the use of liberty in a point not absolutely unlawful, the eating of meats offered to idols, which did not become unclean of themselves by that abuse of them. His words are, *If any man see thee who hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols? and thro' thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? The word render'd, emboldened, properly signifies, edified; but it is the reverse of christian edification, it is building up men in impiety and profaneness in contempt of God's authority,*

* 1 Cor. viii. 10, 11.

by counteracting the light of their own con-
sciences. When a case is so stated that the
use of our liberty has so vastly different and
directly opposite effects upon our neighbour ;
on the one hand, doing what we may think
in itself not sinful, tends to his edification in
wickedness, to his ruin, and so far defeating
the design of christ's death ; on the other,
abstaining, which no man can judge unlaw-
ful, tends to his edification in faith and virtue,
and the preservation of his integrity, to the
saving of his soul, and the honour of the gos-
pel ; when, I say, a case is so stated, what
christian heart would not chuse the charitable
side and abstain ? St. *Paul* for himself carries
his charity so far as to declare, verse 13, *Where-
fore, if meat make my brother to offend, I
will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest
I should make my brother to offend.*

SERM.
I.



I conclude, that thus far to please their
neighbours for good to edification is a standing
rule to christians in all ages, where the case
is parallel to that stated and decided by the
apostle. But then we must take care that
the case be indeed parallel, that is that
in a diversity of opinions concerning the same
action, it is on the one side known to be in-
different, and on the other judged to be simply

SERM. unlawful; and that the tendency of acting

I. against the opinion of the weak, is not merely to irritate, or disoblige, but to shock them in their religious faith and profession, or induce them to violate their consciences by imitating what their hearts condemn as an evil example. It is plain no man can be bound under pretence of pleasing his neighbour to edification, to do what himself judges unlawful, or to omit a positive duty; that would be doing evil that good may come; pretending to edify another at so great an expence as destroying himself; in fine, introducing universal wickedness among christians, by taking away most absurdly the necessary differences of duty and sin: nor yet,

Secondly, Does it appear, by the precedents and decisions of the apostle, that our judgment concerning expediency is to be submitted to others. The meaning of expediency in the language of *St. Paul* is the conduciveness of an action, in itself indifferent, to promote the interest of religion and the good of others, which in a great measure depends on their opinion concerning it. The very reason for his abstaining from some lawful things, was, that the circumstances with which they were attended, rendered them inexpedient, that is dis-serviceable to the honour of christianity,

anity, and the spiritual good of weak christians, especially, because those weak christians judg'd them unlawful. But, if they had judg'd them only inexpedient their opinion could not affect him in the same manner, and be an argument for his forbearing in compliance with them; because there the reason doth not hold, offence is not given in the scripture sense of the word; no one can be supposed to be weakened in his belief of, and adherence to the gospel, by seeing the professors of it do what he only accounts inexpedient; nor is an action only inexpedient, and not reputed in itself wicked, a temptation to presumptuous wickedness, as an example.

Besides, if the rule to please our neighbours were carried so far, no man would know how to conduct himself, there is such a variety and contradiction in the opinions of men upon the point of expediency, which depend wholly on mutable circumstances, there would be no certain measures for our direction; that which some esteem expedient, others esteem inexpedient; he that would please all, must find it impracticable, and should not know how to act. And the truth is, in that way of proceeding, a christian would find himself possess'd of no liberty at all,

SERM.

I.



26 *Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians.*

SERM. all. In the matters of positive duty and sin, the

I. law of God has prescribed to him; and if in
— lesser things, not determined by the rule of
his religion, his judgment and practice must be
directed by his neighbours, wherein is he free?

But *St. Paul* was jealous for liberty as, every wise and good man will be, for it is one of the most valuable rights of the human nature and of the christian state. It was his principle and his rule, to contend for it when any unreasonable encroachments were made upon it. If any thing, which in general was indifferent, so that it might be done or not done, as prudence considering circumstances should direct, was made necessary by the will of men, his fellow christians, in whatever station, he would by no means submit to it. Of this we have a remarkable instance in his different conduct with respect to the Jewish ceremonies. He sometimes complied with them, when it only appeared expedient, but still left a matter of liberty. He circumcised *Timothy* to recommend him the more to the Jews, and he practis'd some of the ceremonies himself, by the advice of his brethren*. But if the same things were insisted on as necessary, which happened at *Antioch*, where

* Acts xxi.

the circumcision of *Titus* was peremptorily demanded to qualify him for religious communion, there he contended earnestly for freedom, and, as he says himself, would *not* give place by subjection for so much as one hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with the churches, uncorrupted by any such additions to it. I conclude, then, that liberty must not be given up to the pretence of edification, and that it is not the meaning of the rule in the text, that we should please our neighbours, by submitting to a standing, constant necessity laid upon indifferent things, merely by their opinions, or their wills.


I shall conclude this discourse with the following inferences. *First*, from the account which has been given of the nature and meaning of edification, it appears that christians are often mistaken in the judgment they make concerning edification, both of themselves and others. If it really means an increase of profitable knowledge, of faith, virtue and charity; they judge very wrong who esteem instructions to be edifying merely by the sound of words, the pleasing of the fancy, or even executing some sudden, unabiding warmth of affections, without giving any light to useful points, or tending to promote

SERM.
I.



mote

SERM. note the practice of substantial virtue; and

I.  least of all, is that edifying which leads to faith in men, or an implicit submission to their authority in matters of religion, instead of faith in *Jesus Christ*, and an inviolable adherence to him as the only Lord of conscience; to confirm the prejudices of men against the plain and simple doctrines of the gospel, to inflame their passions and encrease their uncharitableness.

Secondly, It is not every compliance with men and pleasing them, even in things for the substance lawful, which the christian law requires or allows; but only that which is for good to edification. Some please others from low and selfish motives, from an affectation of popularity, to gain applause, or it may be, to serve their worldly interest, which instead of edifying their neighbours so complied with, and doing them good in a religious sense, tends to confirm them in their mistakes, and to gratify their unreasonable humours, their pride and their passions; and instead of promoting peace on a just foundation, tends to strengthen an imposing spirit, the certain cause of divisions. It is noble and generous to bear the infirmities of the weak, but it is mean and unbecoming a servant of Christ, by

Mutual Edification, the Duty of Christians. 29

a tame submission to imperious demands and arbitrary encroachments, to betray the liberty SERM.
wherewith he has made us free, and to suffer I.
ourselves to be entangled in a yoke of bondage.

S E R-

SERMON II.

Sincere Obedience necessary to our
Acceptance with God.

Mat. vii. 21, 22, 23.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity.

SERM.
II.

NO question can be of greater importance to men than this, upon what foundation they may hope for the favour of God; and what is to be done on their part that they may be intitled to it? And none more important to christians, than what are the terms of salvation fix'd in the gospel; since our Lord Jesus Christ came
into

into the world on purpose to reveal the Fa- SERM.
ther to men, and the way to eternal life; II.
that is, to give them just sentiments concern-
ing God, and the homage he requires; and
to declare by an express law, what are the
dispositions of mind, and the course of action
which will be acceptable to him; we, who have
embraced christianity are not left to be directed
by the dictates of men in this great inquiry, nor
merely to our own reason, and what the light
of nature will suggest: (though that is still
so far a rule, that we cannot receive any pre-
tended revelation which contradicts it, and
hereby the Gospel is recommended to our
acceptance, that its terms are perfectly agree-
able to it :) but we must have our recourse to
our Saviour's express declaration. The rule
of life which he has prescribed, will be the
rule of judgment; and we cannot reasonably
have any hope of happiness in the other world,
but upon our conforming in this world to the
precepts he has given us. The verses I have
read, being near the conclusion of his excel-
lent sermon upon the mount, which contains
the sum of his doctrine, decide the grand
question already mentioned with the greatest
clearness. It is the point which of all others
he takes care to declare the most plainly, as
indeed

SERM. indeed it may reasonably be expected he
 II. should, since consequences of the great-
 est moment to men whom he came to save, depend upon it. And indeed his words are so very plain, that one would think it hardly possible for any of his followers to mistake his meaning. On the one hand, he shews the insufficiency of some pretences, such as a great outward profession of respect to him, calling him, *Lord, Lord*, and the gift of prophecy, of casting out devils, and working miracles, Those pretences he expressly says, he will reject, and if the persons, who claim or expect acceptance by them, are workers of iniquity, his sentence against them will be, *depart from me, I know ye not*. On the other hand, he establishes obedience, as the only solid ground of hope towards God, and declares that they, and they only, who do the will of his heavenly Father; that is, sincerely keep his commandments, shall be acquitted in the day of Judgment, and enter into the kingdom of heaven. These, therefore, are the heads of discourse I shall insist upon from the text. *First*, I will endeavour to explain the false pretences to the favour of God, and the kingdom of heaven, mentioned by our Saviour, with others parallel to them;

them ; and to shew how vain and insufficient S E R M. they are. *Secondly*, to illustrate that only II. solid ground of hope and foundation of our title to future happiness, doing the will of God.

First, to explain the false pretences to the favour of God and the kingdom of heaven ; mentioned by our Saviour, with others parallel to them, and shew how vain and insufficient they are. The first pretence is saying to Christ, *Lord, Lord* : the plain meaning of which is, making profession of christianity. What else can naturally be understood by calling him *Lord*, than acknowledging the character given of him in his word as a law-giver sent from God to erect a kingdom upon earth, whereof he himself is the king ; to instruct, to reform, and to save as many of mankind as will believe in him and obey him ; and at last, to judge the world in righteousness according to their works. The apostle gives us this account of the religion of the Gentiles *. They had *gods many, and lords many* ; superior and inferior gods, celestial deities and terrestrial, lord-agents, *Baalim* as they were called by the *Hebrews*, who had the management of affairs in this lower world, and

* 1. Cor. viii. 5.

SERM. were mediators between the higher gods and

II. men: but to us christians, *there is one God the*

Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him: that is, by whom there is a communication of the divine favours to us, and we have access to God. To acknowledge this, is indeed to acknowledge the truth of christianity, which only reveals it to us: for in the 12th chapter of the same epistle, and the 3d verse, the apostle asserts, no man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the holy Ghost. whereas among the Jews there were pretenders to inspiration, revelation, and miraculous powers; these gifts were now appropriated to christianity; and no one would believe in Christ as his Lord, without being convinced of the divine attestation of the religion which he taught.

The true meaning therefore of saying unto Christ, *Lord, Lord*, is embracing the gospel, professing to receive its doctrines, to obey its laws, and found our hopes of acceptance upon it, in whatever forms, by whatever words or acts that is done; and of those there may be a great variety. For, to answer the purposes of the gospel dispensation, and obtaining its proper effect in the world, there must be a visible

visible society of christians, who *call upon the name of the Lord*; and every one of them who compose this society must avouch Jesus Christ as their Saviour and their Lord. St. Paul joins together believing in the heart, and confessing with the mouth, as necessary to salvation *, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth, the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart, that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For, with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* Our blessed Saviour himself required of all his followers the same open profession of his religion. For this end he instituted baptism, to be a public declaration of men's receiving the gospel, and subjecting themselves to its laws; therefore he says †, *He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.* There are other solemn external acts of religion, as well as baptism, by which a profession of christianity is made, even all those which in the nature and design of them import our being christians; or the avowed disciples of Christ.

Now our Saviour forbids his followers to lay any stress on this claim, or build upon it their hopes of the favour of God and the king-

* Romans x. 9, 10.


† Mark xvi. 16.

SERM. dom of heaven, if it be separated from the
 II. practice of true holiness and virtue in their
 { lives, or doing the will of his heavenly Father,
 which is the supposition in the text. One
 would indeed think it strange, that any should
 delude themselves in that manner, consider-
 ing how obvious the obligation and necessity
 is upon all men to keep God's command-
 ments as the condition of pleasing him ; and
 especially how express the declarations of his
 word are as to that point, and yet in fact we
 find it is the way of hypocrites. How often
 do the prophets reprove the antient Jews for
 trusting to a zealous profession, and to exter-
 nal acts of worship, such as sacrifices, keep-
 ing the new-moons and sabbaths, and an out-
 ward respect to the temple of the Lord, whilst
 they neglected the moral precepts of the law,
 and indulg'd themselves in wicked courses ?
 And in our Saviour's time, the pharisees went
 on in the same track ; they were the strictest
 sect of the Jews, but their strictness consisted
 all in external observances ; in *tithing mint,*
annise, and cummin ; making long prayers,
 and nicely performing all the ceremonies,
 which were either enjoined by the law of
Moses, or recommended by the tradition of
 the elders ; yet they neglected *judgment, faith,*

mercy, and the love of God, the weightier SERM.
matters of the law. Seeing, therefore, this II.


has been so usual among men professing religion, our Saviour had reason to warn his disciples against such a fatal error, which many of them in all ages have run into, as experience shews, some even in his own days and those of the apostles, trusted to a form of godliness, denying the power of it; and named the name of Christ, without departing from iniquity. But, afterwards, the degeneracy of christians was more remarkable; and departing from that simplicity of worship and substantial holiness which the gospel enjoins, religion was turn'd, among them, into empty form. Scarcely can any thing be more notorious, than that many christians, almost whole sects of them, even the most numerous, and some of every sect, have nothing better to support their pretensions to the christian character and hopes, than a loud cry for the honour of Christ, a vehement zeal for the truth of christianity, or what they imagine to be so; and an exact regularity in the outward forms of devotion, whilst the fruits of temperance, righteousness, and charity do not appear in their lives: some have even got into opinions which favour this deceit; such

SERM. as annexing invifible grace and very important

II.  spiritual effects to the outward miniftration of baptifm, the Lord's fupper, and it may be other ufages lefs valuable than thofe, which are wholly of human invention. Others, who difclaim fuch principles, yet muft have their feeret confidence, if they have any at all, in the fame things, the real ufe and intent of which amounts to no more than a religious profefion; I fay their confidence muft be in thofe things, fince they ufe them constantly and regularly, at the fame time indulging themfelves in immoralities, which their own hearts muft neceffarily tell them are contrary to the will of God.

Now, the vanity and infufficiency of this pretence is fo apparent, it would feem not neceffary to infift upon it. The perfuafion of this, one would think, muft follow in confequence upon our profefion: fince by it the words of our Saviour muft be decifive in all cafes. For he is confidered as our infallible teacher, and he has fo exprefly declared, as in the text, *not every one that faith, Lord, Lord, fhall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven*; the whole tenor of the gofpel clearly fhews the fame truth; nor can any attentive perfon

person judge otherwise of its design ; since it SERM.
is a law, the end of it must be obedience : II.

and since it is a law binding the consciences of 
men, and regulating not merely external ac-
tions, but the inward dispositions and pur-
poses of the heart, the end of it must be obe-
dience, that is, the practice of virtue and cha-
rity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience,
and faith unfeigned. When we consider
with what contempt, and even denuncia-
tions of divine wrath, the sacred writers speak
of insincere professions, that is, which are
not accompanied with a good life, and the
most shining solemnities of religious wor-
ship, it is a wonder any christians should
thus impose upon themselves. But indeed
our natural notions of the Deity, and the
very first principles of religion might be suf-
ficient to guard men against this gross delu-
sion. If we believe that the supreme Being
is infinitely wise, perfectly righteous and
good, can it ever enter into our hearts, that
he will be pleased with outward professions,
instead of good works, and formal acts of
homage, contradicted by vicious practices,
instead of a sincere imitation of his moral at-
tributes? Indeed, the profession itself is in
this case discredited, stript of all its virtue,

SERM. may turned into the worst of evils, hypocrisy.

II. For what do we mean by calling Christ *Lord*?

is it not that we acknowledge ourselves indispensably bound to keep his commandments? and yet we do it not. Is not this to be guilty of inexcusable dissimulation? and under a mask of outward respect to conceal a real enmity of heart; which if it were done against ourselves, or other men, we could not but look upon as the vilest disingenuity and perfidiousness. Like the undutiful son, whom our Saviour represents in his parable *, as making a great show of reverence for his father, but still neglecting to obey his commandments; so are they, who under a disguise of religious profession continue in their disobedience to God. The most infamous of mankind, as our Lord there teaches, if they sincerely repent and reform their lives, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven before them.

The second false pretence is founded on the gift of prophecy, of casting out devils and working miracles; and, by parity of reason, any other extraordinary gifts, which, as the apostle speaks, were given to men *to profit withal*; that is, to propagate christianity and promote edification, which yet are separable

* Mat. xxi. 28.

from real holiness of life. This pretence our Saviour says he will reject in the day of judgment; *Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?* It is not difficult to imagine that men may deceive themselves in this manner, as it is natural for them to value themselves upon what is reputable in the eyes of the world; especially being distinguished by such endowments as render them illustrious, and eminently useful in the church: they are easily led into an opinion that they are the favourites of heaven; yet it is certain, that without charity and righteousness, these gifts will not render them acceptable to God. The apostle makes a supposition in his own case *, *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.* This plainly intimates the case is possible, that a man may be adorn'd with the most eminent

SERM.
II.
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\* 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.

SERM. gifts and yet want charity, which is of the  
 II. very essence of religion. But we have exam-  
 ples of it in fact; *Judas*, one of the worst  
 of men, whose name is transmitted with in-  
 famy through all ages, under the odious cha-  
 racter of a perfidious traitor, and the son of  
 perdition, even he was numbered with the  
 apostles, and had a part in their extraordinary  
 ministry, and was endued with the same pow-  
 ers as the rest, of healing the sick, casting out  
 devils, and working other wonders: just as be-  
 fore him *Balaam*, who was a very bad man, loved  
 the wages of unrighteousness, and entered into  
 the most wicked contrivance for debauching  
 the *Israelites*, thereby to bring judgment  
 upon them; this man was honoured to be a  
 true prophet of the Lord. Indeed these gifts  
 have long ago ceased, and there are none now  
 who can claim the kingdom of heaven under  
 this pretence, that they have *propheesied and  
 cast out devils*. But still there is a diversity  
 of stations, and there are different degrees of  
 usefulness among the members of the christian  
 church; as among the members of the natural  
 body, some are more, some less honourable;  
 and it may enter into the minds of such as are  
 in the higher spheres of action, distinguish'd  
 by popular applause, and more distinguish'd

in their own vain imaginations, that they al-  
so on that account stand fairest in the esteem  
of Christ, and have the best claim to his ap-  
probation. This is certainly inexcusable, con-  
sidering the case expressly determined in the  
text: for if the highest offices, and the most  
eminent abilities and gifts, will not entitle  
those who profess them to the kingdom of  
heaven, much less will those of a far inferior  
nature and importance.

But in general, that the pretence itself is  
vain and insufficient, and that nothing of this  
kind can reasonably support the hopes of  
men in a future state, if, as it is supposed in  
the text, they are workers of iniquity; that,  
I say, it is so, will appear to any one who  
considers it, not only from the express decla-  
ration of our Saviour in the text, and in-  
deed the whole current of the scripture de-  
clarations, which absolutely require the prac-  
tice of pure and undefiled religion, and a pa-  
tient continuance in it; and from the inva-  
riable nature of things, that sense of good and  
evil which is imprinted on our minds, with  
a necessary approbation of the one, and dis-  
approbation of the other: from whence we  
infer, that good in us will be only approved  
by the Deity, and evil disapproved, if we sup-  
pose

SERM.

II.



SERM. pose him to be a perfectly righteous and good

II. Being, which is the first principle of all religion :

but particularly it appears from the nature and design of those gifts, which have no necessary connexion with the favour of God, and the kingdom of heaven. They are intended for the advantage of men in this world, for others rather than those who are endow'd with them, and are instruments which providence makes use of to that purpose : but as they do not depend on any inward qualifications or good dispositions, any virtue at all in them to whom they are granted, so they are no mark of the divine approbation. Therefore our Saviour says to them who are represented as pleading for his acceptance at the last day on this score, *I never knew you* ; that is, I never approved you : so that word is often to be understood in scripture, as \* *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his.* And †, *If any man love God, the same is known of him.* Nay farther, such gifts do really aggravate the guilt of men if they continue workers of iniquity : and therefore set them farther from the kingdom of heaven, instead of bringing them nearer to it. The reason is, because the gifts of

\* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

† 1 Cor viii. 3.



prophecy and miracles were designed for the confirmation of Christianity; they were arguments to convince men of the truth of it, that so it might have a proper influence on their lives. Now if they were arguments to the world, and ought to persuade them to obey the gospel, much more should they have had that effect on the prophets and workers of miracles themselves, to whom they must carry, one would think irresistible evidence; and therefore their disobedience to a revelation which was so fully confirmed to them, and in such a particular manner, shewed the greatest obstinacy in wickedness, defying the strongest means of conviction that men could possibly have: consequently, their gifts must expose them to the greater condemnation, instead of being any good plea for their admission into the kingdom of heaven. I come in the

*Second* place, to illustrate that only solid ground of hope, and foundation of our title to the future happiness, which our saviour establishes; namely, *doing the will of God*: and we find this expressed in the clearest manner: for having said that not they, who make the most solemn, and the most noisy profession of his Religion, shall enter into the kingdom

S E R M.  
II.


SERM. kingdom of heaven ; on the other hand, he  
 II. asserts ; that they only shall enter, which do  
 the will of his Father, which is in heaven :  
 and having declared that he will reject some  
 who claim the favour of God under the pre-  
 tence of very honourable privileges and gifts,  
 the reason is, because they are workers of  
 iniquity, or have not done the will of his  
 Father. What especially requires explana-  
 tion here, is, *doing the will of God*. Every  
 one will understand by it keeping his Com-  
 mandments, which he has given to men for  
 the rule of their actions. In order to their  
 binding us as a law, they must be made  
 known ; and they are made known by the  
 light of nature, and by his word. God has  
 written the work of his law on the hearts  
 of men ; and nature itself teaches them the  
 difference between right and wrong : which  
 impression is so deep, that no prejudices, evil  
 customs or instructions, *causing to err*, even  
 in the most corrupt parts, and ages of the  
 world, have been able to erase it, tho' indeed  
 it has been in a great measure obscured, and  
 in some instances men have *called good evil,*  
*and evil good*. It pleased God therefore clear-  
 ly to reveal his will to men, speaking to  
 them at sundry times, in divers manners, by  
 prophets,

prophets, and at last by his Son. He gave SERM.  
*his statutes and his judgments to Israel; and* II.  
more clearly by his grace, *that bringeth sal-*  
*vation, which hath appeared to all men,* he  
has taught us the several branches of our  
duty; of sobriety, righteousness, and god-  
liness.

This being the will of God revealed to us so plainly, the question is, in what sense it is to be done that we may enter into the kingdom of heaven? and a consciousness of the infirmity which cleaves to us all, so that in many things we offend, will lead us to inquire for a more favourable interpretation to give us any ground of hope, than a perfect unflinching obedience: for if God should enter into judgment, and be strict to mark all the failings of the best men, no flesh living could be justified in his sight. Here it is that the gospel relieves us, by declaring the remission of sins to the penitent, and the divine acceptance. It denounces indeed the wrath of God against obstinate wilful transgressors; and declares that they shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven: but makes favourable allowances for indeliberate failures and infirmities, which are inseparable from the present state of imperfection. Indeed,  
the

SERM. the consideration of the goodness of God,  
 II. which appears to all his creatures, and his  
 mercies which are over all his works, would  
 lead men to hope he will not be extreme to  
 mark the unallow'd defects of them who  
 are uprightly endeavouring to do his will so  
 far as they know it, and are diligently using  
 the best means in their power to know it  
 better : yet it must be acknowledged an in-  
 valuable privilege, to have an express decla-  
 ration to this purpose from God himself well  
 attested, and that it is a condescension every  
 way worthy of his wisdom and his grace.

Sincerity in doing the will of his heavenly  
 Father is that which Christ indispensably  
 requires of all his disciples ; that is, doing  
 it with a true intention, with the con-  
 scious approbation of their own minds, and  
 with good affections. He has in another  
 part of this sermon on the mount (chap. vi.)  
 taught us the difference in the examples  
 of prayer and alms-giving, between external  
 works to appearance good, but really hypo-  
 critical, as being done only to be seen of  
 men, and such as are sincere and acceptable,  
 being done from a real inward love of good-  
 ness, and with a true intention to approve  
 ourselves to God. One would think it should  
 be

be no great difficulty for a man reflecting on SERM. himself to know the springs of action in his II. own mind, and the motives which determine  him; whether he is influenced by private, selfish, and corrupt views, or if he acts in those works which outwardly appear virtuous and religious from hearty good-will to his fellow-creatures, love to God, and a desire of being approved by him; yet many impose upon themselves, imagining they do the will of God so far as is absolutely necessary to their acceptance, when really they do it not. This mistake arises from a supine negligence in self-examination, or the strong prejudices of a heart hardened thro' the deceitfulness of sin.

And generally the false cover under which the insincerity of the heart, and disobedience of the conversation are disguised, is what I mentioned before, a vehement zeal in the profession, and in the externals of religion, or the resolutions of a future amendment and obedience, which men fondly flatter themselves will be accepted.


*But, be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit shall*

SERM. of the *spirit reap life everlasting* \*. And he

II. *only who doth righteousness*, as St. *John* teaches,  
 not who professeth or purposeth it, *is righteous*.

Let it be further observed, that if we do the will of God in the sense in which our Saviour requires it as the condition of entering into the kingdom of heaven, we must do it universally. A partial obedience will never please him. To single out some of his commandments, which we will obey because they do not interfere with a favourite vice, or selfish interest, whilst we obstinately continue in the violation of others as plainly declared to us, but which stand in direct opposition to a prevailing lust, this is to rebel against God. A case of this kind we have in the 15th chapter of the 1st Book of *Samuel*, and the guilt of it is fully represented. A commandment was given from God to *Saul*, which he executed in part only, boasting of it, however, to *Samuel*, that he had performed the commandment of the Lord. But when *Samuel* challenged him upon his apparent failure, for that he heard the *bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen*, he palliated the omission by several excuses, such as the importunity of the people, and the pretence of a pious design to offer

\* Gal. vi. 7, 8.

the cattle in sacrifice to God, still insisting SERM. that he had obeyed the voice of the Lord, as II. verse 20. but *Samuel* rejects all his defences  verse 22. saying, *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey, is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams*; and adds in the 23d verse, *Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry*. Rebellion against the true God, by disobeying his commandments, is like serving a false God; and a pretended obedience to God which is only partial, while men seem in some things to do his will, but omit other things as plainly enjoined, and will stubbornly conduct their profest obedience according to their own pleasure or humour, this is really not serving God at all; for the mind which is truly devoted to him, must be determined by his supreme authority, both as to the matter and manner of obedience whenever his will is made known; and no pretence can be more unreasonable and trifling than that we do the will of God, because we do it in some instances, when we knowingly neglect it in others. And, therefore, wilfully to transgress any one

SERM. of the divine precepts is to work iniquity, fo  
 II. as to expose ourselves to this sentence of Christ  
 { at the last day ; *Depart from me, I know you not* : to offend thus in *one point is to be guilty of all* : neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God : if a man habitually indulge himself in any of these vices, though guilty of none of the rest, he is as certainly excluded as if he were abandoned to them all ; the latter may be more criminal, and punished with greater severity, but one wound may be as surely mortal as a multitude ; and by the plain express declarations of the gospel, the wages of every deliberate sin unrepented of, and unreform'd, is death.

A persevering continuance in well doing, is also necessary to our obtaining eternal life ; to them only which endure to the end, is the promise made that they shall be saved ; *but if any man draw back, saith God, my Soul shall have no pleasure in him* : and the prophet has expressly assured us in his name \*, *When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and*

\* Ezek. xviii. 24.



doth according to all the abominations that the SERM.  
wicked man doth, shall he live? all his righte- II.  
ousness that he hath done shall not be mention'd;  
in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in  
his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he  
die.

Having thus shown what it is to do the will of God, it is not necessary to spend time in proving that it is the only ground on which we can hope to be approv'd by him at last, and to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The scripture declarations on this head are so very plain and express, there can remain no doubt with christians who will give themselves leave to consider it. And, indeed, if we look into our own hearts, attending carefully, and without prejudice, to what they will suggest, we shall find that it is only their testimony concerning the sincerity of our obedience, or the persevering practice of righteousness, virtue and charity, which can give us confidence towards God. It was this that comforted *Hezekiah* under the apprehensions of death \*, He would appeal to God himself as the witness of his integrity, *Remember, Lord, how I have walked before thee, in truth, and with a perfect heart, and done that which*

\* *Isai.* xxxviii. 3.

SERM. *is good in thy sight.* And this is the general  
 II. doctrine of the Apostle *John*, which our own  
 minds must consent to \* : *For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and will condemn us also. But if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* Let us, then, apply ourselves diligently to the keeping of God's commandments for our establishment in this resolution, and this course of life ; let us improve the gospel ministrations, never set them up in opposition to it, as a pretence to the favour of God ; for so we shall certainly deceive ourselves. Remember the words of our Saviour parallel to those in my text † : *Then shall ye begin to say at the last day, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I know you not whence you are ; depart from me you that work iniquity.*

\* 1 Ep. iii. 20, 21.

† Luke xiii, 26, 27.

## S E R M O N III.

## The Causes and Danger of Self-Deceit.

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Mat. vi. 22, 23.

*The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light: But, if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?*

**A**S the bodily eye is of great use and im- SERM. III.  
 portance to the animal life, to the  
 direction of its powers, and to the enjoyment  
 of it; (\* *if a man walk in the day be stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; if he walks in the night be stumbleth, because there is no light in him; and this is an article of great moment to the comfort of our present condition; † for truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold*

\* John xi. 9, 10.

† Ecclef. xi. 7.

SERM. *the sun*) so, there is an interior eye of the mind,  
 III. of equal importance and usefulness to the di-  
 rection of our highest capacity, and to the  
 chief ends of our being, which is the sense  
 of good and evil, both natural and moral ;  
 or, the judgment of the soul concerning their  
 difference, and the methods of pursuing the  
 one, and avoiding the other. This last is the  
 subject of our Saviour's instruction in the text,  
 under the allusion of the single and the evil  
 eye; in consequence of which as these are in  
 fact the different conditions of men, they are  
 either wisely and justly guided to the true per-  
 fection and happiness of their nature, or in a  
 state of ignorance, fatal misconduct, and mi-  
 sery. There are certain conditions necessary  
 that the natural organ of sight may properly  
 do its office. It must be duly framed, and  
 its parts regularly dispos'd, as generally it is ;  
 for nature seldom errs in her productions ; and  
 it must be free from a mixture of corrupt  
 humours with which the eye more frequently  
 happens to be vitiated, and which, experi-  
 ence teaches us, has unhappy effects upon  
 the sight ; for in that case the object appears  
 double or inverted, or is dimly and confusedly  
 perceived, so as not to afford a just direction  
 to the affections or active powers which in  
 their

their exercise depend upon it. In like manner the eye of the soul contracts indispositions. It is probably uniform in its original frame ; the same sense of good and evil, and the same determination to choose the former and forsake the latter, being a necessary part of the human constitution : but this inward eye may be obscured and weaken'd by several accidental causes ; by neglecting to cultivate and improve it ; by an habitual attention to wrong misleading objects ; or the over-growth of particular inferior affections.

SERM.  
III.

This leads me to observe, *First*, What I think necessary to be considered in order to our understanding aright our Saviour's moral instruction here, namely, that there is a great disparity between the case of the external sight, and the distempers to which it is liable, and the judgment of the mind with which it is compared. External vision does not depend upon our own choice ; nor are we either to be prais'd or blam'd for it ; an obstruction in the eye-sight may be a man's infelicity, it is not his fault ; but in the other case we are strictly and properly agents, charg'd with the care of ourselves, and with the improvement of our own powers and faculties, so that we may attain their true ends. Here,  
by

SERM. by the single eye, is meant the virtue of simplicity; without reserve or hesitation hearkening to and following the pure voice of conscience, not using any artifice, colouring, or false disguise, nor suffering any bias or prejudice to rest on the mind whereby it may be imposed upon, or misled. The evil eye is a disease of the mind, very malignant, and extremely dangerous; what less can be meant by total and most deplorable darkness? but it is a voluntary contracted distemper, which I think may be fairly inferr'd from the text itself. Our Saviour here describes a very dismal spiritual state, full of guilt, horror, and misery; it imports a fundamental error in morals, and in the way to true happiness, than which, what can be said or thought more wretched in the condition of a rational creature? It is darkness, the emblem of ignorance, vice, and unhappiness; a total darkness without any remains of useful light; and *if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?* Surely this is not the natural state of any intelligent being, nor can be incurr'd without a wilful and criminal perversion of its own capacities. *God made man upright, and put him in the strait way*

to happiness; \* *but they have sought out many inventions.* Again, farther to explain our Saviour's intention, we may consider the connexion of the text; our blessed Lord had in the immediately preceding verses insisted on the most important and comprehensive of all duties, which he describes by *laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven*; that is, that we should first of all fix to ourselves our true ultimate end, with a resolution constantly and invariably to adhere to it, and pursue it vigorously and diligently by all proper means; the plain meaning of which is, as appears from his foregoing discourse, that we should propose for our end the moral perfection of our nature, and the imitation of God by the fervent love and assiduous practice of true righteousness and goodness; that, I say, we should fix this as our last end and principal business, preferably to all the pleasures, profits, and honours of this world, which are vain and perishing things. It is here that the declaration in the text is introduced, and therefore it is plainly intended to teach us, that we are not only capable, but in danger of such fatal darkness, or ignorance and practical error, as to make us insensible of our highest interest,

SERM.  
III.  
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\* Ecclef. vii. 29.


SERM. and to miscarry in the main business of life.

III. This is very astonishing, and yet certainly true, that men should be able to impose upon themselves, as to mis-judge their principal concern and duty, at least so darken their minds as not to have an affectionate influencing discernment of it, and practically to err, wholly by their own fault, in such a capital point, and which of all others is the plainest.

My present design is to explain this subject for our necessary caution, that we may avoid such pernicious mistakes, which we may be sure it is always in our power to avoid; or, that we may not suffer the state of our minds to be such as that *the light in them shall be darkness*. In pursuance of this intention, what I have farther to say, shall be reduc'd to a few observations, tending to convince us of the danger, and lead us into the causes of this destructive self-deceit and practical error in the affairs of religion, and our happiness, that so we may be the better instructed to escape them.

*First*, there are plain declarations of scripture, clearly intimating that men are apt to fall, and often do fall, into such mistakes, and particularly, that they often mis-judge the state of their own  
minds,



minds, and their deliberate actions. *Solomon* SERM.  
says \*, *The ways of a man are clean in his own* III.  
*eyes*; not that he disguises them to the world, 

and affects to throw a veil over their infirmities, which he himself in the mean time, is inwardly conscious of; but they are pure in his own judgment, he sees them in a wrong light; by a strange infatuation he imagines them to be innocent, at least, not so criminal as to forfeit his integrity and his acceptance with God; which is a most pernicious mistake, amounting to a thorough, or a total darkness; and it proceeds from an erroneous judgment concerning the true nature and character of our ways, or the course of our deliberate works. Thus, I say, men often judge concerning their own ways, which will then appear to be wrong, when a superior and more impartial judge shall pronounce sentence upon them, as is clearly insinuated by the sacred writer referred to in the following clause of his proverb, *but the Lord weigheth the spirits*. Again the prophet, † denounces a woe to them who call good evil, and evil good; that put light for darkness, and darkness for light; that put sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet; which certainly is to be un-


\* Prov. xvi. 2.

† Isa. v. 20.

derstood

SERM. derstood in a moral sense, signifying that some  
 III. have so perverted their judgment, concerning  
 the essential difference between right and wrong  
 as to mistake the one for the other ; which  
 is an amazing error in creatures constituted as  
 we are, having the work of God's law so  
 deeply engraven on our hearts. This is di-  
 rectly the case of the text in the highest de-  
 gree of it, when the judgment of moral diffe-  
 rences is so corrupted as to mistake the one for  
 the other ; not that I think it possible the know-  
 ledge of the distinction should be altogether  
 erased, but the mind may be so blinded thro'  
 prejudice and vicious affection as in particular  
 instances not to discern it. The same doc-  
 trine, I think, is taught by our Saviour, in  
 his excellent parable of the virgins \*, where  
 the professors of christianity, the formal  
 and the sincere, are represented as living  
 together promiscuously in one society, and  
 one external state, which is a state of expec-  
 tation that their Lord will return and pro-  
 nounce judgment upon them, according to  
 their works. And as this expectation is com-  
 mon, so the parable represents their hopes  
 of acquittal ; for the foolish virgins, the in-  
 sincere christians, go out with the rest to

\* Mat. xxv.

meet the bridegroom ; and the falseness of SERM.  
their self-deceiving presumptuous notions con- III.  
cerning the goodness of their state, which is   
the foundation of their groundless hope, is  
never discovered to them 'till it is too late, and  
their condition absolutely remediless ; plainly  
intimating, that even when the light of  
christianity is added to that of nature, the  
eye of the mind, or its judgment concerning  
the true moral character, and dispositions,  
and works, as really good and acceptable to  
God, that, I say, this may be, and often is,  
so vitiated, that the light in men is wholly  
darkness.

As there are plain instances of this in scrip-  
ture, scarcely can any attentive persons miss  
of observing some within the compass of their  
own acquaintance. How common is it for  
men to make solemn professions of religion,  
and declare their confident hopes of acceptance  
with God, while yet it is notorious that they  
continue in a vicious course of life ? And how  
shall this be accounted for, without supposing  
the grossest self-deceit ? either such men must  
imagine that the crimes in which they indulge  
themselves are really no crimes, at least, have  
not such malignity as wholly to destroy their  
integrity, deprave the religious state of their  
minds,

SERM. minds, and cut off their hopes of pleasing

III. God ; or else, something of a different kind  
 ~~~~~ which they do, or what they are resolved afterwards to do, will make amends for their deficiencies in virtue and obedience ; both which errors are utterly inconsistent with the plainest principles of morality, and the most express declarations of the gospel.

I observe, 2dly, that the most general cause of this self-deceit in the affairs of religion and salvation, is some prevailing, corrupt affection, or passion. I do not say the only cause, for 'tis certain other prejudices, particularly those of education, may mislead men in this important matter ; whole nations, and for many ages, have been mistaken in points of morality (*calling evil good, and putting darkness for light*) which to others better instructed have appeared very evident. But in those parts of the world where knowledge abounds, at least where christianity is intelligibly proposed, where yet a great many are deceived in the great concern of their salvation and the way of attaining it, the general cause is some predominant evil affection or irregular passion. Such is known to be the weakness of human nature, that our judgments are very much biased by our affections ; not that

that the assent of the mind directly and im-
mediately depends upon the will, which cer-
tainly it does not ; for we often find ourselves
constrained to believe what we are the most
disinclined to ; but it is in our power in a
great measure to deprive ourselves of, and to
defeat the best means of attaining to, or pre-
serving the knowledge of the most important
truths, by turning away our attention from
the evidence of them, and engaging it to dif-
ferent, or contrary objects ; and this is prin-
cipally owing to the influence of prevalent
evil affections and passions, especially when
habitually indulged ; so that the truth not
being *received in the love of it, but detained
in unrighteousness*, and the light which *makes
manifest being hated*, as our Saviour speaks,
by degrees produces an insensibility, and even
unbelief. This was the reason why the
Jews rejected christianity, and the very cause
of their condemnation, * *That when the light
of the gospel came into the world, they loved
darkness rather than it, because their deeds
were evil.*

The immediate result of vicious affections
and unruly passions thoroughly possessing the

* John iii. 19.

SERM. hearts of men, is an unfairness in all their

III. enquiries concerning their duty. A man may
 usefully, to the purpose of discerning the true
 moral state of his mind, consider two opposite parties or interests within himself; the superior, that of reason and conscience, which is properly the man; and the inferior, consisting of animal appetites, affections, and passions. When the latter has got the ascendant, and the practical determination of the heart is in its favour, points of the highest moment to the ends of religion and our rational happiness are against us; and therefore, in our own thoughts, when we cannot avoid considering them, which is what we would soonest choose, we are willing to take all advantages against them, to obscure their evidence, to lessen their importance, or, at least to weaken their force and influence on our own minds. This is what I call unfairness, a criminal partiality; we would call it so in any other case; would we not call him a very unjust partial man, who should enter into the examination of a cause between two parties with such a leaning to the one as would determine him to lay hold of, to improve, and even strain every circumstance to promote his interest; and by all the arts
 he

he could use, to hurt the other? and why may not a man be said to be dishonest, who studies to impose upon, and thereby to hurt himself, as well as he who deals so by another? It is true, no man has an express intention to injure or make himself unhappy, but I do not think this alters the case; for if we enquire narrowly, I do not believe we shall find it any man's principal intention in any injuries he does, to hurt another, or make him unhappy; wrongs do not proceed from disinterested malice, but from selfishness; and in like manner, tho' self-love be an extinguishable principle in us, and we can form no design explicitly contrary to it, yet thro' the vehemence of particular affections we may be drawn into a blind partiality against our own true interest. Thus it is that *the eye becomes evil*, and the *whole man full of darkness*; by his partiality, by his dishonesty, which is as directly as any thing can be said to be, his own fault; never without some remonstrances on the part of what *Solomon* calls *the candle of the Lord within us*, our own self-reflecting powers, which however, prove ineffectual; and conscience, after some feeble efforts, is at last laid asleep and becomes insensible. A deplorable state this is, and

SERM.
III.

SERM. perhaps some may complain that the condition of mankind is unhappy, that they are capable of it. Why were not we, by our very constitution, secured against such a danger? why was not the eye of the soul so made, that it could not become evil? the light of conscience so strong and clear that it could not be obscured, or perverted? In other words, why were we made such frail and imperfect creatures? But, * *Who art thou, O Man! that repliest against God? shall the thing form'd say to him that form'd it, why hast thou made me thus?* I would have you first of all to be thoroughly sensible that the fact is so; I mean, that there is a possibility, nay and a danger of your being thus self-deceived, and falling into such darkness, that you may be thoroughly solicitous to avoid it. But, it is the perverse and froward way of men, that they will not reasonably be aware of their danger; and then when they actually fall into it, they lay the fault to their Maker. I shall not, at present, enter on the vindication of God's goodness in the frame of our nature and the condition of trial he has appointed for us. I will only

* Rom. ix. 20.

suggest that there seems to be very little ground of complaint that we are liable to a danger, for escaping which, we are furnished with so sufficient means, a danger from which plain honesty of heart would effectually preserve us, which must appear both reasonable and easy, if any thing can be called so. Will a man complain of being deluded, who chuses his own delusion, who forsakes the natural guide God has given him, and reverses the order of his nature by voluntarily exalting into a supremacy what the least attention to his own frame would shew him ought always to be in subjection? and still less handle of complaint have christians against their Lord as a severe master, since they enjoy so many additional advantages, such excellent means of attaining to, and preserving integrity, for preventing their being led into destructive darkness and errors, and thereby securing their eternal happiness.

The 3^d observation is concerning the means whereby this fatal disease of the mind and error of the judgment is contracted and confirmed. Tho' the real prevailing cause is the corruption of the heart, yet there must be some plausible pretences and false colours that men's minds may be effectually darkened.

SERM. For, the understanding must have some appearance of truth, that it may give its assent
 III. in any degree, and particularly a bad moral object must be disguised, that the eye of the soul must not discern its turpitude. One instance of this kind, is a false imagination, that something different from true moral piety and virtue, as they appear to the mind in their genuine simplicity, will answer the ends of them, and make amends for defects in them, rendering men acceptable to God. It is first of all supposed, and we easily come into it, that the end of all religion is pleasing the deity. It is then insinuated, that the strict observance of some positive appointments will certainly please him; while it is not considered what the voice of reason, as well as scripture would convince us of, if we attended to it, that morally good dispositions and actions are, to this purpose, not only of equal, but vastly superior necessity and importance. This is the evil of superstition; placing religion in the things wherein it does not consist, or which are of little or no moment to its ends. It is what experience shews us men have always been easily led into, Heathens, Jews, and Christians; and nothing has been more successful in blinding the
 the

the eyes of their understandings and corrupt-
ing their moral judgment. What impurities, SERM.
wickedness, and barbarities, have been com- III.
mitted in the world, while men thought they
were doing God service; at least fondly ima-
gined they sufficiently reconciled themselves
to him by ceremonies of their own invention,
or by complying with merely external obser-
vances which were originally of divine insti-
tution, but never intended by their author to
be substituted in the room of the weightier
matters of his law?

But, though superstition be one great
means of self-deceit in matters of religion,
of vitiating the eye of the mind, or corrupt-
ing the practical moral judgment; it is not
the only one. Some men who have the
justest notions of religion, placing it not in
forms and ceremonies, but in righteousness,
temperance, godliness, and charity, yet com-
mit the most grievous trespasses against some
of those virtues, still flattering themselves that
their state is good, at least, that they shall
escape with impunity, and at last *die the death
of the righteous*. In order to this, such is the
deceitfulness of sin, that even vice itself puts
on the false appearance of virtue. Thus,
extravagance is represented to the deluded

SERM. imagination of the sinner as generosity ; ambition as a laudable greatness of spirit ; and
 III. covetousness passes for prudent frugality ; and generally men are deluded into real wickedness, at least support themselves in it, by the false disguise of something praise-worthy. But if this be too palpable an absurdity to pass upon the minds of men, as in many cases it is, their next shift is to lessen their favourite vices into tolerable infirmities. It is a principle generally received, and if rightly understood, it is a true one, that some failures will always cleave to us while we are in this imperfect state ; * *there is not a just man that liveth upon the earth and sinneth not* ; but the error lies in diminishing a wilful sin, even habitually indulg'd, so as to make it pass with the deluded mind for such a weakness as is consistent with sincerity in the main, which certainly is an instance of the grossest partiality. To this is added, as partly, an excuse where-with men hide from their own eyes the malignity of their transgressions, that temptations are very violent, and their own ability to resist but small ; they are frail creatures ; and this is charg'd to the score of nature which made them so, or of providence which placed them

* Eccles. vii. 20.

in unhappy circumstances. And thus they reason in their own thoughts; will not an equitable, especially a compassionate governor, in his demands of obedience from his subjects make an allowance for their natural infirmity, which he very well knows, and for the difficulties they meet with in doing their duty from inevitable hard circumstances and violent opposition? In the mean time, the truth is, the strength of temptations complained of is the impetuous vehemence of irregular desire and passion, increased by a customary compliance, which is really criminal; and the alledged impotence of the mind, is no more than the want of good affections and resolutions which every one may see, if any thing is our fault.

And, *lastly*, there is nothing whereby men more frequently delude themselves, and cover from their own sight the present evil and danger of their state, than feeble ineffectual purposes of a future amendment and obedience. The amiableness and the necessity of virtue appears to them in too strong a light to be hid, or even disguised by any pretence; so does the deformity, and the pernicious tendency of vicious habits. What method then do they take to quiet their consciences
and

SERM.
III.
}

SERM. and support their hopes, even continuing

III. { in a sinful course? They flatter themselves that in their hearts they are on the side of virtue; as a proof of which, they come to half-resolves that sometime or other they will go over to it in practice, though some very urgent temptation hinders them to forsake their sins immediately. In all these cases inconsideration is the bane of sincerity and contributes above all things to self-deceit. If we would carefully attend, it is impossible such empty vain fallacies should be able to mislead the weakest mind; but the affections being deeply engaged, we do not care to think lest we should be undeceived.

The next observation relates to the extent of this self-deceit. In some it rises to such a height as to affect the main of their state, their whole characters and tempers. And this is the case designedly described in the text, *where the eye is supposed to be evil*, the judgment totally perverted, the light turn'd into darkness which has got intire possession of the mind, and misled it in its chief concerns, its moral integrity and its future happiness. But in some lower degree it is common to mankind; and scarcely is there any one altogether

ther free from it, that is, who is not in some particular instances misled in judging of himself and his own conduct, through remaining self-partiality, and self-ignorance. *David* in the best state of his mind, and when we have no reason to believe he was under the power of total darkness, made this his earnest prayer to God, and every good man will be ready to join with him in it. * *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.* I do not doubt but there is some secret bias upon my mind through selfishness, which cleaves close to me, though I have not yet been able to make a particular discovery of it; and therefore, I beseech God to forgive, and deliver me from it, as he knows I am sincerely disposed to find out and abandon it; and that I do not wilfully allow or indulge myself in any such thing. Indeed, this seems to pass universally for the infirmity of men without any reproach to their general character: for it is allowed that no one, be his character ever so good, is intirely to be depended on in his own cause; though it is taken for granted that he would not designedly prevaricate, even upon his own account, yet still it is supposed that selfish interests and affections will in

SERM,
III.
}

* *Plafms* xix. 12.

SERM. some degree warp his judgment. But, a strict
 III. scrutiny into our own hearts, and a constant
 vigilance over our whole behaviour, would
 make us sensible of it in our own case. Have
 we never found that through the influence
 of an affection, a passion, a favourite interest
 of ours, we have been caught in a snare, a
 practical error, which when the bias was
 taken off, and upon cool reflection we have
 been convinced of?

I shall conclude this discourse with some
 useful reflections. *First*, What has been said,
 and what our Saviour teaches in the text,
 may be very properly applied for a warning
 to us, and should lead us to examine our-
 selves; but is not to be carried so far, as to
 mean that men are under a necessity of being
 self-deceived, or in an utter uncertainty con-
 cerning their own true character and temper:
 some imagine this to be naturally the condi-
 tion of mankind, and a very unhappy condi-
 tion it would be; one would think it hardly
 consistent with the divine moral perfections
 to place such creatures as we are in it. Thus
 they interpret the words of the prophet *Jere-*
miab, in the name of the Lord, chapter xvii.
 9. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and*
desperately wicked, who can know it? which
 words


words have no relation at all to the subject of SERM. self-deceit, as appears from the context, III. where the prophet is dissuading the *Jews* from, and shewing the folly of, putting their trust in men, the sincerity of whose friendship is not to be depended on, more than their strength; for that the hearts of men, many of mankind, are deceitful and desperately wicked. I have shewn already, that we never are necessarily self-deceived, but always voluntarily and by our own fault; and that unhappy state of mind is only incurr'd through the prevalence of evil affections, and a most stupid inattention. But though some hearts may be fatally harden'd through the deceitfulness of sin, that does not hinder but that there may be sufficient clearness and certainty in the testimony of conscience to sincere minds, and they have no reasonable ground of doubt or suspicion concerning their own integrity, and the safety of the way in which they walk. Of this we have many plain instances in scripture; the servants of God speak of it in very strong terms, and even with full assurance; they were altogether satisfied that they walked before God in *truth* and with *perfect hearts*; they rejoiced in the testimony of

SERM. of their consciences that in * *simplicity and*
 III. *godly sincerity, they had their conversation in*
 this world. They † *knew whom they believed,*
and were persuaded he was able to keep that which
they committed to him against that day.

The object being so intimately near, even within ourselves, and the evidence so immediate (for it is the testimony of our own hearts) one would think we should have the greatest certainty, and be least liable to deception in judging of the internal light, or the state of mind itself; for there can be no doubt concerning what we are conscious of, and there is nothing the soul perceives so clearly as what it perceives by looking into itself. This in general is true; but there is a difference in the objects of our conscious perception, such as are the most simple are the most certainly known. There is nothing we discern so distinctly, and our knowledge excludes all possibility of doubt, as our own being, our powers, and operations. But where the object of self-reflection is complex, as in the moral state of the soul, considering how imperfect we are, and that there are contrary tendencies even within our hearts, there is a possibility, nay and a danger of mistakes.

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† 2 Tim. i. 12.

And yet there is a sufficient certainty, where SERM.
the mind is conscious of a calm deliberate at- III.
tention, and that it is so far impartial as not 
to be prepossess'd in favour of some interest
or object of affection which it is not willing
to bring to clear light. This may be illus-
trated by the familiar example of the bodily
eye, the figure used in the text; it is in a
due disposition sufficient for its proper pur-
poses in the natural life; indeed a man in a
fever or a dream may not perceive sensible
things truly as they are, yet one who knows
himself not out of order, and awake, may
trust his eye-sight within its own sphere. In
like manner, though he who is full of hy-
pocrisy and iniquity, may deceive and flatter
himself in his own blinded eye, yet the truly
virtuous heart, calmly and deliberately atten-
tive to its own dispositions and exercises, and
knowing in itself that it has no prejudice in
favour of any vice, but would with pleasure
receive a conviction of all its faults in order
to amendment, and thus, not condemning
itself but rejoicing in the testimony of con-
science concerning its sincerity, and perse-
vering with steady resolutions in the uniform
practice of all that is pure, and just, and
honest, as far as it is understood; such a
4 heart,

SERM. heart, I say, from its own inward feelings,
 III. and having so single an eye, possesses tranquility and peace, with confidence towards God, on so solid a foundation as to cast out fear which hath torment and all suspicion of self-deceit.

Secondly, the case of the human mind being as it has been represented with respect to its judgment in the affairs of religion, and particularly its own moral or spiritual state, it is always safe to be so far diffident and jealous of ourselves as to keep a strict watch over our own hearts, and narrowly observe their motions. A total absence of distrust very often betrays men into mistakes, and lays them open to the most dangerous impositions; 'tis so with respect to others, no man can impose upon us so much as he in whom we put the greatest confidence; and 'tis so with respect to ourselves, we are never in more danger of judging wrong in the matters we are now considering, than when we are carelessly secure, and altogether unsuspecting. In this sense *Solomon* wisely pronounces him a fool * *who trusteth in his own heart*, that is, who relies upon, and implicitly gives into, without examining them, all the rash and uncon-

* Prov. xxviii. 26.

sidered suggestions which may arise in his own mind, perhaps from appetite or passion; for certainly the man who above all others is the least liable to self-deceit, is he, who is the most aware of his danger, and gives the most constant wakeful attention to his heart. There is one symptom which generally, perhaps universally in some degree, accompanies a bad state of mind and the influence of wrong motives in the counsels of our hearts, relating to our moral conduct, and that is, a general secret suspicion that all is not right within, causing perturbation, uneasiness, and an hurry of thought, with a desire to get rid of it. I have said but just now, that a total absence of doubt, or distrust, is dangerous; but, against this we have for the most part a warning, in a secret misgiving of heart, which however proves ineffectual, producing no other effect than a haste to get over it, because we are unwilling to examine it, lest that should end in a dissatisfaction with ourselves: like a bankrupt, who fearing, or having a general knowledge, that the state of his worldly affairs is bad, wilfully declines looking into them more particularly, and examining his accounts, lest he should thereby discover what

SERM.
III.

SERM. he would be very loth to find. Let us
 III. be always upon our guard, that we may
 do justice to ourselves, that we may preserve our integrity and have consciences void of offence; particularly let us not neglect the natural admonitions we have in the secret suspicions of self-deceit which arise in our own breasts; do not pass them over slightly, but examine them with deliberation and candour, that we may be fully satisfied concerning the grounds we act upon.

Thirdly, In ordinary life, and in cases of importance, what is right and wrong in a question propos'd will generally appear to our first thoughts, so good is God to his intelligent creatures, teaching them what they should do, so plain his precepts, so sure a guide, *a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.* Therefore, it is for the most part safe to rest in the first representation of conscience; at least, we should studiously endeavour to keep a clear and lively sense of it. When we incline to take a wider compass in our deliberations, to enter into a long detail of circumstances and tedious perplexing debates, the truth of the case may be, I am afraid often is, that we are only casting about for plausible pretences, whereby to mislead our own judgment,

ment, and endeavouring to reconcile an appearance of right to selfish interest or inclination.


SERM.
III.



Fourthly, in order to prevent self-deceit and find out the truth more exactly, it may be expedient to substitute another person in our own place; consider how we would judge if the case were a neighbour's to whom we are indifferent; perhaps a fault, a moral blemish might be more easily spied, and a *mote in a brother's eye better discerned than a beam in our own*. It might be profitable too, to change the judge, as well as the party to be tried. Make the supposition that a person intirely disinterested, were to hold the enquiry, knowing as perfectly what passes in our minds, as we do ourselves; nay, suppose a malicious enemy to have that province who would curiously pry into every secret corner to detect the most latent corruption; surely a well-govern'd self-love makes it more our interest to discover our faults, in order to amend them, than hatred could make it his interest, in order to expose them. And,

Lastly, let us always earnestly implore the assistance of divine grace, that we may be led into the knowledge of the most important religious truths, and be preserv'd from fatal

SERM. errors and darkness. As on the one hand
 III. there is an awful judgment of God which
 the scripture expresses by *giving men up to strong delusions, hardening their hearts*, for the punishment of their unbelief and disobedience, and leaving them *to walk in their own counsels*; so, on the other hand, there is nothing more agreeable to the will of God and the benignity of his nature, than to give instruction to honest minds sincerely dispos'd to receive and faithfully to improve it. He is *the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift comes down*, and he will give *liberally, without upbraiding* to every one who is sensible that he wants *wisdom*, and asks it from him; nor is there any petition we can address to him with greater confidence of being heard, if we *ask not amiss*, but with an upright intention to know that we may do his will. In this his faithful servants have given us an example which we ought to imitate, and have good encouragement to hope for success. *David* prays in the 26th *Psalms*, *Examine me O Lord! and prove me, try my reins and my heart*. And in the 139th *Psalms*, 23d and 24th verses, this is the application he makes of his excellent meditations

ditations of God's omniscience, particularly SERM.
his intimate knowledge of the hearts and ways III.
of men, *Search me, O God! and know my* 
heart, try me and know my thoughts, and
see if there be any wicked way in me, and
lead me in the way everlasting.

SERMON IV.

Of Christian Fortitude.

2 Pet. i. 5.

And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.

SERM.
IV.


THE apostle having, in the preceding verses, shewn the great things which God hath done for christians, *his divine power has given them all things that pertain unto life and godliness; he hath called them to glory and virtue; rather it should be rendered, by glory and virtue, meaning the glorious effusion of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, and the mighty powers thereby communicated to them, which were a great confirmation of the gospel; as a farther illustration of the favour conferr'd upon us, the Father and his*

Son

Son *Jesus Christ* have given us exceeding great and precious promises, and the invaluable advantage to be obtained by these promises is that by them we might be *partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption, that is in the world thro' lust.* The apostle, I say, having laid this foundation, proceeds to exhort the christian *Hebrews* to steadfastness and growth in all the christian graces; and we have here set before us an excellent summary of practical christianity, *of those things, which, if they be in us and abound, we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* What is here translated, *besides all this,* is by very good expositors understood to signify, *and for this cause,* according to which sense the connection is clearer. The glorious benefits which divine grace has bestowed upon us are indeed the strongest motives to diligence in every duty; we should therefore labour assiduously in God's service, and in those things which tend to the perfection of our nature, because God has brought the blessed end within our view, and has laid such a foundation for our hopes and for making our endeavours successful.

SERM. Two things I shall consider in the words
 IV. now read; *First*, that important circum-
 stance which must attend every part of our
 duty, *giving all diligence*. *Secondly*, the
 first particular which the apostle exhorts us
 to add to our faith, and it is *virtue*.

First, let us consider that which must accompany our whole duty, the manner of performing it, or applying ourselves to it, *giving all diligence*. It is not to be confin'd to one point, but runs thro' the whole detail of the christian graces which is here given us; give all diligence in virtue, all diligence to attain knowledge, all diligence in the exercise of patience, of temperance, of godliness, and charity. Diligence in religion is often recommended to us by the sacred writers. That familiar image under which they describe the practice of piety, *walking with God*, plainly implies it. For, as a man who walks is all in motion, we must exert the utmost activity of our souls in that tenor of conversation whereby we would approve ourselves to God, and maintain fellowship with the *Father and his Son Jesus Christ*. The glorious prize of that favour which he shows to them that love him, is not prostituted to the ineffectual wishes,

wishes, the lazy unactive desires of the sloth- SERM.
 ful, which *kill him while his hands refuse to* IV.
labour. We should summon all the powers 
 of our souls continually to attend this very
 thing, and watch every occasion of doing and
 of receiving good. The psalmist says, * *that*
his soul followed hard after the Lord. And
 as our Saviour pronounces them blessed *who*
hunger and thirst after righteousness, he re-
 commends it to his disciples, that they should
 grow more and more assiduous in order to
 obtain it; and that to all other endeavours
 they should add their fervent prayers to God,
 in which apprehended delays and disappoint-
 ments should only whet their desire and in-
 crease their fervour and importunity; † *Ask*
and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find,
knock and it shall be opened unto you.

And tho' the scripture teaches us to attribute
 our attainments in religion to the grace of
 God (while St. *Paul* labour'd more abun-
 dantly than all the rest of the apostles, he
 ascribes the praise not to himself, but to the
 divine grace) yet this is not intended to va-
 cate, or at all to lessen our obligation to dili-
 gence; on the contray, the greatest en-

* Psal. lxxiii. 8. † Mat. vii. 7.

SERM. couragement we have in * *working out our*
 IV. *own salvation with fear and trembling*, is,
 { *that God worketh in us both to will and to do*
of his own good pleasure. Nothing, indeed,
 is more certain than the divine assistance to
 men heartily dispos'd to perform their duty,
 which, instead of superseding the necessity
 of their own endeavours, should animate
 their zeal, and excite them to industry; as
David in giving a charge to *Solomon* his son,
 concerning that good work of building the
 temple, thus exhorts and encourages him,
 † *arise and be doing, and the Lord be with*
thee. Never is there the least countenance
 to a supine negligence by the promise of di-
 vine aids, nor have men any reason to expect
 that God will *work their works in them and*
for them, if they be wholly wanting to them-
 selves; or that they *shall see the salvation of*
God, if they so stand still as to be idle, and
 do not call upon their souls, and stir up all
 that is within them to a vigorous concurrence
 in improving every opportunity that presents
 itself.

The necessity of this will appear, if we
 reflect on the constitution of human nature,
 and the divine wisdom and condescension in

* Philipp. ii. 12, 13. † 1 Chron. xxii. 16.

accommodating to *it* the way of conferring the greatest blessings upon us. The blessed Author of our beings has a regard to their frame while he carries on his merciful designs towards us. He does not deal by us as unintelligent machines, but rational creatures. He does not make us happy without our own knowledge, choice and concurrence, which would indeed be a contradiction; but prepares our souls for the enjoyment of himself, and for the perfection of righteousness, by forming in them strong desires, and exciting them to vigorous endeavours; and the more earnest the pursuit is, the greater is the felicity.

In the affairs of common life, if a man has business to transact which he regards as of importance to his interest or reputation, he will be upon his guard that he do not miscarry in it; and we see that ordinarily, it is *the band of the diligent that maketh rich*, as Solomon observes, * *And he becomes poor that deals with a slack hand.* And if we have at heart the attaining of the ends of religion, the like care and industry we will use in attending the means; improving all opportunities, and exerting all our abilities for it, which is in this

* Prov. x. 4.

SERM. case the more necessary, because we are sensi-

IV. ble there is a difficulty in the practice of virtue, from our own confessed weakness. It is a work to which we find ourselves unequal, by the vanity of our minds, the darkness of our understandings, and many infirmities which compass us about; but all these disadvantages are no argument for sloth or discouragement; on the contrary, they should incite us to greater zeal and activity, according to *Solomon's* proverbial expression. * *If the iron be blunt, he must put to the more strength.* Since most important consequences depend upon performing our duty aright, and † *we labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life*; since there is but a short time appointed for this most necessary work, and ‡ *there is no knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device, in the grave whither we are all hastening*; these considerations urge us to industry, and show that negligence is very unreasonable. *Solomon*, in his excellent proverbs; the main design of which is to recommend religious virtue under the amiable character of wisdom, and engage men in the pursuit of it; very earnestly exhorts us to diligence as absolutely necessary in

* Eccles. x. 10. † John vi. 27. ‡ Eccles. ix. 10.

order to our obtaining it. Thus in the 2d SERM.
 chapter and 3d verse, *if thou criest after know-* IV.
ledge, and liftest up thy voice for understand-
ing, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest
for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou
understand the fear of the Lord, and find the
knowledge of God. Again, chapter iv, verse 5.
Get wisdom, get understanding, forget it not,
neither decline from the words of my mouth; and
at the 7th verse, Wisdom is the principal thing,
therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting
get understanding. Experience confirms the
 justness of his advice, and shows that industry
 in religion has always been successful, and
 never fail'd of obtaining its end. Unwearied
 endeavours has overcome the greatest diffi-
 culties, removed the most perplexing hin-
 drances, and let men into the *secrets of wis-*
dom, as that author speaks, making those things
 which are too high for fools, plain and familiar
 to them. Diligence is not merely to be con-
 sidered as itself *a means* of getting wisdom or
 religion, but it implies *the constant and pro-*
per use of all means, and the vigorous exertion
 of our own active powers *in it*. These
 powers will naturally exert themselves some
 way or other, according to the predominant
 inclination and bent of the mind. We see
 what

SERM. what pains men are at to compass wicked designs. The adulterer *waits for the twilight*, he spares no pains, endures fatigue and tedious delays to accomplish his vicious purposes. The covetous and ambitious are restless in their endeavours; *they rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrow*, to acquire the riches and honour of the world. Change but the object, and you will see what it is to be diligent in religion. Nature itself points out the way. Let there be, *First*, a love of virtue, and in consequence of this, an earnest intention of mind, which is the spring of labour universally in all cases, but it is the very spirit and life of religious labour; for it is not in this as in ordinary outward works where the labour of the hands produces the effect, however the mind is employ'd; but here the soul must especially exert itself, without which the external work is of no significancy; nay, but an empty form, serving no purpose but to dishonour God and expose ourselves to condemnation. This will engage us to the use of all proper means; for, in vain shall we pretend great earnestness and intention of mind, without using the means for accomplishing what is intended. I say, *proper* means, for as reasonable beings we ought to make choice

choice of such. Religious diligence does not consist merely in application and labour by whatever way, but is accompanied with prudence directing the regular use of those means which in the nature of the thing, and by the best information we can get, (in this case the best is from the word of God) appear to be the most proper and effectual. The Scripture sometimes speaks of *a seeking God*, which is unsuccessful. Our Saviour admonishes his disciples, that *many shall * strive to enter into his kingdom and shall not be able*; because they have not wisdom, sincerity, and resolution enough to tread in the paths of strict holiness and virtue which God has prescribed to them. And *St. Paul*, who represents religion as a *contention for masteries*, shews that to one's being crown'd, its absolutely necessary he *should strive † lawfully*. And being thus solicitous to have all the christian virtues abound in us, and having made a choice of the best means, diligence imports the using them frequently, and with spirit and vigour.

God has given great encouragement to our hopes, that if we be thus industrious in religious virtue, our labour shall not be in vain.

* Luke xiii. 24. † 2 Tim. ii. 5.

SERM. It is expressly said in the name of wisdom,

IV. * *I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me.* Such seeking it early, or diligence, imports in it those dispositions with which we must suppose the supreme Being, infinitely good, and a perfect lover of wisdom, so pleas'd, that he will bestow whatever is necessary on his part, in order to our obtaining it with all its comfortable fruits. If there be in us such *hunger* and *thirst* after *righteousness*, that is, such a prevailing love of goodness that we are ready for its sake to thwart and deny the love of ease, an aversion to labour, and all selfish affections which may hinder our progress; and if we are prepared to undergo all the difficulties and pains in quest of virtue, which may arise from that indolence and depravity which we have contracted, we may rest assured, God will give the assistances of his Holy Spirit, whose good offices for our attaining wisdom, and even advancing to consummate virtue, are so largely explained in the gospel. Besides, diligence in order to the exercise of virtue, is really practising it; and we find in all those things the knowledge whereof and dexterity in them *is acquired*, it is by application and practice we

* Prov. viii. 17.

arrive at perfection, such is the nature of the human capacity, it is not perfect at once, but is carried on by degrees, and by a constant exercise and repeated acts, to maturity; for by this method habits are acquired, and a facility and pleasure in that manner of acting in which men were at first but awkward and had little satisfaction.

I will add but one observation more on this subject, that religious industry will produce constancy as its natural effect. Whatever obligations we are under to diligence in our duty at any time do equally bind us at every time; and there can be no sure evidence of our sincerity without a persevering steadfastness in the work of the Lord. The service of Christ is not become either more burdensome or dishonourable than it was, nor are the things which are true, and pure, and just, and honest, and virtuous, less lovely and praise-worthy; we shall rather find that the more we think on, and the more we do them, they are still the more worthy of that character, and *our salvation is nearer than when we believed.* Let us, therefore, then understand the direction in the text, *giving all diligence*, that as it extends to every virtue, so it does to the whole time of our lives; not like


SERM.
IV.


SERM. the warm but abortive zeal of those who bear
 IV. the word, and anon with joy receive it, but only
 endure for a while, for when affliction and
 temptation ariseth, by and by they are offended*.
 Their † goodnes and their diligence, is as
 the morning cloud, and the early dew that passeth
 away. But our resolution, if we would have
 the christian virtues be in us and abound,
 must be stedfast and permanent, holding out
 to the end of the race that is set before us. I
 come now to,

The *First* particular, which the apostle ex-
 horts us to add to our faith, and it is *virtue*,
 by which I understand, in this place, a re-
 ligious fortitude in adhering to the profession
 of our faith, and in that course of action
 which it directs, for tho' virtue, in the com-
 mon acceptation, signifies every moral per-
 fection, or good quality, and it may be some-
 times so taken in scripture, yet when it is, as
 here, to be understood in a limited sense, and
 expressly distinguished from other good habits
 and dispositions, nothing more obviously oc-
 curs as its meaning, than *courage*. This was a
 way of speaking used by the antient moralists ;
 a very eminent one tells us, that though virtue is
 become the common name of all good affections

* Mat. xiii. 20, 21.

† Hof. vi. 4.

yet more properly, it belongs to fortitude; SERM.
 both the Latin word, and that of the same IV.
 signification in Greek, being derived from 
 the name of a man in those languages, to
 denote that the quality itself in a pecu-
 liar manner belongs to man; is an ex-
 cellence most becoming the dignity of his
 nature and his condition of being, and in
 the strictest sense, *manly*, as we now also
 commonly speak.

The sacred writers, likewise, often recom-
 mend courage as necessary to be added to
 faith, or to the embracing christianity, espe-
 cially in the primitive times, when faith was
 accompanied with great difficulties and dan-
 gers, and the profession of the gospel exposed
 men to trials and afflictions of various kinds;
 as particularly St. Paul does, * *Watch ye,
 stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be
 strong.* So that considering the state of the
 christian Jews, to whom the apostle *Peter*
 writes, that their lot was fallen in perilous
 times, that they were to expect great adver-
 sity, of which he often warns them, to be in-
 sulted and derided for their religion by scoffers,
 to endure the spoiling of their goods, the most
 bitter reproaches, the torture of their bodies,

* 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

SERM. and in fine all manner of persecution even to
 IV. death itself; considering this, I say, it would
 be strange indeed, if courage so absolutely necessary in their circumstances, had not a place in his directions to them, for which, and the other reasons already mentioned, it seems natural to conclude, that such courage is meant by *virtue* in this summary of the christian duties and graces.

This virtue carries in it the idea of hazards and difficulties, and the excellence of it consists in a magnanimous superiority to all dangers and all opposition. As it is peculiar to a probationary state, or a state of discipline, like ours, it is that without which there can be no real goodness, at least no steadfastness in such a state. To be above all danger and all resistance in the execution of good purposes, belongs to a more perfect condition than the human; and to sink under them and not pursue good purposes against them, is to have no goodness at all. As the gospel, therefore, requires this quality in its professors, it shows the proper occasion for the exercise of it. It represents our state in this world under the notion of a *war*, nay of a *continual fight*. St. Paul * exhorts christians to *fight the good*

* 1 Tim. vi. 12.

fight of faith, and near the close of his own militant life which commenced from his embracing the christian religion, he says, *I have fought a good fight* *. We have a great number of violent adversaries which will be continually annoying us, endeavouring to spoil us of our integrity, and to take from us our crown; such as *the corruptions of our own hearts*. It is the unhappiness of the human nature in its present degeneracy, *that the flesh lusteth against the spirit*; a multitude of unreasonable and impetuous inclinations tending to sin, take their rise from the body; our senses and inferior appetites always minister the occasion of evil. Now these must be resisted by a christian; at least, his desires and passions so regulated and restrain'd, that he may not by complying with them be led to offend God; which certainly is one of the most arduous provinces of religion, and will require the utmost vigour and firmest resolution of our souls. Again, *the world*, by which is often understood in scripture, the corrupt part of mankind, in opposition to God's peculiar people, his true church: Our Saviour, in his last discourse to his apostles before his death, states an irreconcilable en-

SERM.
IV.
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\* 2 Tim. iv. 7.

SERM. mity between the world and them; and  
 IV. shews them they were always to expect hatred, ill-usage, and injuries from the *men of this world*. Here then is another occasion for the exercise of christian fortitude, which may in some cases require all our strength. How difficult must it be to stand unmoved against a train of sufferings in our outward estate, in our bodies, against galling reproaches, despiteful usage, and all manner of wrongs, and still to maintain integrity, meekness and patience? It is further to be considered, that the scriptures often speak of invisible, malignant powers, as having by divine permission, great influence upon affairs in this world, and particularly, as instigating wicked men to evil works. So the apostle speaks of \* *the prince of the power of the air, who worketh in the children of disobedience*. And † *We wrestle not* (that is, *not only*) *against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickednesses in high places*. And how much those invisible wicked agents may contribute to the difficulties and trials of the christian life, who can certainly say? But however that may be,

\* Eph. ii. 2.

† Eph. vi. 12.


the world in the present state of things is to be considered as a field in which the courage of the servants of Christ is put to severe proof, and particularly the noblest branch of it, passive fortitude, or patience.

SERM.  
IV.



Having thus shewn you the proper object of christian fortitude, or the occasion of its exercise, I will next consider the exercises and dispositions of mind which are necessary to it, or do concur in it. And let us, first of all, observe that it is very different from a blind passion. Some people seem to mean nothing else by courage, than a mere contempt of danger, a tumultuous and furious rage, whereby men are driven with a brutal impetuosity into hazards and difficulties. This is certainly a very wrong notion, in the moral, especially in the christian sense, according to which, every virtue, every good quality, is founded in understanding, and must be conducted by light, and by a calm and dispassionate consideration. Indeed, the rash sallies of passion, whatever appearance they may have of fortitude, as defying danger, yet as they never were worthy of that name, they soon fail; like the violent swellings of waters, or impetuous waves of the sea which speedily fall and sink down, and tempests which are

SERM. quickly blown over. Nothing is more necessary in the whole of our religion than that we be sedate and deliberate; and, particularly, that our zealous resolutions for God be form'd upon a just and solid ground of calm and mature consideration. Human passions undirected by reason can never be the foundation of christian graces; so far from it, it is the business of religion to keep them within due bounds, and to restrain and govern them: nor is there any thing wherein we have more occasion to quit us like men and be strong. Whenever we find a warmth and vehemence of temper causing emotion and perturbation of mind, we may fancy ourselves zealous and resolved christians; but such a disposition is always to be suspected, unless upon a calm and serious *reflection* we see the clear grounds upon which it is founded. What will plainly demonstrate the truth of what I have said, is that we see men resolute and bold, without anything of religion; nay, in wickedness they are stupidly, indeed impudently fearless of danger. Surely there must be something very different from this in the courage of a good man, and it especially consists in the consideration and persuasion of his mind concerning the cause in which he exerts

erts his strength. Let us therefore, above SERM.  
 all things endeavour to be found in the way of IV.  
 righteousness; *ask for the good paths, and the*   
*right ways*, as the prophet directs\*, constantly pursuing them in the manner God pre-  
 scribes, and this will be the chief support of  
 religious fortitude.

*Secondly*, having proceeded so far, the next  
 thing necessary is stedfast resolution. *To be*  
*toss'd to and fro, and carried about with every*  
*wind*, as the apostle speaks †, *by the slight of*  
*men, and their cunning craftiness to deceive*;  
 or by violences; this is to be like children,  
*not to quit ourselves like men*. Certainly it is  
 a great unhappiness to be unresolv'd in mat-  
 ters of the greatest moment, even in religion.  
 They that are so, cannot possibly approve  
 themselves to God, nor will be stedfast.  
 They were unfaithful and unconstant wor-  
 shippers of God whom the prophet represents  
 as *halting between two opinions*, between the  
 service of the true God, and the service of  
*Baal*; such men are ready to be driven by  
 every temptation, to embrace every form of  
 religion, and every course of action that is  
 enforc'd by strong worldly motives, which are

\* Jer. vi. 16

† Eph. iv. 14.

SERM. apt to work upon their fear, or their most  
 IV. prevailing selfish inclinations. It is of consequence to us, that we hold on in a religious way, that we endure to the end (to those only who do so, salvation is promised). Then certainly we should fortify our minds against temptation by firm purposes; we shall find the firmest we can enter into weak enough, often too weak, and we ought never to trust entirely to them; but how defenceless must they be who have never come to any fix'd resolution at all? how easily will they be drawn aside to sinful and crooked ways?

*Thirdly*, the virtue which the apostle here exhorts us to add to our faith, imports bearing trials, uneasiness and fatigues with equanimity. This seems to be principally meant by fortitude. He who fights manfully, does not shrink or give back at every wound, much less for threatening or danger, but must maintain his station and go on in his course, resolving to conquer. This exhortation St. Paul gives to *Timothy* \*, and it is necessary for all christians, *Thou therefore endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus*


\* 2 Tim. ii. 3.

*Christ.* It is not an insensibility of pain or hardships he prescribes, which cannot be attained, and there would be no virtue in it; but whatever uneasiness we may have on trial of any kind, to submit to it, and bear patiently, rather than draw back. A christian has the same sense of pleasure, profit, and honour with other men: And yet he bravely denies them. He has the same feeling of pain, and yet he is not moved by it to forsake his duty; and herein he acts reasonably, for the tendency of such disagreeable sensations is over-ruled by superior motives; he sees such an excellence in religion, finds such an inward peace and comfort in his integrity and the testimony of his conscience concerning it, has such a solid joy in the prospect of a future glorious reward, as is sufficient to bear him up under all his present uneasiness. Here, then, is the exercise of religious fortitude; we must not be shocked with the difficulties of the present state, so softened with its pleasures, or terrified with its pains, as to suffer ourselves to be diverted from our duty; but go on constantly in the ways of God whatever it may cost us. As the love of pleasure, and the fear of pain are the great sources of temptation inseparable from our present state  
of

SERM.  
IV.




SERM. of infirmity, nothing can be of greater conse-

IV. quence to us than to be fortified against them,  if we would approve ourselves the faithful servants and soldiers of Jesus Christ. The apostle therefore very reasonably gives this the first place in his christian directory, because it is an universal defence against temptations, and a necessary security to every virtue.

I shall conclude this discourse, with an exhortation to that peculiar virtue here recommended, which I have endeavoured to explain, having a regard to the connection of the apostle's discourse. In general, it is to be observed that he earnestly presses christians to add to their faith all the parts of practical christianity, which was very necessary to his purpose, and suitable to the occasion of his epistle. A most dangerous error had crept in among some of the *Jews* who professed the Gospel, that *faith alone* without works of righteousness and charity, was sufficient to justification and acceptance with God. St. *James* levels a great part of his excellent epistle directed to the same persons, the *Jews of the dispersion*, against this most pernicious doctrine, and largely demonstrates that we are justified not by faith only, but by works also. St. *Peter* therefore being sensible how need-  
ful



ful it was, and what danger the christians of SERM.  
 the circumcision (his special charge) were in IV.  
 of being *led away with the error of the*   
*wicked, and falling from their stedfastness,*  
 gives also his testimony to the same important  
 truth, and exhorts them to perfect their faith  
 and prove its sincerity by abounding in every  
 good work, in all the branches of religious  
 virtue, that they might *neither be barren nor*  
*unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.*  
 This is to be understood as the standing doc-  
 trine and rule of christianity; and whatever  
 opinions have a contrary tendency, that is to  
 lay such stress on faith as to supersede the ne-  
 cessity of obedience, of sobriety, of righteouf-  
 ness, of godliness, and charity, ought to be  
 regarded as most dangerous, overturning  
 the very foundation, which says the apostle  
 has this seal, \* *let every one that nameth the*  
*name of Christ depart from iniquity.* Whe-  
 ther we understand by faith a naked assent  
 to the truth of the gospel, or a strong con-  
 fidence in the merits of *Jesus Christ*, on nei-  
 ther of these ought we to rely; it is that faith  
 only which *worketh by love*, which *purifies*  
*the heart*, and reforms the life, by which we  
 can hope to be accepted; that faith only to

\* 2 Tim. ii. 9.

which

SERM. which is added the constant practice of virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, and charity.

But, in particular, *virtue*, in the more limited sense, that is, courage, was very properly recommended by the apostle to be added to *faith*; for no one, surely will imagine that faith could save any person without holding it and persevering in it; and it could not be held and persevered in without firm resolution, when the temptations to desert it were so very strong as they were in that age. The apostle *Paul* therefore writing to the same *Hebrews*, urges them, by a great variety of powerful motives, \* *to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering*. This, I say, is necessary, unless we would suppose that an imaginary believing in Christ, without professing his name and his religion, would be sufficient to our salvation. Such a faith, indeed requires no virtue; for it may be dissembled and denied at pleasure, and exposes the pretended believer to no danger. But the insufficiency of it is expressly taught by St. *Paul* †, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the*

\* Heb. iv. 14, and x. 23. † Rom. x. 9.

dead,

*dead, thou shalt be saved.* Where confessing with the mouth, that is an open avowed profession of christianity, is declared as necessary to our being saved, as believing in the heart; and he adds at the 10th verse, *for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* Our Saviour himself, in effect taught the same doctrine when he join'd baptism with faith, as requisite to salvation; as \* *He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved.* For the principal intention of that ordinance, was to initiate men into christianity, and to be a public declaration of their embracing it, and that they bound themselves to observe its laws; and when he tells his disciples, that whosoever should either thro' fear or shame, deny him and his words, him will he deny before his father and before the angels.

On the other hand, virtue is very properly proposed to be added to faith, because faith is the only foundation upon which it can stand. If we would be strong and with resolution adhere to the christian profession, and to our duty, it is first and above all things necessary, that we be established in the faith, which is the chief support of

\* Mark xvi. 16.

SERM. resolution, and furnishes us with those mo-  
 IV. tives which will prevail against all tempta-  
 tions, St. *John* teaches us, *that this is the*  
*victory that overcometh the world, even our*  
*faith\** which is the † *Substance of things*  
*hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,*  
 which gives us the assurance of a better and  
 more enduring substance, and so makes us  
 take joyfully the *spoiling of our goods, and*  
*bear patiently those light afflictions which are*  
*but for a moment, as knowing, that they work*  
*for us, an exceeding great and eternal weight*  
*of glory* ||. And St *Paul*, in the sixth chap-  
 ter of his epistle to the *Ephesians*, describing  
 the whole spiritual warfare, and the prepa-  
 ration of a christian to act his part in it, un-  
 der the similitude of a warrior's armour  
 and his weapons, lays the greatest stress upon  
 faith, as the most effectual support of reli-  
 gious valour, and the best preservative against  
 being overcome by temptations. At the 16th  
 verse, above all, taking *the shield of faith,*  
*wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the*  
*fiery darts of the wicked.* And in the 10th verse  
*be strong in the Lord, and the power of his*  
*might. We endure as seeing him who is in-*  
*visible,* in the sense of our own weakness,

\* 1 John v. 4. † Heb. xi. 1. || 2 Cor. iv. 17.

in all our temptations and conflicts, still how-  
ever with resolution to exert all the powers  
we have, we rely on him *whose grace \* is*  
*sufficient for us, and his strength made perfect*  
*in our weakness,* and faith representing the  
reality and certainty of future distant things,  
both rewards and punishments, animates our  
courage, and excites us to diligence and steady  
resolution in breaking thro' all difficulties, to  
*be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding*  
*in the work of the Lord.*

SERM.  
IV.

\* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

# SERMON V.

## Of Knowledge.

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2 Pet. i. 5.

— *And to virtue, knowledge.* —

SERM.  
V.

**T**HE apostle lays before us in the context an excellent abridgment of our duty. As nothing can be more dangerous for christians than to trust to an empty profession or an unfruitful faith, which will neither make them stedfast in religion nor entitle them to the rewards of it, he shews wherein we ought continually to exercise ourselves, that we may be the approved disciples of Jesus Christ, glorifying our heavenly Father, and obtain an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.

The first particular here recommended to be added to our *faith* I have already explain'd, namely, *virtue*; by which I understand in this place a religious fortitude, in adhering to  
the

the profession of our faith, and that course of SERM. action which it directs. *Secondly*, the apostle V. exhorts us to add to our *virtue knowledge*;  which is the point I am now to consider. And that you may be the more sensible of its importance, it ought to be remembered that it is very frequently enjoined in scripture. It seems to be the principal subject of the book of *Proverbs*, where the wise man often inculcates this direction, at the same time he represents the invaluable advantage which will attend the acquisition of it, and the best and most effectual means for attaining it. Any one who reads that book with attention, cannot but observe that knowledge is in *Solomon's* account absolutely necessary to the practice of every virtue; indeed, of its very essence; for he usually comprehends all virtue under the name of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and discretion. And so it will appear to be, if we consider the nature of the thing. For as virtue is peculiar to rational creatures, the exercise of it depends on the exercise of reason, or understanding; without which no one conceives any moral goodness in a person's dispositions, or his works.

Christianity, therefore, an institution of righteousness and pure religion, is address'd to

SERM. the reason of men. The blessed author of  
 V. it having proposed truths of the greatest im-  
 portance and the most excellent rules of life,  
 must be supposed to require that we should  
 apply our minds to the understanding of  
 them; accordingly he frequently shews the  
 evil of ignorance, insists on the criminal  
 causes of it, and guards his disciples against  
 them, exhorting them to search the scrip-  
 tures diligently, and to do their duty that they  
 might know the will of God. After him,  
 the apostles earnestly press christians to la-  
 bour assiduously in this most necessary work;  
 to prove all things by the unerring rule, and  
 use all other proper methods for their daily ad-  
 vancing in sacred knowledge. And to all  
 their exhortations, they add fervent prayers  
 and direct *us* to pray, for the illumination  
 of the Holy Spirit. Of so great use and ne-  
 cessity is knowledge to the practice of reli-  
 gion, and the regular conduct of a virtuous  
 life. Indeed any one who reflects on the na-  
 ture of religion and the extent of it, the weak-  
 ness of our understandings, and the many  
 disadvantages we are under in this imperfect  
 state, will be convinced that we ought to give  
 all diligence that we may add to our faith,  
 virtue, and to virtue, knowledge.

In



In discoursing on these words more particularly, I shall *first* consider what kind of *knowledge* is the subject of this exhortation; *2dly*, the reasonableness of our endeavouring to attain it, and make daily progress in it; and *3dly*, I shall propose some directions in order to this end.

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First, let us consider what kind of *knowledge* is the subject of this exhortation. Knowledge in general, is an attainment or accomplishment very suitable to a reasonable nature, and will appear to our first reflections the glory of man, because it is the improvement of that faculty which is one of his distinguishing privileges above the inferior kinds of creatures. At the same time it is obvious, that the human understanding very much needs improvement; for it is weak at first, and grows up by degrees, and by a constant exercise, to its maturity. Nor are the means which nature hath provided in common for all men; that is, our senses by which we receive the information of things without, and our capacity of attending to, and reflecting on them, and on our own powers, these means, I say, as they are afforded to all men alike, are not sufficient for

I 3

acquiring

SERM. acquiring a proper measure of knowledge,

V. without the addition of our own art, and industry. What a poor empty thing is the mind of man (tho' its capacities are noble) when uncultivated by study, experience and instruction? Its sphere of understanding is very narrow, and so are its pleasures; but knowledge refines and ennobles it, brings it to a vast deal of entertaining objects, and enlarges all its powers. Tho' there may be pain and difficulty in the acquisition, and, in this sense, *be that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow*; yet, that is over-ballanced with great advantage and great satisfaction. Human life itself looks quite another thing when improv'd by knowledge, than it is in a rude uncultivated state. What a difference is there between a herd of barbarous savages, such as there are at this day in many parts of the earth, and those civiliz'd nations where arts and sciences flourish? One would almost think them to be a different species, at least, that there is a great distinction between the wisest man and the most ignorant, as there is between this last and some of the brutal species.

But there is a great diversity in the kinds of knowledge, which chiefly depends on the quality

quality of the object and the importance of the ends it serves. That knowledge which the text recommends, is, according to this rule, the most valuable; the object of it are the *most excellent things*, it is what *Solomon* calls the *knowledge of the holy**, of God himself, and of his will, in which the mind of man perceives a peculiar dignity, and it yields an intellectual, pure pleasure which doth not arise from the knowledge and consideration of other things. It likewise answers the noblest ends; the forming our temper and directing our conduct to the most important purposes of our being. Every kind of art, science, or discipline, to the study and improvement of which men apply their minds, still in order to practice is reasonably valued, in proportion to its usefulness. Those more vulgar arts which require no great force of genius to comprehend them, yet some understanding and industry to be able to use them dextrously, are far from being despicable, since they serve the conveniencies of life, in the present state. Those, however, are deservedly in greater esteem, which answer higher ends, the very preservation of life, the improvement of the mind, or the most ex-

* Prov. ix. 10.

SERM. tenfive good of human society. But the
 V. knowledge which the apostle recommends,
 is the most excellent of all, because it directs
 us to the highest perfection of our nature,
 and the greatest and most lasting happiness we
 are capable of. It is the knowledge of our
 duty, with the proper motives to it, and the
 important consequences which depend on our
 doing or neglecting it. If we observe the con-
 nection of the apostle's discourse, that he has
 placed knowledge in the middle of the chri-
 stian virtues, it will appear plainly enough,
 that he means a right understanding of *them*,
 such a knowledge as is necessary to our prac-
 tising them. Religion is founded in light ;
 it has all of it the character of a reasonable
 service ; whatever external appearance there
 may be of piety, righteousness, or any thing
 that is praise-worthy, yet if it be without
 understanding, it is like the body without the
 spirit, dead. Human nature must be greatly
 perverted, as well as religion, when it is
 founded in ignorance ; for that can produce
 nothing but superstition, which is just the re-
 verse of true religion ; an unreasonable service,
 or, according to the instance *St. Paul* gives in
 the superstition of the *Athenians*, to an un-
 known God ; a blind and servile dread of
 what

what the worshipper himself does not know ; SERM.
 without love to, without confidence in, or a V.
 desire of imitating the moral perfections of the
 wisest and best of beings, but misrepresenting
 him and changing his glory into the image
 of a weak, passionate, cruel, and capricious
 Being, pleased with the misery of his crea-
 tures, and pleased with trifles. There is no-
 thing like this in the christian religion ; I mean
 that true christianity which the scripture
 contains ; but a manly rational worship, and
 the practice of substantial virtue with under-
 standing. Agreeably to this, the apostle in
 the text, exhorts us to add *knowledge* to our
faith and *virtue*, that is, a right understand-
 ing of christianity to our receiving it, and to
 our professing and adhering to it, and to
 all the duties it prescribes with zeal and cou-
 rage ; otherwise, our religion degenerates
 into a mere form, and our zeal into a sense-
 less passion, which is neither pleasing to God,
 nor profitable to ourselves. The same must
 be said with respect to the other graces he
 mentions, temperance, patience, godliness,
 and charity, which, everyone of them, to their
 sincerity, that is, their very being, requires
 the illumination of the understanding. For
 they do not consist in outward acts, but prin-
 cipally


SERM. cipally in the dispositions of the mind, form'd
 V. by just sentiments and a clear apprehension of
 the motives and the manner of acting. And
 as the being of every virtue depends upon
 knowledge, so doth every step of our pro-
 gress in it; we shall never grow in grace, in
 the favour of God, in which we only grow
 by an increase of the christian virtues, I say,
 we shall never grow in grace on another
 foundation than our growing in the know-
 ledge of our Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ**.
 When the apostle prays, † *that the hearts of*
christians might be comforted, being knit to-
gether in love, which is the perfection of com-
 fort and of virtue, as the foundation of it he
 prays, that they may *advance unto all riches*
of full assurance of understanding, to the ac-
knowledgment of the mystery of God the Father,
and of Christ. When therefore, we are ex-
 hortated, as in the text, to add to *faith* and
virtue, knowledge, the meaning is, that in
 order to our exercising all the christian virtues
 uniformly, and growing in all the parts of
 religion, we should constantly study to be
 more and more acquainted with them, to un-
 derstand the mind and will of God, and be
 making daily proficiency in the exact know-
 ledge of our duty.

* 2 Per. iii. 18. † Col. ii. 2.

One thing more is necessary to be added SERM.
 here, that whereas knowledge in it self, is V.
 not properly speaking the subject of an ex- }
 hortation, because the mind is wholly passive
 in it, as every one may be convinced by expe-
 rience; what we do know, we cannot help
 knowing; and it has no dependance upon our
 own choice; very disagreeable truths, espe-
 cially in religious matters, force themselves by
 their evidence on the understanding, and some
 there are in whom knowledge is so far from
 being commendable, that it greatly aggravates
 their guilt, because they detain the truth in
 unrighteousness, and are wicked in spite of
 the clearest conviction, to him *that knoweth*
to do good and doth it not, to him it is sin *.
 The wisest men, even the most understand-
 ing christians, come far short in knowledge
 of the devils themselves, who are supposed
 to be incurably wicked, and fix'd in their ob-
 stinate rebellion against God; therefore the
 meaning of the exhortation must be, that we
 should still use our own active endeavours
 that we may grow in knowledge, for the pur-
 poses of usefulness and goodness. *Wisdom en-*
ters into the heart by its being first pleasant to
the soul, as Solomon speaks †, and we make it

* James iv. 17. † Prov. ii. 10.

SERM. our choice, as the most precious treasure, preferring it to all the enjoyments of the earth ;

V.  when we esteem the merchandize of it better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain of it than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all things we can desire are not to be compar'd to her *. And when, therefore, we summon all the powers of our souls to attend a diligent and impartial enquiry ; in this it is that the virtue of knowledge consists, and this is the good disposition and the commendable practice which God approves, and so necessary to attain the measure of knowledge which is profitable to religious purposes, to the practice, and to the growth of every virtue.

Secondly, another thing which must be understood to be intended in this exhortation, is a disposition to improve knowledge to the proper practical ends of it. *If ye know these things* (saith our Saviour to his disciples) *happy are ye if ye do them †*. As light is pleasant to the eyes, so is knowledge to the mind ; but virtue is perfected in action ; our knowledge, therefore, is not to be mere speculation, to be dormant and unactive in the mind, nor to be sought with that view, but in order to use it to its true ends, that is, to

* Prov. iii. 14, 15. † John xiii. 17.

practise what we have discovered to be our duty. SERM. V.

But I propos'd in the 2d place to consider the reasonableness of our endeavouring to attain *knowledge*, and make daily progress in it. And this is, in a great measure, evident from what has been already said. If knowledge be absolutely necessary to our doing our duty acceptably, then all the arguments which press us to the one, the performing of our duty, do also oblige us to the other; that is, to use our constant sincere endeavours, that we may understand it. If our acceptance with God, and our eternal salvation depends on faith, and the fruits of it, virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, and charity, and none of these can possibly have a being, nor can we grow in them, without knowledge, I don't see that a greater necessity can be laid on any thing. It is true, the immediate moral obligation that lies upon men, is to practise what they know, and the most heinous kind of wickedness is to sin against knowledge; yet since the knowledge of the will of God is placed within our reach, and since he has indued us with capacities, and afforded us means in order to attain it, there must be an obligation on us to improve those capacities, and to use those means

SERM. means with sincerity and diligence; and to
 V. offend thro' ignorance, which is the effect of
 supine negligence, stupid inattention, and a
 disaffection to goodness, is very provoking to
 him.

But I hope I may use the apostle's expression in another case, *I speak as to wise men*, to men who have some knowledge of their duty, and who have it at heart by discharging it faithfully to approve themselves to God; and, therefore, are not to be press'd to lay again the very foundations of christianity, to acquaint themselves with the first principles of the oracles of God, the most fundamental truths of religion, but rather to go on to perfection, to be making continual progress in virtue, and in order to it, continual proficiency in knowledge. To which purpose I propose the following considerations.

First, that this is the way to be preserv'd from snares, of which we are always in danger thro' temptation and the deceitfulness of sin. There is not any thing a sincere christian is so solicitous about as maintaining his integrity, and making a successful stand against all temptations, that he do not fall into such wickedness as is inconsistent with sincerity and a good state towards God, and so commit sin as to be its servant.

servant. A multitude of occasions there are whereby he may be misled, a multitude of infirmities which St. *James* calls *the lusts of his own heart*, by which he is in danger of being *drawn away and inticed*. One of the best preservatives from this is religious knowledge; to have the understanding and the memory stored with divine Truths, so as readily to suggest what our duty is, what are the best and most powerful dissuatives from the evil or omission of duty we are tempted to. *David* says, * *he hid the word of God in his heart that he might not sin*: that is, he had it treasured up in his understanding, and always in his remembrance, that it might be produced for the direction of his life as every circumstance required. This is the antidote *Solomon* prescribes against ensnaring company, and the pernicious influence of corrupt example, than which nothing can be more dangerous †. *When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant to thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee, to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things.* And ‡ *My son keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother,*

* Psalm cxix. 11. † Prov. ii. 10, &c.

‡ Prov. vi. from verse 20.

(improve

SERM. (improve diligently the means of education
 V. and instruction) *bind them continually upon
 ~~~~~ thine heart, and tie them about thy neck,*  
 (that is, let thy mind be filled with them,  
 and turn thy thoughts always to them as the  
 best guide of thy ways.) *When thou goest, it*  
 (the commandment thus fix'd in the heart,  
 with understanding by instruction and me-  
 ditation) *shall lead thee, when thou sleepest*  
*it shall keep thee, and when thou awakest it*  
*shall talk with thee; for the commandment*  
*is a lamp, and the law is light, and the reproofs*  
*of instruction are the way of life to keep thee*  
*from evil.*

*Secondly,* In proportion to the measure of  
 our knowledge, so is our stedfastness; if it is  
 of a rational kind. It is *good to have the heart*  
*established with grace,* and a great unhappiness  
 to be always in a wavering and fluctuating  
 condition of mind, ready to be driven by  
 every wind. The apostle \* compares the  
 state of those who are so tossed to and fro,  
 to that of children; and children they are,  
 because of their small measure of understand-  
 ing. † *Brethren be not children in under-*  
*standing; howbeit in malice be you children,*  
*but in understanding be men.* It is much to

\* Eph. iv. 14.    † 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

be regretted that christians who have long professed the christian faith, and one would think made a considerable proficiency in religion, when, as the apostle says to the *Hebrews*, *for the time and the advantages they enjoy'd, they might have been teachers of others*, yet should be shaken with every wind and easily diverted from their duty; or unstable as water, and unresolv'd in it. And one great reason is, that they have not taken due care to improve their understandings; still like children, unskilful in the word of righteousness, not grown men, who by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

*Thirdly*, this unsteadiness, together with weakness of understanding, which is one cause of it, renders men in a great measure unprofitable to the world and to the church. There is not any thing a christian should have more at heart, that is more worthy of his character and the temper which his profession requires, than to promote the common edification of the body of Christ, of which he is a member, and to the interests whereof he is indispensably bound to have always a sacred regard. And that this may be effected, adding knowledge to our faith and virtue is the best expedient, as is plain from the


SERM. texts just now cited \*, in both which passages  
 V. the apostle is treating of the church, or the whole  
 number of Christ's followers, as a collective body; of the good offices which every christian should contribute for its edification, and the care all ought to take for avoiding every thing whereby it may be hindered: and there is not any thing which will be more effectual for promoting our usefulness than the encrease of our knowledge. One great occasion of the divisions among the primitive christians, was, the weakness of understanding which remained in many of them. I don't say it was so much the criminal cause of their dissensions and animosities as uncharitableness was, for they ought to have borne with each other's infirmities; but the *occasion* it was, whilst some were so weak as not to understand the nature and extent of their christian liberty, and others treated them with too much contempt on that account, hence arose strifes, and mutual censuring and judging one another, which it's true ought to have been prevented by charity *the bond of perfectness*, but at the same time might have been in a great measure prevented by a greater degree of knowledge. And as thus the weak-

\* Eph. iv. and 1 Cor. xiv.

ness of christians in understanding is hurtful to the church in general, and obstructs their usefulness to others. So, SERM.  
V.

In the next place, it is the unhappy occasion of much discomfort and perplexity to themselves. It produces endless scruples, and some degrees of superstition; imagining things to be good and evil, which really are neither, and placing religion in points wherein it does not consist. How difficult is it for a man who has very narrow notions about the lawfulness of things, and weakly fancies *that* to be either injoin'd or forbidden by the divine law, which is of no moment at all, which commendeth us not to God, *neither if we do it are we the better, nor if we forbear are we the worse*; how difficult, I say, is it for him to preserve an uninterrupted serenity and comfort in the approbation of his own mind, and according to the apostle's expression, *to be so happy as not to condemn himself in the thing that he alloweth?* Against all these evils and inconveniencies, an increase of true religious knowledge would be a good remedy. It would shew men the right way, make them useful in instructing and directing others, and enable them to go on steadily with confidence and resolution, according to our Sa-

SERM. viour's similitude, which he applies to some-

V.  what a different purpose\*, *If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; but if he walk in the night he stumbleth because he hath no light in him.* In fine, by all the necessity that lies upon us to go on to perfection in holiness, to a thorough habitual purity, and uprightness of mind, resembling the original sanctity of the divine nature, to an universal righteousness and goodness, to an established firmness and constancy in the christian profession and practice, to a prevailing integrity of intention, which shall direct the whole tenor of our life and actions, and to such confirm'd habits of religious virtue as shall make good works, the proper fruits of them, pleasant, easy, and in some sense natural; I say, by all the necessity that lies upon us to go on to perfection in holiness, we are urged to a persevering diligence that we may grow in knowledge, as the true and regular foundation of it; to *follow on to know the Lord*, as the prophet speaks †, *Then shall we know him.* Without this we may grow in the delusions and vanity of enthusiasm, we may grow in

\* John xi. 9, 10. † Hof. vi. 3.



superstition, in presumptuous confidence, we may embolden ourselves, and edify one another in sin, for St. *Paul* speaks of such edification \*, but we cannot grow in zeal and pure religion. I shall conclude this head with the excellent words of *Solomon*, which show the great advantage of religious knowledge †. *My Son eat thou honey because it is good, and the honey-comb which is sweet to thy taste, so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul, when thou hast found it there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.*

I am in the *Third* place to propose some directions for our attaining useful and salutary knowledge; and the *first* is, a high esteem of it. If it be pleasant to our souls, if we have a just sense of its excellency, and thus our affections are captivated to it; it is the best preparation of mind we can have for this most important acquisition. *Solomon*, therefore, in the beginning of his book of *Proverbs* enlarges so much on the dignity and excellence of wisdom, that he may engage men to fall in love with it, and that from so just a principle they may be determined to the constant

\* 1 Cor. viii. 10.

† Prov. xxiv. 13, 14.

SERM. and diligent pursuit of it. He would have  
 V. us above all things solicitous to acquire the  
 knowledge of the holy; to regard the riches, honours, and every kind of sensible enjoyment, as but trifles in comparison. He represents wisdom as the principal thing; its instructions are right; they have an innate beauty and rectitude, a transcendent worth which commands the approbation and respect of every attentive intelligent being; there is a dignity in them which whenever we turn our thoughts to it, strikes the mind with veneration and esteem. Other things which possess the affections of carnal and worldly men when set against it, appear to be of no worth at all. The merchandize of silver, the gain of gold, and the price of rubies, or indeed whatever we can desire in this world, is but low and mean, does not fill the capacity of the soul, nor satisfy its large desires, and is but of a perishing nature and momentary duration. When men are got thoroughly into this way of thinking (and a serious attention will not fail of bringing them to it) and when the love of wisdom is the ruling affection in the soul, those things which to fordid, earthly and sensual spirits, appear mysterious, will become familiar; or what others

others look on with indifference and neglect, they will see a real, a transcendent beauty and glory in; a hunger and thirst after it, an ardent desire to this most amiable form, will overcome all difficulties; and wisdom will be found of them that thus seek her early, and with the most earnest intention of mind; \* *through desire a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.* In pursuance of this, SERM.  
V.

*Secondly*, let us use the means of attaining knowledge with great diligence and care. There is no other way to prove our sincerity and our love of wisdom. Let a man profess what he will, we shall never believe him to be intent upon obtaining any end, whilst he neglects the means which he knows, and has the opportunity of using. Let us, therefore, labour for it assiduously, and as *Job* expresses the longing desire and solicitude of the miserable for the grave, *dig for it as for hid treasures*. Now, the principal means to us christians are the scriptures, in which God, has given a compleat revelation of his will, and them we ought constantly to search. The *Psalmist* has given us an excellent exam-

\* Prov. xviii. 1.

SERM. ple, he meditated in the law of God, day and  
 V. night; he studied it with care, and to that  
 and his practising what it enjoins, he attributed all his attainments in wisdom. \* O! how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day. Thou thro' thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. And again, † How sweet are thy words to my taste? yea sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy precepts I get understanding. That revelation which David enjoyed the advantages of, though imperfect in comparison of the later and better one God has vouchsafed to us in these last ages of the world, by his Son, the most excellent messenger from heaven, who has declared the Father and his will to mankind, yet was so instructive to him, that we see he speaks of it as matter of his highest delight. It is of the same scripture St. Paul speaks, when he says, ‡ that Timothy from a child had known the holy scriptures, which were able to make

\* Psal. cxix. 97.

† Ibid. verse 103.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

him wise unto salvation. Much more is the New Testament the doctrine of Christ, which himself calls, *a fountain of living water*, our sure guide to all necessary truths and he who searches and enquires into it carefully, and without prejudice, shall have that salutary knowledge which shall be *a well of water in him springing up to everlasting life*.

But, *thirdly*, it is above all things necessary, that we use the means of knowledge, and particularly the last mentioned, namely, that we search the holy scriptures without prejudice and prepossession. If we suffer our minds to be under any bias, and corrupt inclinations, or worldly interests to get into our religious counsels, and influence our enquiries; or if we give up ourselves implicitly to the direction of human authority, in matters of faith and conscience, this is not the way to attain to the knowledge of truth, but to imbibe error, to be overwhelmed with thick darkness, and to run into superstition and a contentious party-zeal, instead of rational piety, meekness and charity, which are *pure and undefiled religion before God the Father*. And, besides an unprejudiced search of the scriptures, after the example of the generous Bereans,

SERM.

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SERM. *Bereans*, so highly applauded by *St. Paul*,  
 V. every man ought to attend to the candle of the  
 Lord within him; I mean, those original notices of truth, of the divine perfections, and the essential differences of moral good and evil, which are deeply engraven on our minds. These are the standards by which all pretences to divine revelation are to be tried, and nothing can be reasonably embraced as a doctrine from God which contradicts them, there being no evidence of any heavenly commission to teach religious truth equal to that irresistible evidence which the light of nature gives us of those first principles of reason and natural religion. If this rule had been duly considered, men could not have been led by any authority whatsoever to embrace such absurdities as transubstantiation, and that sinners may make atonement for their sins by voluntary sufferings and superstitious external devotions.

*Lastly*, the best means of attaining to religious knowledge, is, doing what we know to be the will of God. The efficacy and success of this means rests upon the promise of our Saviour, \* *If any man will do his* (God's

\* Jo. vii. 17.

will,) he shall know the doctrine which is of God; not that he shall be infallible in all points, or set above the possibility of error or ignorance in matters of religion; but he shall certainly know what is absolutely necessary to be known, and be preserv'd from pernicious mistakes. But this is the fatal cause of unbelief, either of the whole gospel doctrine, or some of its most important articles which have the most direct and immediate influence on practice, this, I say, is the cause of such unbelief, and of condemnation for it, *that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.* The greatest hinderance of men's attaining the knowledge of the truth in matters of religion, is a vicious disposition; the prevalence of evil habits and strong predominant lusts and passions, which blind their understandings. Above all others, the scorner, tho' he take some pains in seeking wisdom, shall not find it; and the sensual debauch'd man cannot discern the things of God, which are spiritually discerned; but if the eye of the mind be single, not vitiated with corrupt affections, with the love of the world, and the things of the world, the whole man is full of light; for as the natural eye is fitted

to

SERM.  
V.

SERM. to discern light and colours, and the ear perceive sounds, so the upright unbiaſſed judgment discovers the doctrines of truth; they are an object connatural to it, and our Saviour tells us, that *his ſheep*, that is, his true diſciples, who are ſincerely diſpoſed to follow him, *know his voice*, and can diſtinguiſh between it and the voice of ſtrangers; that is, the voice of error. I conclude with that gracious declaration God has made in favour of his upright ſervants, \* *The ſecret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will ſhew them his covenant.*

\* Pf. xxv. 14.




# S E R M O N VI.

## Of Temperance.

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2 Pet. i. 6.

— *And to Knowledge, Temperance.* —

**A**LL men who have had any just sense SERM.  
of morality and religion, whether by VI.  
the light of nature, or by positive   
instituition, have numbered temperance among  
the most necessary virtues; by which they  
understand such a due government of our ap-  
petites and passions, as that we may not be  
led by them into those excesses which are un-  
becoming the dignity of our reasonable na-  
ture, or which may interfere with our duty  
in any other respect.

Every one is sensible that man is a com-  
pounded being, made up not only of the gross  
corporeal part, which we call our own body,  
by the organs whereof, we perceive other ob-  
jects about us, and which is moved according to  
the

SERM. the direction of the mind ; but there is also  
 VI. in our constitution an inward self-conscious  
 principle, indued with understanding and  
 other powers, which will not admit of matter  
 or any of its qualities into the idea of them :  
 We find in ourselves a great variety of capacities  
 and affections which have very different ten-  
 dencies, such as, *reason*, a power of perceiv-  
 ing and investigating truth, of comparing  
 things in order to discover their various rela-  
 tions, connection, and dependencies, their  
 agreement or disagreement. We have *liberty*,  
 a power of chusing or determining ourselves ;  
 we have appetites, which incline us to sensible  
 objects suitable to the body, or the present  
 animal state ; affections to other beings, ac-  
 cording to the qualities or motives of affec-  
 tion which are apprehended to be in them.  
 And *Conscience*, a power of judging our-  
 selves, our own dispositions and actions ac-  
 cording to the differences of moral good and  
 evil, which our minds as necessarily perceive  
 as we distinguish light and darkness by our  
 eyes, or sweet and bitter by our taste.

Since there is such a variety in our compo-  
 sition, there must be some government, else  
 there can be no harmony, nor, indeed, happi-  
 ness. It cannot be that every power should  
 exert

exert itself to the full, and every affection and inclination be gratified without restraint; for they must necessarily interfere, as their tendencies in some instances are directly opposite to each other. Now, it is impossible for any one who attends to his own frame not to be convinced, that reason and conscience ought to rule in him; these are the powers which are fitted to have authority and to controul the inferior appetites and passions; then all things move in their proper spheres and the ends of our being are regularly pursued. Other animals who have the same appetites, and the same pleasure of the external senses, without any moral capacities, pursue those gratifications without restraint and without reproach. But mankind are universally conscious of a higher principle and a higher rule of action, and that a licentious indulgence of their appetites is unworthy of the prerogatives of their nature; for scarcely are any of them so abandoned as not to be ashamed of it, and affect to conceal it, as contrary to honesty and decency.

It is from this origin, that the moralists very rationally deduce the obligation of temperance, or sobriety, which in its utmost latitude, and according to the most comprehensive

SERM. hensive division of the vertues, takes in the  
 VI. government of all our selfish affections and  
 passions; it includes humility, modesty, chastity, and what is more strictly call'd temperance or moderation in the desire, and in the use of meat and drink. There is no one so ignorant or so stupidly vicious as not to acknowledge, if he considers at all, that it is excellent and praise-worthy for a man in all these instances mentioned to preserve the superiority and freedom of his own mind, to have the dominion over his lower affections and passions, or to speak in the language of the scripture, to follow the direction of the *Law in the mind*, rather than that of the *members*; or of *the spirit*, rather than that of *the flesh, and its lusts which war against the soul*.

It would seem reasonable in this text to understand temperance in a large extent, because the apostle here gives an abridgment of practical christianity, of which the government of all our sensual affections and passions is an important part, not contain'd in any other branch of our duty which he mentions; only, that restraining the *fear of man which brings a snare*, is imported in virtue, or religious fortitude; and patience implies suppressing

pressing immoderate sorrow and dejection of mind on account of the calamities of life ; but the due regulation of our desires towards outward enjoyments in the whole compass of them, which is a very comprehensive christian virtue, seems to be by the apostle comprehended in temperance. I shall, therefore, endeavour, in the *first* place, to explain this virtue ; and then propose some motives to the practice of it, these especially, which are insisted on in the gospel.

The virtue itself, and wherein it consists, will be easily understood by any one who attends to the present constitution of human nature and what our experience will obviously suggest to us. The Author of our being has planted in us desires towards those objects which are necessary to the preservation and conveniency of life, and passions which excite us to such action as is useful for our own safety ; and herein his wisdom and goodness appears, making provision for the continuance, the comfort, and all the purposes of our existence in this world. But, as the highest ends of our being are not confined to the present state, and the same wise Creator has indued us with nobler powers and affections, by which we are determined to the



SERM. VI.

SERM. pursuit of more excellent objects, wherein our  
 VI. true perfection and happiness consists; it is  
 plain these inferior appetites were ordained to  
 be in subjection to reason, and to be gratified  
 within such limits as to be consistent with su-  
 perior enjoyments, and with the proper exer-  
 tion of superior powers. What St. *James*  
 teaches us on this subject is very evident,  
 \* *that every man is tempted when he is drawn  
 away of his own lust and enticed; for when  
 lust conceiveth it bringeth forth sin.* The  
 tendency of the *carnal mind* is to debauchery  
 and luxury, the excesses directly contrary to  
 the virtue of temperance, and therefore, the  
 sensual affections ought to be always so re-  
 strained as to avoid those extremes. Not  
 only so, but all those immoderate cares, even  
 about lawful enjoyments, which dissipate the  
 vigour of the mind, which distract and per-  
 plex, or any way render it unfit for its duty,  
 or for that temper which it ought to have in  
 expectation of *Christ's* coming to judgment;  
 for thus our Saviour warns his disciples,  
 † *Take heed lest at any time your hearts be  
 overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness,  
 and cares of this life, and so that day come  
 upon you unawares.*

\* James i. 14, 15

† Luke xxi. 34.

To consider this subject a little more particularly ; in the *first* place, it is plain, that sobriety, or temperance, does not require the rooting out, or an obstinate refusal to satisfy or comply with the original appetites of nature. Such an attempt, in itself an apparent absurdity, so far from having any virtue in it, would be a rebellion against the law of our creation, and an endeavour to destroy the work of God. The correspondent relation between appetites and objects is as much a part of the divine constitution, and as clearly shows the use to be made of those objects, as any other relations of things in the frame of nature shew the wisdom of God and the purposes they were made for. It is evident likewise, that the first motions of natural appetite toward its proper objects are not criminal. Who can say it is a sin for a man to hunger or thirst, that is, to desire the objects which these appetites determine him to ? and if these be what St. *James* means by the *conceptions of lust*, in the place already referred to, they certainly are not sinful, though they may be the inlets and occasions of sin or temptations. I say, they are not sinful, for they are the necessary result of our constitution, and they prevent all deliberation and consent of the mind, with-

SERM. out which there can be no sin. God will  
 VI. not impute that to any man as guilt, which  
 he could not possibly avoid, and in which he  
 did not act voluntarily.

But, *Secondly*, on the other hand, temperance requires such a regulation and restraint of our desires towards sensible objects, or the pleasure of the external senses, that they shall not possess that room in our esteem and affections which is due to things of vastly greater excellence and value. They are not our chief good, nor ever ought to be desired and pursued as such. The soul of man was made for higher enjoyments, the favour of God, the *seeing of his face in righteousness*, so contemplating his moral perfections as to be transformed into the likeness of them; these alone can fill up its vast capacity, are an object suitable to its noble powers, an happiness adequate to its large desires and endless duration. Yet so degenerate are the spirits of some men become, thro' inconsideration and a stupid indulgence of their sensual appetites, that, as the scripture speaks, they are *altogether flesh*, like *natural brute beasts*, according to the expression of the apostles *St. Peter* and *St. Jude*, having lost all relish of those  
 in-



infinitely superior objects for the enjoyment of <sup>SERM.</sup> which the Author of nature intended them. <sup>VI.</sup>

The apostle *Paul* speaks of some, and even of those who made a religious profession, and pretended great zeal for it, *whose god is their belly* \*: probably of the same persons it is that he says, † *that they serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies*. That is, whatever respect they might profess for christianity, whether they were of the principles and way of the *gnostics*, or the false apostles who contended for the necessity of circumcision and the Jewish ceremonies; at bottom, their design was only to draw disciples after them, to make gain of their pretended godliness, and to live voluptuously. But, what a monstrous appearance does such a creature make in the universe? and how is the order of nature revers'd in a man in whom the sensual affections are uppermost, and the objects of them got into the place of God, to possess the supremacy of the heart, to be superlatively loved and adored, and all things, even conscience itself, sacrificed to their service?

But it is very hard to fix a conviction of this guilt upon men, and such is the deceitfulness of sin, few will be sensible of it though

\* Phil. iii. 19.

† Rom. xvi. 18.

SERM. they are really guilty. The true test to which  
 VI. they should bring their tempers and dispositions, is, their practice. Temperance forbids excesses of sensuality, debaucheries and riotous living, such as the apostle speaks of\*, when he describes the way and the will of the Gentiles, by walking *in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings*. These things need not be particularly mentioned, every one knows what are the extremes of the *lusts of uncleanness, luxury, gluttony and drunkenness*, against which the scripture so often warns christians, and assures them, *that for the sake of such things the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience*; particularly, it forbids such an immoderate use of sensual enjoyments, and such an habitual indulgence of sensual desires to weaken the powers of the mind, and indispose them for their proper functions. That this is the effect of luxury and intemperance daily experience shews; the depriving men of the use of their reason, by transporting them into madness, or sinking them into a brutish stupidity, is a gross instance, most reproachful to human nature; and yet to such a height of wickedness are some arrived, as to make a mock of that scan-

\* 1 Pet. iv. 3.

dalous sin, to consider it as a matter of indifference or even innocence in themselves, to divert themselves with beastly symptoms of it in others, and glory in their ability to out-do their companions in excess, which is indeed to *glory in their shame*. But the prophet denounces a woe to them *who are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink* \*. Temperance not only forbids all excesses of this kind, but requires such an habitual moderation, that the freedom of the mind may be preserved, its powers in a constant readiness for better, even for rational and virtuous exercises, and that it may have a taste for intellectual and moral pleasures. The natural and necessary effect of a customary indulgence to carnal desires is a confirm'd habit, which increases the desire so as it prevails against better inclinations; and then experience shews the truth of what the apostle teaches, *that fleshly lusts war against the soul*; they tend to enervate its powers, impair its liberty, and *bring it into bondage*. How often do we see men, otherwise virtuous and well disposed, by accustoming themselves to gratifications which may be esteemed innocent, at least not vicious, get into such an habit, that

\* Isa. v. 22.

SERM. they cannot be easy, nor enjoy themselves  
 VI. without the usual entertainment at the re-  
 turning season, even though the interests of  
 virtue and religion, or the most important  
 affairs of life call them to be otherwise em-  
 ploy'd? nay, and the health, as well as the  
 heart, is overcharged with surfeiting, the pow-  
 ers of nature are overloaded with sensual en-  
 joyments, and indisposed for their proper  
 functions, which certainly is the effect and  
 sign of intemperance; an offence against na-  
 ture, which wisely appointed nourishment to  
 repair the daily wastes of the body, and pre-  
 serve its organs in an aptness to minister to the  
 proper offices of life. To eat and drink ha-  
 bitually without a view and subordination to  
 the proper ends, is to be guilty of intempe-  
 rance. It is not to eat and drink, as the apostle  
 directs, *to the glory of God*, that is, to the  
 purposes of religion and virtue. *Solomon* pro-  
 nounces *a land happy, when princes eat in  
 due season for strength, and not for drunken-  
 ness or luxury*\*; and the virtue is the same  
 in all stations of life: but it is yet more cri-  
 minal to eat and drink, or indulge any sen-  
 sual appetite, so as to impair health, to ren-  
 der the body dull and inactive, instead of pre-


\* Eccles. x. 17.

ſerving it in a condition for honeſt induſtry, and for virtuous and uſeful employments.

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To conclude this explication, I obſerve, that ſobriety, as all other virtues, is ſeated in the mind. The appetites take their riſe from the body, but the regulating and reſtraining them belongs to the higher faculties of the ſoul. It is in the ſuperiority of the ſoul in its freedom, and in the dominion of reaſon and conſcience over the lower deſires and paſſions that the virtue chiefly conſiſts. Still I know not how it comes to paſs, though the other branches of religion are acknowledged to lie in the heart, a man, for inſtance, is not accounted pious for mere external acts of devotion, without ſuppoſing him inwardly a fearer of God, yet he paſſes for ſober and temperate by the mere outward regularity of his life, and by an abſtinance from the groſſer acts of debauchery and ſenſual wickedneſs in his converſation. Let us not however ſo judge of ourſelves, but principally and with the greateſt exactneſs obſerve the inward diſpoſitions of our minds. If a man by any outward neceſſity, or by a regard to worldly conſiderations, is led to preſerve an outward decorum in his behaviour, and to abſtain from diſſolute and vicious courſes, yet unleſs his affections be ſet  
not

SERM. not on things on the earth, not on the pleasures and cares of life, but *the things above*,

VI.  on holiness, on the perfection of righteousness and innocence in the heavenly state, unless, I say, it be so, he has not attained to the christian virtue of temperance; in order to which it is necessary that *we mortify the deeds of the body, and crucify the flesh with its lusts and affections*. Some indeed have run into the extremum of voluntary severities, fastings and abstinences, with other things of like nature, in which they place religion, which, as the apostle says \*, *have indeed a shew of wisdom and humility, and neglecting the body*; but the error lies in a fond imagination that such uncommanded austerities please God, and make atonement for sin : whereas he is a most beneficent Being, who delights in the happiness of his creatures, especially in the prosperity of his servants ; he imposes no arbitrary hardships upon them, nor requires them to impose any upon themselves, or to exercise any discipline over their bodies with their appetites and passions, but such only as may minister to the purposes of virtue, which is their greatest felicity. He allows them the free use of his creatures, which the scripture

\* Col. ii. 23.

declares

declares *to be all good, and none of them to be refused, if received with thanksgiving, and improved to good ends,* preserving still a good and ingenuous temper of mind, with vigorous affections to the best objects, and not brought under the power of any thing in this world. SERM. VI.

I come now in the second place to propose some motives to sobriety and temperance; and tho' what I intend chiefly to insist upon, are those considerations which the gospel contains, yet we ought not to pass over the arguments which reason itself suggests. Indeed the inspired writers themselves do not neglect them; the apostle *St. Paul*\* exhorts christians *to think on whatever things are true, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise,* which in effect is an appeal to the common sense of mankind concerning the amiableness and excellence of virtue. This particular virtue of temperance stands upon the same foot with the rest, and is like them recommended by its own native beauty and intrinsic worth, which at first strikes any mind which attends to it. It is impossible for any one,

\* Phil. iv. 8.

SERM. upon a deliberate comparison, not to acknowledge in his heart, that the sober man is more excellent than his neighbour who is intemperate? that it is a more lovely character and more worthy of the human nature to have the rule over one's own spirit, to keep a steady discipline over the appetites and passions, and have them in due subjection, which spreads a decency and regularity over the whole behaviour, and preserves a man always in a preparation for the most important affairs, and all the proper offices of a religious, virtuous, and social life; that this, I say, is a more lovely character than to live in luxury and carnal pleasures, and so *to be dead while one lives*, as the apostle speaks. We look down with contempt on the brutal kinds which have no higher principles of action than appetites, and therefore indulge them without any reproach. But is it not melancholy to see men voluntarily turn themselves *into natural brute beasts*, according to St. *Jude's* expression, to see the glory of humanity so dismally reversed, that the beast rules over the man, and the understanding no otherwise used than if it was made for no other purpose than to be a slave to the appetites and passions, and to serve them? One would think that a just resentment



ment of such indignity to the honour of their species, and a regard to the prerogatives of their being, might rouse the most voluptuous of mankind out of their reproachful stupidity, that it might engage them to shake off the inglorious yoke, and restore the sovereignty of reason, which is their true glory.

Besides, intemperance naturally tends to make life not only mean and contemptible, but miserable. Perhaps vicious men will not be convinced that they deprive themselves of the truest and most substantial pleasures, those of the mind, which arise from the practice of virtue and the approbation of conscience. But, this at least one would think should affect them, that their vices are accompanied with many outward inconveniencies, that they bring on mortal diseases, grievous pains and sufferings, poverty and disgrace in this world; so that upon a fair computation of the loss and gain of temperance and intemperance, judgment must be given for the former; and it will appear that to live soberly, is the way to live happily, even abstracting from the consideration of a future state. *Solomon* in the book of *Proverbs*, among many other useful observations on human life, insists largely on the unhappy present effect of debauchery;


he

SERM.  
VI.

SERM. he says \*, *The end of it is bitter as wormwood,*

VI. *and sharp as a two-edged sword; that the feet of the prostitute go down to death, and her steps take hold on hell.* Therefore he affectionately warns simple men, as he calls them, to avoid such wickedness, lest they give their honour to others, and their years to the cruel, lest strangers be filled with their wealth, and their labours be in the house of strangers, and they mourn at last, when their flesh and body are consumed. And † he represents the sottish infatuated debauchee going on in the way of temptation, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks: till a dart strike thro his liver. As a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. Therefore, says he, *bearken to me, O! ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth; let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths, for she hath cast down many wounded, yea many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.* Of intemperance in the stricter sense that author thus speaks, and in a lively manner thus describes its unhappy effects ||, *Who hath woe? Who hath*

\* Prov. v. 4. † Ib. vii. 22. || Ib. xxiii. 29.

*forrow? Who hath contention? Who hath bab-* <sup>SERM.</sup>  
*bling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who* <sup>VI.</sup>  
*hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at*   
*the wine, that go to seek mix'd wine; look not*  
*thou upon the wine when it is red, when it*  
*giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth*  
*itself aright; at the last it biteth like a ser-*  
*pent, and stingeth like an adder.* Besides, such  
 sensual excesses destroy the very end of them,  
 and mar that pleasure they are intended to  
 yield. Men, by an habitual immoderate in-  
 dulgence of their appetites may increase the  
 uneasiness of desire, which is itself an unhap-  
 piness; but they abate rather than increase the  
 satisfaction which arises from sensible enjoy-  
 ments, which comes purer and stronger, as  
 well as with more innocence, to the tempe-  
 rate person, whose appetite is not palled by  
 an immoderate fruition. Such arguments,  
 and many more, reason and experience will  
 suggest to any attentive person.

But, I intended principally to insist on  
 these considerations which are contained in  
 the gospel. It deserves the serious attention  
 of christians, that the blessed Author of our  
 religion himself, and his apostles after him, very  
 frequently and earnestly inculcate this virtue.

Our

SERM. Our Saviour in his parables and other discourses, often shews men the absolute necessity of restraining and governing their appetites and desire of present enjoyments, that they may *enter into his kingdom*, that they may be his approved faithful subjects and servants, and be intitled to the final reward he has promised. This is in effect what we are to understand by self-denial, which he recommends by the figurative expressions of *plucking out the eye, and cutting off the hand*, and other such representations of our duty, which import offering violence to ourselves; but really mean the virtue of temperance, curbing our inclinations, peremptorily refusing to comply with those which are vicious, and so retrenching our affections to lawful things, that they may not grow exorbitant, and mislead us into evil: I say, they really mean the virtue of temperance described in a way which is accommodated to the corrupt state of mankind, in which prevailing ill customs and habits of sensuality have rendered reformation so difficult, that it is aptly expressed by *crucifying the flesh, with the lusts and affections thereof*. The apostles likewise urge temperance on christians with great earnestness. They denounce the wrath and  
 Judgment

judgments of God against intemperance, as well as other sins, and tells us, that \* adulterers, fornicators and drunkards, no more than the idolaters and the unjust, shall not inherit the kingdom of God; that if † we live after the flesh we shall die; and, for the sake of such crimes, the wrath of God cometh on the children of || disobedience, or of unbelief. These vices, therefore, are a direct rebellion against the gospel, and will be punished as such. They are the works of the Gentiles, or of *the world that lieth in wickedness*; and when christians are guilty of them they involve themselves in the sin and condemnation of unbelievers; *for that when light is come into the world, they loved darkness rather than it, because their deeds are evil.*

Let it never enter into our thoughts, that great professions of respect to him and zeal for his truth, will please our Lord Jesus Christ, or pretended faith in him, if we continue in carnal impurity, and live after the flesh. The fornicator is as obnoxious to the displeasure of God as the profane person; and our Saviour himself expressly tells us ‡, he will at the last day utterly reject the pretences of

\* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. † Rom. viii. 13. || Eph. v. 6.  
‡ Mat. vii. 22.

SERM. those who profess great respect to him, and  
 VI. call him Lord, if they have impenitently con-  
 tinued workers of iniquity; nay, if they  
 should be able to say, *we have professed in  
 thy name, and cast out devils, and done many  
 wonderful works; yet he will profess unto  
 them, I never knew you; that is, I never*  
 approved and acknowledged you as my true  
 disciples; for, *not every one that saith unto  
 me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the king-  
 dom of heaven, but he that doth the will  
 of my father which is in heaven.* Which will  
 is the law of eternal righteousness and virtue,  
 comprehending the duties of sobriety and  
 temperance, as well as of piety and benevo-  
 lence.


It is the peculiar glory of the christian religion that God has given his holy Spirit to confirm the truth, to inspire the first teachers of it, and incline and assist men to obey its precepts. It is therefore called the ministration of the spirit. The virtues it prescribes are the fruits of the spirit; and the vices contrary to them are peculiarly aggravated as they are trespasses against that divine instructor. The apostle expressly teaches us \* that

\* Gal. iii. v. 20

temperance is one of the *fruits of the spirit*, a virtue which the *law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus* is intended to form in men, and the indulging of sensual appetites grieves the *Holy Spirit whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption*. He exhorts us in this manner \*, *Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the spirit*. For that person who abandons himself to impurity and criminal excesses is not a fit temple for the Holy Ghost, or as the apostle elsewhere speaks, *an habitation of God thro' the spirit*.

But there are two arguments which you will find particularly and often urged in the New Testament, one is taken from the circumstances of our present state compared with the future. The *second* is, that temperance is an excellent preservative from snares and temptations. The *first*, I say, is taken from the circumstances of our present state compared with the future. Our condition in this world is represented by the sacred writers as very short and uncertain, and experience shews it to be so. *Here we have no continuing city, but we look for one whose builder and maker is God*. Now, this con-

\* Eph. v. 18.

SERM. VI.  sideration, *that the time is short*, the apostle expressly uses as an argument for moderating our affections to present enjoyments \*. How unreasonable is it that men should eagerly pursue those gratifications which are of a perishing nature and momentary duration, which must quickly depart from them, and be lost for ever? If men will at all use their reason in the choice of happiness, should they not value that most which is of the longest duration? But the gratifications of sense, as they perish with the using, leave no abiding enjoyment, nor any comfortable reflexion, so the utmost possibility of possessing them reaches but to a very short time. *Meats for the belly and the belly for meats* †. There is an established relation between them for the purposes of this animal state, but it is of a short continuance, for as the apostle adds, *God shall destroy both them and it*. And this shall be succeeded by another unchangeable and eternal condition of existence, in which there shall be no use of meats and drinks, nor any thing of a parallel kind which belongs to *flesh and blood*, the present animal constitution; there shall, I say, be no use of them, nor any appetites for them.

\* 1 Cor. vii. 29.

† 1 Cor. vi. 13.



It is therefore apparently foolish and unworthy of men to be very solicitous about such short-lived enjoyments: rather, as the apostle argues, \* *since the end of all things is at hand, we ought to be sober and temperate; moderate in our desires to the pleasures of life, and cultivate our affections, to enjoy as far as we now can, and make our title sure to that happiness which shall endure for ever.* Would any one that has the serious expectation of a future judgment, seek with anxiety *what to eat and drink, wherewith to be clothed,* or any other enjoyment in life which he knows will then be of no use to him? Rather, according to our Lord's advice to his disciples, we should *take heed, lest at any time our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of life, and so that day come on us unawares †;* the day he means, probably, is the destruction of *Jerusalem*, but the argument holds as well universally with respect to the last judgment, or the day of death, which fixes every man in an unchangeable state. Another part of the argument is, that the expectation of an infinitely greater felicity should abate our de-

\* 1 Pet. iv. 7.

† Luke xxi. 34.

SERM. fires to those things which are but mean in  
VI. comparison as well as momentary. This

St. Peter urges \*, *Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds, be sober, and hope unto the end, for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The second argument is, that temperance or sobriety is a good preservative from snares and temptations; therefore is it so often recommended in conjunction with vigilance, as † *let us not sleep as do others, but watch and be sober.* And, || *Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* The most prevailing and dangerous temptations are those which excite the love of the world, the lusts of the flesh, and the eyes, and the pride of life; and therefore the best defence against them must be an habitual temperance or moderation of our desires towards these objects.

As we make a very solemn profession of christianity, nothing is more necessary for us than to guard against temptations whereby we may be in danger of being drawn away

\* 1 Pet. i. 13. † 1 Thes. v. 6. || 1 Pet. v. 8.



and enticed to sin, and to fall away from our stedfastness. No instruction can be more suitable, no duty more properly inculcated than sobriety; by it temptations will be most successfully defeated, for the root and foundation of them is taken away when our affections to the things of the world are mortified. The fruits of this virtue in our conversation will be very ornamental to the christian profession, and the exercise of it in our hearts will yield great inward peace and confidence towards our Lord Jesus Christ at his appearing. There cannot be a more necessary qualification for running successfully our religious race, as the apostle calls it \*, for as he adds in the verse following, *Every man that striveth for mastery is temperate in all things*, referring to the discipline, particularly the regular abstinence used by the candidates for a crown at the antient game celebrated in *Corinth*. Now, says he, *they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we christians have a higher prospect, and we use temperance, in order to obtain an incorruptible crown*; let us therefore, imitate the example of the apostle, who in the same context, and on the occasion

\* 1 Cor. ix. 24.

SERM. already mentioned, says thus of himself, *I so*  
 VI. *run, not as uncertainly, and so fight, not as*  
 ~~~~~ *one that beats the air; but I keep under my*  
body and bring it into subjection; I exercise
 such a discipline over my appetites as to establish the dominion of my mind, and to be always in a disposition for the works of virtue and charity. Nay, it is plain, from the account he gives in that chapter and elsewhere, that he laid restraints upon himself in the use even of things lawful, that he might so exercise his liberty, as to do what appeared most expedient, that is, what, all circumstances considered, might contribute most to promote the honour and interest of religion, and the good of his fellow-christians. I am afraid the precedent may be thought improper when men have got into a taste of life very different from his; and false notions of grandeur, politeness, and even decency, have so heightened the desire of delicacy in living, that it is look'd upon as a high pitch of virtue, to keep within the bounds of lawfulness itself. But, at least it will be allowed, such generous self-denial was highly commendable, and then it may be hoped that some christians will be inclined to imitate it by a resolved

solved denying of their own inclinations, even SERM.
in things not absolutely sinful, which if prac- VI.
tised, not superstitiously, but purely for the
purposes of virtue, would produce happy
effects in the confirmed freedom and tran-
quility of their own minds, and a *readiness*
for every good work.

SERMON VII.

Of Patience.

2 Pet. i. 6.

—*And to Temperance, Patience.*—

SERM.
VII.
~~~~~

**T**HE condition of the christian Jews to whom this epistle is directed, scattered abroad, and under persecution, made it very necessary they should be instructed in the virtue of patience, or of bearing affliction with equanimity and resignation to the will of God : The apostle therefore, in this abridgment of practical christianity, does not omit that most important part, which tho' their circumstances particularly required it, yet is of general use in the christian life. For this is a state of discipline, and God has given to all men *some measure of travail and grief, as their portion under the sun.* Job pronounces universally concerning men that afflictions are natural to them, *man is of few days*

days and full of trouble, he is born to it as the SERM.  
*sparks fly upward*; we meet with it every VII.  
 day, and almost in every circumstance of life, though upon a general estimate of our condition, it is overbalanced with good; and we are not left without many undeniable witnesses of the divine mercy, yet our trials are various, and the pressure of them so great, that any religious institution might well be reckoned defective, if it did not teach us how to bear them.

The apostle very properly adds *patience* to temperance, which is the foundation of it. It is the prevalence of carnal appetites and worldly affections that makes affliction so painful to us. It is on these affections that the calamities of life bear so hard, and upon them they make so sensible and deep impressions. Poverty and reproach, and hard labour and disappointments, would not be so galling and so uneasy as they are, were it not for the excess of our desires (which temperance ought to correct) to riches, honour, ease, and other present enjoyments. Therefore, the man who has learned to live soberly, to moderate his appetites and passions, to contain them within due bounds, to think meanly of the objects of them, and treat them with

SERM. indifference and neglect, has made good advances towards patience, and it will naturally be added to his temperance.

Let me observe this farther by way of introduction, that the virtue which is the subject of my present discourse, is very much celebrated by the sacred writers of the New Testament; scarcely will we meet with any description of the essence of christianity, or the necessary preparation for heaven, which doth not expressly take it in, as it is always understood. \* *That ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises*; where you see it is joined with faith, as of equal necessity, and declared to be the way by which the saints attain to the inheritance of the promises; † St. *John* describes himself as the brother of christians, to whom he writes, and *their companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*; which shews that patience is a necessary qualification of Christ's faithful subjects, and without it we cannot be in his kingdom. Especially the doctrine of St. *James* on this point is very clear, || *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* It

\* Heb. vi. 12. † Rev. i. 9. || Jam. i. 4.



is such an important branch of religious perfection, that it is evident where it is not attained, there is something essential wanting to the integrity of the christian character.

Patience, generally, is understood in so strict a sense as to relate only to afflictions. That virtue whereby we bear our adversities with a religious equanimity and chearful submission to the will of God; that calmness, contentment, and all those dutiful affections and becoming behaviour under trials, which he requires: but we will find that the scripture uses it in a larger extent, and applies it to our doing our duty, as well as bearing the cross; to our expectations of a future distant reward, as well as enduring the calamities which attend our expecting state. Thus, \* Patience is the character of well-doing, and of a persevering continuance in it. And our Saviour, in his parable of the sower †, thus explains the similitude of the good ground, *they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.* So that in an active life, fruitful in the works of righteousness, this virtue is a necessary ingredient. If we consider the commands of Christ in that light

\* Rom. ii. 7. † Luke viii. 15.

SERM. wherein himself represents them, under the  
 VII. notion of a yoke, it will appear we have  
 need of patience in keeping them; for tho' the difficulty does not arise from the precepts themselves, which are not grievous, but most suitable to a rational nature, tending to our highest perfection and happiness, yet a difficulty there is, occasioned by many and violent temptations, and by the infirmities of our own minds in this imperfect state, which it will require the firmest resolution and constancy to overcome; and whilst we are, by the vigorous endeavours of a holy life, seeking glory, honour, and immortality, pursuing the end of faith, the salvation of our souls, and when by the appointment of providence we have difficulties to overcome in our present state of discipline and improvement, tranquility and contentedness of mind, that is, patience, is very necessary to our opposing those difficulties successfully, and is a duty we owe to the sovereignty, wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, who has fixed us in such a militant condition.

*Secondly*, the future reward is at a distance, and here *we walk by faith, and not by sight*. Many and important changes there must be, which to minds judging according to sense, seem

seem even incredible; the soul must pass SERM.  
VII. into a separate state, of which, with its exercises and entertainments, we can form but a very confused idea. The body dies and is laid in the grave, it returns to its earth, and according to outward appearance, and the ordinary course of things, seems to be irrecoverably lost. This mortal must afterwards put on, by the immediate power of God, immortality; and this corruptible put on incorruption. These things are not seen, they are only apprehended by faith in the promises of God. But if they are really believed, one would think the believer should long for them with great earnestness, and that the distance of them should be a great trial of his patience: So glorious is the expected change in the state both of his mind and his body, from very weak and imperfect, to the highest perfection and happiness of both; *such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man.* Patience, therefore must necessarily accompany our hope, as the apostle teaches \*, *We are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for? but if we hope for what we see not,*


\* Rom. viii. 24.

SERM. *then do we with patience wait for it.* I am

VII. sensible this is a branch of patience that needs  
 not be much insisted on ; christians generally want to have their desires of the future felicity increased, that they may prevail against worldly affections, rather than moderated ; yet some spirits there are filled with such a sense, and so rais'd expectations of the glory which shall be revealed, and so brought under the power of that world to come, that the distance of it is a great trial of their patience. This was the case of *St. Paul*, as himself tells us \*, *He was in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which was far better ; nevertheless, to abide in the flesh was more needful for christians ;* and therefore, with a most generous resignation, he patiently submitted to the will of God, which appointed him to continue for a time attending their service, tho' his own perfect happiness, of which he had the utmost assurance, was postponed.

I shall in the remaining part of this discourse, confine myself to the stricter and more usual signification of patience, as it imports an humble contented temper of mind, and a dutiful behaviour under the afflictions

\* Phil. i. 23.

and difficulties of life. Every man has reason SERM.  
 to lay his account with trials. Experience shows VII.  
 that there is no condition of man in this world   
 exempted from them. The greatest and most  
 prosperous is liable to vicissitudes, and there  
 is such a variety of troublesome incidents  
 which attend all the affairs of human life, it  
 would be the greatest weakness and vanity  
 for any one to promise himself an uninterrupted  
 prosperity. The christian religion is so far  
 from giving us reason to expect an immunity  
 from afflictions, that our Saviour expressly  
 warns his disciples, *that thro' much tribula-  
 tion they must enter into the kingdom of God.*  
 And the Apostle tells us, *that all who will live  
 godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.*  
 The state of the world is such, and there is so  
 much corruption and wickedness in it, that  
 sincere and good men may expect to suffer  
 injuries, and be exposed to inconveniencies  
 in their outward condition, for their resolved  
 adherence to the cause of truth and of pure  
 religion.

Patience, therefore, is of universal use;  
 and every christian needs to be instructed in  
 it. If the present incumbence of some ad-  
 versity doth not call for its immediate exer-  
 cise, (scarcely, however, is any one so easy in

SERM. all points as not to find occasion for it in some  
 VII. article or other) yet it is reasonable for us to  
 look for trials. We ought to arm ourselves  
 against them, and make it our business to  
 know how we should bear them. Certainly,  
 wisdom requires that a man should prepare  
 himself for what he cannot help, seeing, if  
 he considers it at all, to be the common con-  
 dition of men, and almost inevitable.

What I would *first* of all propose, in or-  
 der to our understanding this excellent virtue,  
 are the principles on which it is founded. I  
 mean those sentiments and persuasions of  
 mind which produce the regular dutiful af-  
 fections and dispositions wherein it consists;  
 for in common with all other christian vir-  
 tues, it takes its rise from just principles, and  
 is a part of that religion, the universal cha-  
 racter whereof is a *reasonable service*. There  
 may be an indolence or stupidity in some  
 tempers which may be mistaken for patience,  
 because it restrains, or rather does not pro-  
 duce those violent symptoms, by which the  
 passions and vices contrary to that christian  
 grace are discovered. But let us look into  
 the springs and examine the principles from  
 which that seeming patience proceeds, for  
 those are of essential consideration.

He

He who is patient as a christian has his mind habitually under the influence of such considerations as these, and they are the very reasons of his equanimity and inward composure, that nothing falls out in this world by blind chance, or fatal necessity, which really are no causes of any thing, but words without a meaning, which weak, inattentive, or irreligious minds amuse themselves with, unwilling and disinclined to consider the full and demonstrative evidence which the supreme intelligent independent cause has given us of his being, his absolute perfections, and his government of the world. That as he is infinitely wise and powerful, so he is infinitely good, and beneficent towards his creatures, the gracious parent of the universe communicating happiness to those beings who are capable of it, and ruling the whole, not arbitrarily, but according to the exactest measures of wisdom, equity and goodness; and, therefore, in the entire scheme of providence, tho' we cannot comprehend the work of the Lord, *his ways are unsearchable, and his judgments past finding out*, yet we reasonably infer from the wisdom and benevolence which he has made manifest, that no event is appointed or permitted without that

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counsel which conducts all to such issues as are best in the whole. That affliction, particularly, does *not rise out of the dust*, as it is expressed in the book of *Job*, but it is ordered by the infinite wisdom of God with a kind intention to promote the real advantage of all men who are sincerely disposed to make a right improvement of it; to correct their faults, to bring them to a serious consideration of their ways, to try their virtues, to make them partakers of holiness, to produce in them the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and so to do them good in their latter end. These and such-like principles, even natural religion teaches, but the scripture more fully and particularly. Its declarations on this subject are very many and express, that, \* *whom the Lord loveth, he rebuketh and chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*; that therefore, *we ought not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when we are rebuked of him*. That † *all things shall work together for the good of them that love him*; and therefore christians ought to count it ‡ *all joy when they fall into divers temptations*; and to || *glory in their tribulations, because*

\* Heb. xii. 6. † Rom. viii. 28. ‡ 1 James i. 2.  
|| Rom. v. 3, 4.

they



they work patience. Our Saviour's tender, affectionate sympathy gives great encouragement to his faithful disciples under all their trials; *having suffered, being tempted in all points as we are, only without sin, he is ready to succour those who are tempted.* The promise of divine assistance by the Holy Spirit is the support of patience, and the *joy of the Holy Ghost* seems to have a special relation to a suffering state; and in a very peculiar manner that *life and immortality which Christ has brought to light through the gospel*, is the great encouragement of his afflicted followers. For *this cause we faint not* \*, but though the outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Who would not bear up with spirit and resolution under adversity, when not only he is assured that the event will be happy, but that the afflictions themselves, light and momentary in comparison, will greatly contribute to the promoting of that happiness? Such as these are the foundations of patience, which as it signifies a disposition of the

SERM.  
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\* 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17.

SERM. mind, essentially consists in a chearful submission and resignation of our wills to the will of God, acquiescing with full consent in his appointments whatever they are, so that we may say, after the example of our blessed Saviour, the most perfect pattern of patience, under the most grievous sufferings, *not my will but thine be done, heavenly Father*. Other examples we have in scripture of great resignation, most worthy to be imitated, such as that of *Eli*, when *Samuel* denounced astonishing judgments which were to come on his family, he said \*, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*. And of *David* †, when he was by the prevailing rebellion of his son *Abjalom* driven away from *Jerusalem*, his imperial city, and the appointed place of God's worship, he thus expresses his humble submission to divine providence, *If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again and shew me his habitation*. But, if he thus say, *I have no delight in thee*; (if I shall be abandoned to the deepest distress and dishonour, so as to have no such outward tokens of his favour) *here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him*. It is requisite,

\* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

† 2 Sam. xv. 26.

on my part, to bear without repining the just effects of his displeasure. An utter insensibility of painful events is what human nature is not capable of, nor is it ordinarily possible by the most steady considerations of the excellence of religious virtue and its motives, to divert the mind from attending to the sensations of pain. But, when in a suffering state, the soul, having a firm persuasion that God superintends all human affairs, approves and consents to the whole of his administration as wise and good, and thereupon constantly endeavours to suppress all murmuring and angry resentments, and peremptorily refuses to go into any undutiful purpose of heart, or instance of unbecoming behaviour in practice, then patience has her perfect work; and then indeed St. James had reason to say, a *Christian is perfect and intire, wanting nothing*; this being one of the highest attainments in religion. But a serious reflection on our own infirmities will convince us how far we come short of it.

Because there are different extremes men under affliction are in danger of falling into; through the difference of their tempers and

\* James i. 4.

SERM. the variety of their passions, which it is the  
 VII. province of patience to suppress; I shall  
 briefly mention some of them, and thereby  
 farther shew you how we ought to be exercised under the chastening, *which for the present seemeth not to be joyous but grievous.* In general it is to be observed, that the calmness and serenity of the mind is its health and vigour; when we are dispassionate and sedate, acting upon cool and serious thoughts with deliberation, then only it is that we enjoy ourselves, and behave as becometh reasonable creatures and christians. The preserving this temper under affliction is practising the virtue of patience. And every prevailing passion is contrary to it, which hurries us with violence, and breaks the composure of our spirits, whether it be an excessive dejection of mind, fear, or anger. Despair is an extreme we are apt to fall into, or an immoderate, overwhelming sorrow, without hope, which *worketh death.* How apt are some at least, to sink under discouragement, and faint in the day of adversity, *because their strength is small?* There is no spirit left in them, no expectation of any relief. Cheerfulness and courage therefore, in opposition to this, is one necessary ingredient in the christian

virtue I am explaining. The lamentations of *SERM.*  
*Jeremiah* describe as great a calamity, and *VII.*  
 as bad a state of things as we can well imagine, yet even in that case it is represented as the duty of good men, still to retain their confidence in God as the only foundation upon which they can possess any measure of inward tranquility, chapter iii. 26. *It is good for a man both to hope, and quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord; and the Psalmist, from his own experience, gives this advice to all the servants of God, even in their deepest distresses \* : Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.*

Again, as under the actual incumbency of affliction some give up themselves to utter discouragement and impotence of mind, so there are timorous spirits which continually distract and perplex themselves with the apprehensions of evil to come. Of all the passions which frail human nature is liable to, none is more confounding, or attended with greater perturbation than fear. It fills the soul with vexing and disquieting thoughts, is perpetually presenting dangers to it, from every quarter, and, instead of rousing it to its defence, so

\* Pfam xxvii. 14.

SERM. enervates its force as to render it incapable

VII. of making any at all. Now, it is the province of believing patience to controul and to suppress these disturbing fears, and to preserve the mind humbly confident under the shadow of the Almighty, in a due disposition for following the direction of its own reason, and exerting its own powers, in the most proper manner.

In the next place, angry resentments against the providence of God are by all means to be restrain'd and subdued, as being directly contrary to patience, and chargeable with great and heinous impieties. What can be more undutiful than for creatures to quarrel with their almighty Maker, and arraign the wisdom and goodness of his conduct in any instance? Will we pretend that he is accountable to us, or dare we say in any case that the judge of the whole world has not done right? Yet some degrees of this evil, even good men have fallen into. The prophet *Jonah* \* said in the bitterness of his spirit, *I do well to be angry to death.* Other holy persons under violent temptations, especially arising from the prosperity of the wicked, have expressed themselves disrespectfully towards the provi-

\* *Jonah* iv. 9.

dence of God. The *Pfalmist* went so far as to say, *verily, I \* have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.* As if religion were altogether an unprofitable thing, and God to governed the world as to show no regard to it. It is therefore a necessary caution, especially to the afflicted, which we have in *Pfalm xxxvii. 8. Cease from anger and forsake wrath, fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.* But though peevish and rash expressions may sometimes drop from good men in very great trouble, it is utterly inconsistent with their character to be habitual murmurers and complainers, such being numbered among the greatest transgressors by the apostles *St. Peter* and *St. Jude.*

Let it be further observed, that it ought to be our care to grow in all the good dispositions which are imported in patience, and to keep our hearts continually, and set a watch upon our lips, that we do not offend. We should take heed, as the apostle exhorts us, that we do not grow weary nor faint in our minds. Whatever reason there is for patience and submission in the shortest affliction, equally holds for the same temper in all the adversities of life, even if they should continue to its last

\* *Pfalm lxxxiii. 13.*

SERM. article. Sometimes great calamities have been  
 VII. excellently supported at the beginning, and yet  
 when lengthened out have produced impa-  
 tience. What more glorious resignation  
 could be expressed by any man, than that  
 which *Job* shews in as dismal a conjuncture  
 as we can well suppose, when all his children,  
 and all his substance was destroyed at once,  
*Naked*, says \* he, *came I into the world, and  
 naked I shall go hence; the Lord hath given,  
 and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the  
 name of the Lord. In all this he sinned not,  
 nor charged God foolishly.* Yet all his affliction  
 continued, and new ingredients exasperated  
 his pain, the frailty of human nature discovered  
 itself in indecent expressions, which after-  
 wards were the subject of his deep regret. We  
 ought, therefore, to be always upon our guard,  
 always watchful over our own spirits, and  
 keep a steady discipline over our passions, of  
 sorrow, fear, and anger, especially in afflic-  
 tions of long continuance, lest they transgress  
 the bounds which reason and the laws of God  
 have set to them, and betray us into impa-  
 tience.

In the *last place*, it is to be observed, that  
 as patience in common with all other religious

\* Job i. 21.



virtues, is principally seated on the mind, it SERM. must influence and direct our whole beha- VII. viour, which is the surest evidence of good dispositions. It ought not only to restrain indecent and undutiful expressions, but govern our whole practice; that no methods be taken which are inconsistent with an intire resignation to the will of God, and an humble confidence in his mercy. The rebellious and incorrigible spirit of King *Abab*, shewed itself, when in the grievous famine which distressed *Samaria*; and being sensible that calamity was from the Lord as a punishment for their sins, he said, *What should I wait for the Lord any longer* \*. All sinful and indirect ways for our deliverance from affliction are directly contrary to patience: Therefore, in the 37th *Psalms*, when we are exhorted to wait upon the Lord, at the same time he requires us *to keep his way, and to depart from evil and do good*. It is perfectly consistent with a dependence on God, and a submission to his providence, that we use all lawful means for our escape from trouble; nay, the neglect of them is the effect, not of believing patience but stupid sloth (*St. Paul* in his most hazardous voyage, though he had the

\* 2 Kings vi. 33.

SERM. utmost assurance that God would preserve the  
 VII. whole company in the ship, yet insisted that  
 { in the last extremity the sailors should not  
 leave them, nay, declares expressly, that *except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved*, but no man can pretend that he commits himself to God, and waits upon him, while he takes those measures for safety which he knows in his heart God does not approve. *He that believeth*, and patience is the fruit of faith, will *not make such haste* \*, particularly, patience is always accompanied with meekness, or an humble, charitable, and unrevengeful spirit toward those who have been injurious to us. If the awe of God restrains men from opening their mouths against heaven, they sometimes give themselves the most outrageous licence in reproaching their fellow creatures, who are the instruments of their trouble. But this is not agreeable to the example of our blessed Master, who in all his sufferings carried it not only with dutiful submission to the will of his heavenly Father, but meekly towards his enemies, who treated him with most inhumanity. *He was led like † a lamb to the slaughter, and as the sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.*

\* Isai xxviii. 16.

† Ibid liii. 7.

When St. *Peter* pronounces *it acceptable to God*, when we suffer for well doing, *to take it patiently*\* : he thus explains the exercise of patience in imitation of our Lord, verse 22, *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, who when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.* SERM. VII.

It is not necessary to insist much on arguments for enforcing the duty of patience. This is in a great measure prevented by the explication. There is no more wanting than a serious attention to the thing itself, and the grounds of it, to convince any man that it is reasonable. Such principles, as the sovereignty of God, the irresistibility, the wisdom, and goodness of his providence, every one will acknowledge, who is not gone into downright atheism, and then a patient submission in every calamity and affliction of life is no more than a just application of these principles ; for certainly, if the divine dominion be universal, it cannot be pretended that we and our particular affairs should be exempted from it : That the † *earth should be forsaken for us, and the rock removed out of his place ;*

\* 1 Pet. ii. 20.

† Job xviii. 4.

SERM. as it is expressed in the book of *Job*, that is,  
 VII. that God should abandon the care of his government in any instance, or that he should not pursue the intire scheme of his providence by firm, even and steady measures. But if we ourselves, and all our affairs, and the whole series of events which befall us, are comprehended in his eternal counsels, then who may call him to an account, or say unto him, *what doest thou?* The mind of man cannot but upon reflection approve what is wisely done, and for the best in the whole; and as this is apparently the character of God's government or disposition of things by his providence and every part of it, if we believe his absolute perfections, must not our own hearts condemn us in repining against it? If the supreme ruler of the universe constantly and uniformly carries on one design, that is, the greatest absolute good, by a vast variety of methods, every one of them is proper: as in his works of creation, such as the frame of the human nature, those parts which appear to us less honourable, or ornamental, are yet needful; and if in the plan of providence, a certain portion of affliction is necessary, who may quarrel with that which by the direction  
 of

of infinite wisdom falls to his share? for if any one in that case might reasonably complain, every one might; and then the reason of the divine counsels, and the reason of men would contradict each other, which is an absurdity.

SERM.  
VII.

But to what purpose are murmurings? and why should man contend with his Maker? *He \* determines the things that are appointed for us, and there is no possibility of altering his counsels, as Elibu says very reasonably †, should it be according to thy mind, he will recompense it whether thou chuse, or whether thou refuse.* The truth is, men can only fret and torment themselves by repining against providence, and bearing chastisements impatiently; they cannot make their condition better. The prophet ‖ thus describes the state of obstinate incorrigible sinners, by a very significant comparison, *They are like a wild bull in a net, full of the fury of the Lord,* the more they impotently resist and rebel, the more uneasy still they make themselves, far from lessening their pain. Or, as it is expressed in the prophecies of *Jeremy*, they are *like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*, which, the more impatient he is, only galls him the

\* Job xxiii. 14, † Ibid. xxxiv. 23. ‖ Isa. li. 20.

SERM. more, and sits the heavier upon him. Pa-  
 VII. tience indeed is a merciful prescription, cal-  
 ~~~~~  
 culated for our interest and advantage, as well
 as it is a duty which we owe to our supreme
 and perfectly wise Governor. It is the only
 effectual way to make the best of our con-
 dition, and give us all the happiness we can
 possibly enjoy in such circumstances. Since
 it is not in our power to alter our state, and
 since the very sting of affliction is the unea-
 siness and perturbation of our own minds
 under it; for as the moralist justly observes,
 it is not so generally events that trouble men,
 but their own opinions and ways of thinking
 concerning them; what remains, but that it
 is the wisdom of every man to bear quietly
 and peaceably what he cannot avoid? to calm
 the tempests of his mind by the considerations
 of religion and virtue? to retire within him-
 self, collect all his strength, and summon all
 the powers of his soul to attend such an im-
 portant office as enquiring what fund of con-
 solation remains from within, and what sup-
 ports independent on all external occurrences?
 for there is the only sure remedy, and it is all
 summed up in patience.

But let christians look to the captain of their
 salvation who was made perfect thro' suffer-
 ings;

ings; to * *Jesus the author and finisher of their faith, who endured the cross, despising the shame; let them consider him who endureth the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they be weary and faint in their minds.* The blessed author of our religion has given us an example of suffering patiently, *that we should follow his steps.* If we profess to be his disciples, and say *we abide in him,* we ought to *walk as he walked,* and endure the cross in imitation of him. It is not possible for us to equal him in the generous principles and motives of his sufferings; his zeal for the glory of God, for the cause of true holiness and virtue, and his charity to men are altogether unparallel'd; but the greater compassion he shewed in suffering for us, *and while we were yet enemies reconciling us to God by the blood of his cross,* with the greater cheerfulness should we, in obedience to his will, and for his service, *take up our cross and follow him.* *The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.* If he, then, our Lord and Master, who was *holy, harmless and undefiled, and separate from sinners,* did, in pity to us, and for our redemption, voluntarily submit to reproaches and indignities, to the most grievous passion and exquisite tortures, why should we make ourselves ob-

* Heb. xii. 2, 3.

SERM. noxious to the displeasure of God, by our own
 VII. sins, and liable to calamities of many sorts, as
 ~~~~~ the natural consequence of our own folly, according to the established course and constitution of things; why should we repine at far less degrees of sufferings, wisely dispensed by our gracious heavenly Father, for his honour and our good; especially since we are assured of a happy event, that as Christ is now set *down at the right hand of God*, he has prepared mansions there for his servants, that he will bring them out of all their tribulations, and *if they suffer with him, they shall also reign with him, and be glorified together?*

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# SERMON VIII.

## Of Godliness.

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2 Pet. i. 6.

—*And to Patience, Godliness.*—

**G**odliness is sometimes in scripture taken SERM. VIII.  
in so large a sense as to comprehend VIII.  
universal righteousness, all the dispositions of mind and habits, every course of action which are morally good, and to which God has annexed the promise of acceptance. Thus it is to be understood in St. Paul's exhortation to *Timothy*, \* *Exercise thyself unto godliness, which is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* For surely it is not to piety alone in the strictest sense, those rewards are promised, but to all the branches of religious virtue. And when the same inspired author

\* 1 Tim. iv. 7, 8.


SERM. gives this as the general character of christianity, that it is a doctrine according to  
 VIII. godliness, or after godliness, we must understand the word in the same large signification. But, in other passages, and particularly in my text, when the particular parts of our duty, or of practical religion, are enumerated, and godliness distinguished from the rest, it is to be taken in a more limited sense, signifying that respect or practical regard which we owe to the supreme Being himself, and whereof he is the proper immediate object. From whatever spring moral obligations are derived, whether from instincts and affections planted in our nature, determining us to an esteem of and complacency in superior and more perfect beings, and a love and desire of doing good to those who are capable of happiness; or whether they be all deduced from the will of the one great law-giver, still there is a diversity of objects in which our duty terminates, and according to them it is divided into godliness, righteousness, and charity, containing all the good offices we owe to our fellow-creatures, and sobriety, or a due government over our appetites and passions. I shall endeavour in this discourse briefly to shew you wherein  
 godliness

godliness consists; and secondly the reasonableness and necessity of adding it to other virtues.

SERM.  
VIII.  


*First*, wherein godliness consists. And it takes in all those dispositions of mind, with the proper expressions of them, which are due to the high perfections of the Deity, and which result from the relations we bear to him. Those notions which natural and revealed religion teach us to form of the supreme Being, direct us in paying our respect and homage to him. As he is eternal, independent, infinitely excellent, powerful, wise, holy and good, the light of nature itself teaches us to glorify him by our praises, to esteem, love and fear him, and to obey his will in all things, as far as it is known to us. As he is the almighty Creator of all things visible and invisible, the preserver and governor of the world, in whom we live and move, and have our being, and who daily loads us with his benefits, from hence arises the obligation to gratitude, confidence in his mercy, submission and resignation to his providence. All these particulars which reason dictates to men are more fully explained in the holy scriptures, the principal design of

SERM. which is to instruct mankind clearly, to deliver them from the errors and superstition which generally prevailed, and teach them to serve God so as to please him.


VIII.  From these considerations of the Deity I have mentioned, and which are largely explained in the rule of our religion, the inward affections which naturally arise, comprehended in godliness, are, *First*, fear; a reverence for his majesty, a serious affecting sense of all his glorious attributes, not a confounding terror and amazement which can proceed only from an apprehension of wrath and power, and is accompanied with aversion; but together with the acknowledgment of his supremacy, the very highest esteem of his amiable moral excellencies, and an unwillingness to offend him. The holy angels are represented in scripture as approaching the throne of God in a very awful and humble manner, *covering their faces*, which seems to signify an acknowledgment of their distance, and of his infinitely superior perfection. His worshippers of mankind, who we have reason to believe are the most acceptable, serve him with the most awful respect. With what reverence did *Abraham*, honoured with the title of his friend, address  
the

*the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth*, confessing that he was but dust and ashes. SERM. VIII.

The highest and most powerful of all creatures are considered as nothing in comparison, and the fear of God in a godly mind prevails against the fear of the whole world, so that his displeasure is to be avoided at any rate, even tho' it subject us to the rage and resentment of those who are the most formidable upon earth. Thus our Saviour instructs us whom we should fear, *not them who can only kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but him who hath power to destroy soul and body in hell-fire\**.

*Secondly*, the fear of God, as the scripture explains it, which is an essential part of godliness, and of the respect he claims from us, doth not exclude love. It includes it rather, for a proper object of our fear, as the prophet says †, is his *goodness*, which directly and naturally excites love. Our Saviour gives it as an abridgment of religion, the sum of our duty, the first and great commandment of God's law ||, *to love the Lord our God, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the mind*. Love is the very best tribute we can pay; and we may be sure the greatest

\* Mat. x. 28. † Hof. iii. 5. || Mat. xxii. 37.

SERM. worth, the most excellent of all Beings demands it of us. Gratitude is a kind of love  
 VIII.  which considers the object not only as excellent in himself, but as benefactor to us. It is an affection which naturally arises in the mind to any being who discovers kind intentions towards us. And as God is continually preventing us with his loving-kindness, and heaping favours upon us, without any antecedent obligation laid upon him by us, this is one part of the homage he very reasonably requires.

These are the affections essentially comprehended in godliness, or the duty which God indispensably requires in every condition of human nature, necessarily resulting from the manifestations of his glorious perfections, and his relations to us. However dark the intimations be which we have of his nature and essence, if we can discover him to be the independent, necessarily existing, infinitely powerful, wise, and good, creator, preserver, and governor of all things, these contain the strongest motives of affection, and claim for him our highest esteem and reverence, the most intense unequalled desire and delight, a deliberate preference of him to every other good,  
 with

with a prevailing inclination and purpose to please him in all things. SERM.  
VIII.

How these excellent principles will exert themselves in the other world, in the perfected state of our nature, when we shall no more see God *darkly through a glass*, by analogical obscure representations, by remote, cold, and unaffecting reasonings, *but face to face*, and *know even as we are known*; and what high pleasures will accompany the exercise of them when the glorious object will be intimately present to the mind, and as immediately perceived as the objects of sense now are, or even our own powers and actings, which we know by an inward consciousness; how this will be, we cannot at present comprehend. The exercise of love and respect, the sum of godliness, accommodated to our state in this life seems especially to consist in resignation; an entire acquiescence in the order he has appointed, with confidence in his wisdom and goodness, and submission to his will. Such a temper as this is the natural, and indeed necessary expression of the highest esteem and reverence in the relations we bear to him, as his creatures, dependents, and subjects; the most proper result of our acknowledging his high per-

SERM. perfection and his government. So our  
 VIII. minds are framed that we cannot but approve  
 ~~~~~ the conduct of that agent who doth what is  
 perfectly wise and absolutely good. If we
 divest ourselves of prejudices, and lay aside
 partial considerations, we shall certainly judge
 so; and that accidental private inconveniences
 which may attend a well-contrived scheme
 for promoting the greatest good, ought not to
 be charged as a fault on the author, nor im-
 puted to any defect of wisdom or goodness.
 If therefore it be a principle sufficiently evi-
 dent that the governor of the world, to whose
 dominion all things are subject, and who does
 whatsoever pleaseth him, is perfectly wise and
 good, it follows, that what he does is best,
 absolutely, and in the whole; and conse-
 quently that intire resignation and depen-
 dence is due to him, that we should commit
 ourselves to him, our ways and works to
 his direction, who is the faithful Creator,
 the just and wise, and gracious disposer of all
 things. Thus only it is that we testify our
 affection to his character and his government.
 To love him whom we acknowledge to be
 the great ruler of the world, that supreme
 all-comprehending mind, who sees every,
 even the minutest part in this great whole,

the

the universe, adjusts all the relations of things, SERM. conducts them in the best manner, and directs the intire chain of events for the greatest absolute good, and at the same time to repine against any of his dispensations, and to resist his will, is a contradiction; for such murmuring, such resistance really amounts to a disesteem of his character, and disaffection to his government. VIII.

The christian revelation, as in many other points, particularly in this, gives great light to the minds of men and relieves them from many anxieties and distreffes. However reasonable it might appear to be, it would be difficult to abstract so wholly from all consideration of our own interest, as to rest fully satisfied in an administration proved in general to be the wisest and absolutely best, without any particular assurance of our own happiness. But it has pleased God to give us an express promise of eternal life, upon the condition of repentance and sincere obedience; and not only so, but that all their afflictions and trials shall work together for the *good of them that love him*. And this is a great support to godliness; a great encouragement to trust in God at all times, to hope in his mercy and faithfulness, to cast *our cares and burdens upon*

SERM. upon him, believing that he careth for us;
 VIII. and that he is a rewarder of all them who
 ~~~~~ diligently seek him.

When I speak of resignation to God, I do not only mean that we should be satisfied with the occurrences of life, as ordered by divine providence, which is indeed an important part of godliness, and a noble expression of our love and respect to the Deity; but that we should approve and actively obey his precepts, submitting to his moral, as well as providential government: For his eternal laws of righteousness are a part of his constitution; the appointment of his wisdom and goodness for us, (excellently fitted to our nature, and designed to lead us to our proper perfection and happiness) that we may fulfil the part which is assigned us, in the intire scheme of his government, as the best suited to our capacity. Obedience to his commands is a just and natural expression of all dutiful and good affections to him, of fear, of love, of gratitude, and resignation, at least, all professions and appearances of respect without it are but vain, and will be punished by him as a real indignity. Why, says our Saviour, *call ye me Lord, and do not the things which I say?*  
 and

and again\*, *not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, shall be accounted a real christian and godly person, an approved worshipper of God, or professor of religion, and rewarded as such, but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven.* As the laws of God, the dictates of eternal reason and truth are the transcript of his own moral perfections, it amounts to the same thing, if we say that godliness comprehends the imitation of those perfections, and that they only are godly persons whose tempers and conversations are formed to a resemblance of the rectitude and goodness of the divine nature; they who are *followers of God as dear children who are holy in all manner of conversation, as he is holy, pure and perfect as their heavenly Father is, kind, compassionate and merciful, after his example.*

This doctrine has been always taught in the true church, and care taken to prevent men's falling into that fatal error of placing the all of religion in acts of devotion, while they neglected that much more substantial proof of respect to the Deity, the imitating of his righteousness and mercy. The *Psalmist*,

\* Mat. vi. 21.

SERM. in the name of God, tells the people of  
 VIII. *Israel* in the 50th psalm, that he will not  
 reprove them for sacrifices and burnt offerings  
 to have been continually before him. What  
 he inculcated more earnestly, and laid much  
 greater stress on, was offering thanksgivings  
 to God, and paying their vows to the most high,  
 by a thorough effectual reformation of their  
 lives. The same pious author elsewhere  
 gives this as the character of the man that  
 shall ascend to the hill of God, and stand in  
 his holy place; he that hath clean hands and a  
 pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul to  
 vanity, nor sworn deceitfully\*. And more  
 fully in the 15th, the godly man who shall  
 dwell in the tabernacle of the Lord, is de-  
 scribed by the constant diligent practice of  
 moral duties. He that walketh uprightly and  
 worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth  
 in his heart; that backbiteth not with his  
 tongue, nor doth evil to his neighbour, nor  
 taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.  
 In whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but  
 he honoureth them that fear the Lord; he that  
 sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not.  
 The same doctrine is yet more clearly taught  
 and largely insisted on in the New Testament.

\* Psal. xxiv. 4.

Our Saviour often reproveth the Jews of his time because religion with them had degenerated into empty forms. They employed themselves wholly in, and valued themselves on, the scrupulously exact performance of outward instrumental duties, while they neglected substantial holiness and virtue; *they tithed mint, annise, and cummin, but neglected judgment, faith, mercy, and the love of God, the weightier matters of the law.* And the apostles likewise take care to instruct christians that the christian religion does not consist in external things; *the kingdom of God, the essence of true christianity, is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost* \*.

Yet the external acts of adoration and homage to the Deity are not to be left undone; and the performing of them according to his institution is a part of Godliness. In our present state the affections of the mind naturally vent themselves by some outward actions. Benevolence, esteem, gratitude, and other dispositions towards our fellow-creatures, are not silent and unactive in the heart. Nature and custom have taught us the proper expressions whereby they shew themselves, and

\* Rom. xiv. 17.

SERM. if these be altogether omitted, we shall scarcely  
 VIII. conclude that the inward principles have a  
 being. By a parity of reason, if we have  
 internal good affections to the Deity, the sincerity and the force of them are discovered by proper outward acts. If human superiors reasonably require that their subjects should recognize their rights, and pay them the public respect they claim, is it not just that the *Possessor of heaven and earth, the Lord of the spirits of all flesh*, should be honoured with our external acknowledgments? Not that there is any value in the outward performance, as separated from the affection; but supposing first the sincerity of good principles and dispositions in the soul, they ought to be exerted in external acts of worship, for two reasons:

*First*, because that has a tendency to increase them. The body and the mind in our present constitution have a mutual influence on each other. As the vigorous attention of the mind and the earnest exertion of its powers, sometimes, even overbears the external senses, and suspends or abates their exercise, so the use of the bodily organs, as in speaking, or other appointed significant actions, tends to fix the attention of the mind,  
 and

and invigorate its affections. Experience justifies the institution; for it teaches men that while they speak to God in prayers and praises, and perform other appointed services in the due manner, pious dispositions, in which godliness principally consists, are strengthened. SERM. VIII.

*Secondly*, Another reason for outward acts of adoration and homage to God is, that thereby we may glorify him. As his servants esteem him in their hearts, they love and fear, they trust in and are devoted to him, all these ought to be testified by some proper external acts, that others seeing their good works may be also induced to honour him. This is what is *principally* meant by that celebrated expression in scripture, *calling on the name of the Lord*: not particular acts of worship, but a public and open profession of the true religion, which every godly man will make, and in some cases it is the best evidence that can be given of sincere piety. It is observed \*, that when *men were multiplied on the earth*, and probably the good separated from the wicked, then *began men to call on the name of the Lord*. To join in religious solemnities as a public acknowledg-

\* Gen. iv. 26.

SERM. ment of the true God, and his pure worship.

VIII. And to this purpose St. Paul \* applies that declaration of the prophet *Isaiah*, *whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*; that is, whosoever shall in the sincerity of his heart, make open profession of the true religion, believing in and worshipping the true God; for the apostle has shewn in that context, that as *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*, so there must be also an agreeableness of our outward behaviour to this, for *with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*. And our Saviour often tells his disciples, that *whoever shall confess him before men, him will he confess before his Father and before the angels; but whoever shall be ashamed of him and deny him before men, of him will he be ashamed and deny him before his Father who is in heaven*.

A religious or godly profession is made, not only by words, but public acts of worship, in which societies join as a testimony of their believing in the same God, and acknowledging the same rule of worship and obedience. And tho' this is far from being the all, or indeed the main of a pious character, yet I don't see that the omitting it altogether

\* Rom. x. 13.



can in ordinary circumstances consist with SERM. true piety. As it is exceeding plain that VIII. christianity requires our assembling for worship, I can't but observe that some christians neglecting it so much as they do, shews too great an indifference to the injunctions of our Lord, and to the design of such assemblies. Perhaps they may imagine, and I will suppose it to be true, that they cannot expect any great improvement in knowledge, by attending the public instructions; yet their withdrawing altogether is an offensive example, and has an ill influence on their weaker fellow-christians, whose weaker capacity and understanding both needs and may receive information in matters of the greatest moment to them. Besides, a well disposed mind may bear, and think it no disagreeable entertainment to be stirred up by way of remembrance, (which *St. Peter* thought was a just reason for writing his epistles) I say, to be stirred up by a repetition of religious truths, which it has known before. And, considering the many avocations we have from pious exercises, it may not be unprofitable for the best and wisest men, jointly with their fellow-worshippers, at set times to engage their solemn

SERM. VIII. attention to the things of religion, and endeavour to excite and confirm good affections in themselves, which may contribute to their defence against the returning temptations of the world. Thus I have endeavoured briefly to explain godliness, to shew you what are the affections and dispositions of mind, wherein it consists, and likewise that it does import the proper fruits of those inward principles in external acts of homage to God. I will not enter on the consideration of the particular modes of worship, or those external actions whereby our respect to the Deity is or ought to be expressed. Religion, in its essence unchangeable as the object of it is, has even by divine appointment varied its forms, as we see by the scripture account of the *patriarckal*, the *mosaic*, and *christian* schemes; only we may observe in general that considering how vain the imaginations of men have appeared to be in this important affair; what a ridiculous, extravagant and absurd pageantry of religious service they have devised, and how difficult it would still be to bring all men of very different sentiments and unequal understandings into one method of worship, if they were left to their own

in-

nvention; considering this, I say, we are indebted to revelation, as there the external solemnities of devotion are ascertained by an express institution of God. And, especially, it is the peculiar excellence of the christian dispensation that it prescribes a religious service which is pure and simple and rational, and which our Saviour, by way of distinction, and in opposition to all other forms, calls *spirit and truth*. I proceed now to consider according to the apostle's direction in the *text*,

SERM.  
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*Secondly*, The reasonableness and necessity of adding godliness to all other virtues. It is indeed a dangerous mistake to imagine that, taking it in a strict sense, it is the whole of our duty. Other virtues are of eternal and indispensable obligation, as well as piety, and the grace which brings salvation, or the gospel, teaches us not only to live *godly*, but *soberly* and *righteously*; but it is a main part of our duty both on its own account, and as it is the chief support of all virtue. *First*, if we consider godliness in itself abstractedly, it will appear to be a very eminent and important branch of our duty. Not only is it so

SERM. represented in the holy scriptures, the rule  
 VIII. of our religion, but if we attend to the rea-  
 son and nature of the thing, we must be  
 convinced, that as God is the most excellent  
 of all beings with whom we have to do as  
 our ruler and constant benefactor, and our  
 judge, our first respects are due to him. It  
 is the great commandment of God's law to  
 men, and must be supposed to be the great  
 commandment of any law he would give to  
 reasonable creatures, to *love him with all the  
 heart, and soul, and mind.* Can it be thought  
 that he would form such creatures with so-  
 cial affections, and under a law of mutual  
 kindness, in order to the happiness of all, and  
 every one, which our Saviour calls the second  
 commandment; and not require that we  
 should love and honour him, the pattern of  
 all perfection, and the parent of all good, ha-  
 ving given us clear discoveries of his being  
 and glorious excellencies, endued us with  
 powers naturally capable of discerning them,  
 and even a necessary determination to admire  
 and esteem them? It is the distinguishing privi-  
 lege of mankind to be capable of religion. There  
 are plain enough traces of reasoning in other  
 sorts of sensitive beings, but no appearance  
 of

of any sense of religious and moral obligation, of a reverence for the Deity, or acting with a regard to his will and approbation.

But of all the *nations of men that God has made to dwell upon the face of the whole earth*, there is none so barbarous, as to be without all sense and all form of religion, which shews how connatural it is to man, that the service of our Maker is one high purpose we were made for, and that without it we do not answer the end of our creation, nor fill up the place assigned to us, and perform the proper offices belonging to us, as a part in the regular system of God's works. *All his works praise him.* The inanimate part of them can do it no otherwise, than by ministering occasion to intelligent beings to glorify him. But these latter, as the apostle says \* *are without excuse, if when that which may be known of God is manifest in them (for he hath shewed it unto them, for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made) they glorify him not as God, neither are thankful.* Thus, it appears, not only from scripture, but the light of nature and reason, that godliness in the strict sense,

\* Rom. i. 20.

that

SERM. that is, an affectionate respect to the Deity  
 VIII. with proper expressions of it, is a very im-  
 } portant and a very evident part of our duty as  
 } reasonable creatures.

*Secondly*, It ought therefore to be added to all other virtues, because it is the chief support and security of them, and where it prevails has a great influence on men to practise them, It is not the professed design of revealed religion, merely to make men pious, but from that principle to make them universally virtuous. Accordingly in scripture, when our whole duty is set before us, and abridgments given of all God requires, other particulars are mentioned in conjunction with piety. Thus in the prophecies of *Micah* \*, *He hath shewed thee O man! what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* And *Solomon* † gives this as the conclusion of the whole matter, the whole duty and whole interest or happiness of men, *to fear God and keep his commandments*, comprehending his whole unchangeable law of righteousness, sobriety, and mercy, which are necessarily connected together. If the fear of God, or some

\* Micah vi. 8.      † Eccles. xii. 13.

expression parallel to it which may be SERM. strictly interpreted to signify piety, is frequently used to describe a good character, and all that is required to our acceptance with God, it is not to be understood abstractedly, and as separated from other branches of our duty, or of virtue; but that manner of speaking always supposes that the fear of God is naturally productive of, and constantly accompanied with, other good dispositions, and a course of action suitable to them; and we find that very often in scripture, departing from evil, doing good, and such like general directions, importing, whatever is morally right and virtuous, are joined with the fear of the Lord; and justice, as well as devotion, is declared to be a necessary ingredient in a religious character, as in that of *Simon* \*, *The same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.* VIII.

The efficacy of godliness, strictly so called, to the production of all other virtues, appears from the nature of it already explained. For, it imports a disposition to obey all God's commandments, and to do every thing which he approves. Now, since his word plainly declares that he requires of man every thing

\* Luke ii; 25.

which


SERM. VIII. which is good, universal righteousness, charity, faithfulness, temperance, patience and humility; and besides, if we acknowledge his moral perfections, we cannot but believe he is pleased with every thing which is pure, and true, and honest, and just, and virtuous, and praise-worthy, it follows that we cannot better testify our respect to him than by *thinking on and doing these things*. Again, a desire to imitate the Deity is imported in true godliness, or a sincere respect to him. In vain should we pretend to esteem any excellent being, which can only be on the account of his moral character; for infinite power and wisdom, with other natural attributes of God, separated from that, might be the object of admiration and terror, but not of affection; how vain, I say, would it be to pretend an esteem for him, and not desire and endeavour to resemble him? Now, the righteousness of God is *like the great mountains*, eminent and conspicuous, firm and stable. *The Lord is good unto all, his tender mercies are over all his works; he opens his hand liberally and supplies the wants of his creatures; he is kind to the unthankful and the evil*. How then can we say, that we love God, and have our minds filled with



reverence for him, while we are altogether SERM. unlike him? when instead of righteousness, VIII. long-suffering, abundant goodness, and compassion, we are unjust, deceitful, implacable, and cruel? This indeed is so plain a case, that it is impossible for any one thro' mere weakness to mistake it; any one especially who has the opportunity of being instructed out of the holy scriptures. The sacred writers do so constantly and uniformly teach the necessity of *following God as dear children*, and that if we would approve ourselves to him, it must *be by mercy rather than sacrifice*, and by obedience to his moral precepts *more than by burnt-offerings*, or any other external acts of devotion.

The application of the whole is, that we should exercise ourselves unto godliness. That we should endeavour to have the principles of the fear and love of God more and more strengthened and confirmed in our hearts. To this end let us frequently meditate on those amiable representations which the works of God, and especially his word, give us of him; use the means of religion diligently, never resting in the outward form, but still making it our chief aim to have pious and devout affections excited in our hearts.

SERM. hearts. Thus shall we be sincere and without offence in our whole conversation, and

XIII.  adorn *the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to his praise.*

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# S E R M O N IX.

Of Brotherly Kindness and Charity.

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2 Pet. i. 7.

*And to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and  
to Brotherly Kindness, Charity.*

**C**HARITY is often represented in SERM.  
the New Testament as the sum and IX.  
the highest perfection of religion. St.   
*Paul* teaches us \* *that love is the fulfilling  
of the law.* It comprehends all the particular  
precepts which relate to our neighbour, such  
as *thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit  
adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt  
not bear false witness. Thou shalt not covet.*  
And it is the best and most perfect evidence  
of the sincerity and the prevalence of all good  
dispositions. This is the meaning of our  
Saviour's command to his disciples †, *Be ye  
therefore perfect, as your Father which is in  
heaven is perfect.* In the foregoing verses

\* Rom. xiii. 8, 10.

† Mat. v. 48.

SERM. he exhorts them thus, *love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.* And adds this argument, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. Immediately, it follows, *be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.* That is, imitate that glorious perfection of the Deity, his abundant goodness and long-suffering towards his creatures, even those of them that are wicked, and whom he cannot approve. And in the parallel place of *St. Luke's gospel* \*, after the very same discourse, the conclusion is thus expressed, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is also merciful.* So that, evidently, the christian perfection which our Lord recommends to his followers, in imitation of God, is the perfection of charity and mercy. And thus in the text, when the apostle had enumerated the other virtues which should be added to our faith, and adorn our christian profession, he mentions as the finishing part of a religious character, that we should add to godliness,

\* Luke vi. 36.

and to all the rest, brotherly kindness and charity. SERM.  
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These two, brotherly kindness and charity, are represented in the same manner, and with the same distinction as different virtues; the latter to be added to the former; tho' the principle is the same, an universal benevolence to mankind, differing only in its exercise, according to the diversity of the condition and circumstances of the object. The general law which our Saviour calls the second commandment, like unto the first, which enjoins the love of God, is this, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* And it appears plainly from our Lord's discourses, particularly his parable in the 10th of St. *Luke's* gospel, from the 30th verse, that by our *neighbour*, we are to understand any of mankind to whom we have an opportunity of doing good offices, without distinction of nation or religious profession; and elsewhere, as has been already observed, by an injunction more peculiar to himself, and to his own religious institution, he extends the precepts of charity, even to our enemies and persecutors. At the same time, as he has laid a foundation of great intimacy among his own dis-

SERM. ciples, having united them all to himself  
 IX. their head, as members of the same  
 body, by the same spirit, in one baptism or  
 religious profession, and one hope of their  
 calling; and in the relation of *children to  
 one God and Father of all, who is above  
 all, and through all, and in them all,*  
 he therefore enjoins them to keep the *unity of  
 the spirit in the bond of peace.* There are  
 peculiar offices of love due from them to each  
 other, founded on that intimate union. The  
 tenderest compassion to the infirmities of the  
 weak, bearing one another's burdens, in-  
 structing, exhorting, strengthening, comfort-  
 ing, and edifying each other. And as our  
 blessed Master enforces and recommends  
 these mutual kind offices of christians, the  
 members of his body by peculiar motives,  
 those especially taken from his own example,  
 and the love he has shewn to us in *dying  
 the just for the unjust, that he might bring us  
 to God,* so he lays very great stress on our  
 sincere and faithful performance of them.  
 This is the distinguishing badge of his true  
 followers; hereby, says he, *shall all men  
 know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one  
 another.*

But

But still, charity is not appropriated to those of the same religion, or those who are of the household of faith; at least, if there be a particular brotherly kindness due to them, and they *who have purified themselves by obeying the truth thro' the spirit*, will and ought to love one another *with pure hearts fervently*, yet a more extensive charity and good-will must be added to that virtue, a disposition to do good to every one of mankind, as we have opportunity.

Concerning this affection with the evidences and expressions of it, it is not necessary to say much; but, I shall consider more largely the obligations we are under to cultivate it, and especially the necessity of *adding it to godliness*. The principle itself is easily understood, and made obvious by that rule that is given us to judge by in the abridgment of the moral law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*. We know every one of us, however ignorant, what it is to love ourselves; there is no one of mankind, in whom this principle is not strong: We may be mistaken in the methods of pursuing our own happiness, no doubt many are mistaken, but we all sincerely wish and earnestly desire

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SERM. it. It is in the reality and truth, not in the

IX. measure of the affection, that self-love is the  
 } standard of charity; and by looking into our  
 own heart, and comparing it with that un-  
 dissembling desire we have of felicity to our-  
 selves, we may judge the sincerity of our love  
 to our neighbour.

The proper expressions and fruits of this inward good affection in the mind are as various as the necessities of some of mankind, and the abilities and opportunities of others to relieve them. As our present condition is imperfect, one way of supplying its wants is by the social and compassionate dispositions God has planted in mankind; so that the cares of every one are not confined to himself, but as parts of the same system, the same society, or as members of the same body, which is the similitude used in scripture to represent the near relation of christians, every one should be solicitous for the good of his brother, and the good of the whole. The happiness of the souls of men, arising from their integrity and virtue, is the greatest, in its kind, that they are capable of, and the longest in its duration; and, therefore, to promote it is the *first* demand of charity. To instruct the  
 ig-



ignorant, to reclaim the disobedient, to convert sinners from the error of their way, to strengthen the weak, comfort the feeble-minded, to encourage the sincere, and excite them to growing diligence and zeal in religion; these are the noblest offices we can possibly perform to our brethren, because they serve the highest ends, and produce the best and most lasting effects. And these are the charitable offices which the apostles very often and with great earnestness recommend to christians; as they severely inveigh against the contrary faults, and press all the disciples of Christ to avoid them; such as offending, weakening, censuring, judging, despising, and grieving one another; particularly, the New Testament urges two instances of charity, the forgiving of injuries, and forbearing the weak; that is, those of our fellow-christians, in whom we observe pitiable infirmities, not wilful and obstinate wickedness, and errors not pernicious or inconsistent with the very being of christianity. You will find it is the current doctrine of the apostles, that we ought to practise these constantly; and they are press'd with the greatest warmth, and enforced with the strongest arguments,

SERM. taken from the example of Christ, from the  
 IX. design of his death, and the obligations he  
 ~~~~~ has laid us under by his love. How often do  
 they call upon us to lay aside all animosities
 and contentions, all bitterness, clamour, envy,
 revenge, wrath, and evil speaking; to forgive
 one another, if any one have a quarrel against
 any, even as God for Christ's sake freely for-
 gave us; to receive our fellow Christians, the
 weak as well as the strong, as Christ received
 us to the glory of God; on account of lesser
 differences in religion (which in this imper-
 fect state are inevitable) not to break the
 unity and peace of the church, not to alie-
 nate our affections, nor withdraw from the
 religious fellowship of each other? Scarcely
 is there any thing more designedly and largely
 treated on, especially in *St. Paul's* epistles
 than this; as the condition of the church,
 and particularly the difference between the
Jewish and *Gentile* converts, did in a pecu-
 liar manner require it. And, by-the-by,
 these are offices of charity which need now
 as much as ever to be inculcated, there being
 notorious trespasses against them in almost all
 the Christian churches; not only particular
 persons are chargeable with it, but the very
 constitution of religious societies founded on
 things



things confessedly of very little moment, appropriating the tokens of christian communion and marks of esteem to those who agree in them. Any one may see how disagreeable this is to the apostolical rules which injoin Christians to receive those who are *weak in the faith not to doubtful disputations*; and to that *spirit of meekness and gentleness, of brotherly kindness and charity*, which the rule of our religion so warmly recommends.

But, besides these offices of charity, there are others injoin'd by the natural law of benevolence, and which the gospel so far from overlooking, peculiarly enforces; those, I mean, which relate to the present condition of mankind. The wise and sovereign providence of God has so ordered that there is a diversity in the state of men; some are indigent, others in a capacity of relieving; the *rich and the poor meet together*, the disconsolate and the comforter, the distressed and him who is able to help him. In all these and other cases of a like nature, reason and a compassionate heart will readily suggest to a man how he ought to show his charity; that it is by *feeding the hungry, cloathing the naked, visiting the sick, and the prisoner, and taking in the stranger*. To these good works

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the

SERM. the law and the prophets witness as duties of
 IX. perpetual obligation. And our Saviour, instead of diminishing from the value and importance of them, presses them with the greatest earnestness. In the account he gives of his own distribution of rewards and punishments at the last judgment, these he mentions as particular examples of the works he will liberally recompense; not so as to exclude others, but to shew that they are in God's sight of great account. And let it be remembered, that we must exert ourselves in the practice of them according to our several abilities. For charity is not an unactive affection resting in the heart, but shews itself with vigor in genuine beneficial fruits. The apostle *James* puts so plain a case that every man at first hearing must be convinced that the demands of charity are not satisfied either by good wishes or good words, without substantial good works. * *If a brother or a sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to them, depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit? Indeed it is equally unprofitable to the object and the*


* James ii. 15, 16.

pretender to charity. But I proceed to con-
sider,

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Secondly, The obligations we are under to the practice of this excellent duty. And the *first* I shall mention, is taken from the consideration of ourselves. If we enter into a serious reflection on the constitution of our own minds, we shall find they are so framed as to be under an almost necessary determination to the exercise as well as the approbation of charity; and if there be any part of *the work of God's law written in our hearts*, it is this. There is such an instinct of benevolence and compassion to the afflicted of our own kind planted in every human breast, that scarcely the strongest prejudices or most powerful habits of wickedness can overcome. By this sacred bond God has linked us together, and shewn his gracious care for the common advantage and happiness of all the nations of men which *he has made of one blood to dwell on the earth*. Let any one look into the workings of his own heart when a pitiable object is presented to him, and try whether he does not feel something within which calls him to stretch forth his hand for the relief of the distressed? if it is not with violence to himself that he can
shut

SERM. shut up his bowels, harden his heart, and

IX.  he is not self-reproached when he refuses or withdraws his help? and on the contrary, whether he does not find a real and substantial pleasure arise in his mind, a solid self-approving and abiding joy which exceeds all the gratifications of sense, when he has freely and heartily used his power, and improved the opportunities that were given him for doing good, and imparting comfort to the needy? The greater ability, therefore, which divine providence gives any man of diffusing the effects of his virtue far and wide by relieving multitudes of his fellow-creatures, the larger occasion he has of enjoying the purest pleasure, even like that of God himself, whose happiness is in communicating good; for the absolute perfection of his nature raises him above the possibility of receiving any. This is the highest enjoyment which can arise from power and riches. What real benefit can there be in the mere possession? *Solomon* says very justly concerning wealth, that *there is no good in it to the owner, save the beholding it with his eyes*; a very poor enjoyment. Nay, he observes, that riches often tend to the hurt of the possessor, which is always the

the

the case when they are abused to the purposes of luxury, of pride, and oppression. And St. Paul * teaches us, *that they who will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in perdition.* But when riches are employ'd in liberality, and are the means of doing good, they then turn to the best account and bring in the sweetest profit to the owner. All things in this world are subject to vicissitudes, and, particularly, we see every day changes in the outward condition of men; no mortal can be secure against this; but in all events the liberal man has the best prospect. *Blessed* (says the *Psalmist* †) *is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in trouble, he will preserve and keep him alive, he shall be blessed on the earth.* But though the goodness of providence is in this case the chief security, yet, in experience it is often found that the beneficence of good men has procured them such esteem in the world (it certainly has that effect above all other virtues) as has been very advantageous to them in a change of their outward condition. Therefore is || *Solomon's* advice very just, *Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it*

SERM.

IX.


* 1 Tim. vi. 9. † Ps. xli. 1. || Ecclef. xi. 1, 2.

after

SERM. *after many days. Give a portion to seven,*
 IX. *and also to eight, for thou knowest not what*
 evil shall be upon the earth. But if that expectation should fail, yet surely there will be a recompence at the resurrection of the just, and what is *lent to the Lord*, he will certainly repay in a future state. So that the best improvement which can be made of the *mammon of unrighteousness or falsehood*, that is, *deceitful riches*, is what our Lord recommends, namely, to make such friends of it by works of charity and mercy, *as when we fail shall receive us into everlasting habitations* *.

Secondly, Another obligation to the practice of brotherly kindness and charity arises from the object of it, our brethren and neighbours, their condition, and the relation we stand in to them. We are all brethren, derive our being from one origin, and partake of the same common nature, and are liable to the same frailties, indigence, and vicissitudes. † *God has made men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth.* And though his providence, which fixes *the bounds of their habitations*, and as *Moses* expresses it, *has divided the earth among them*, ap-

* Luke xvi. 9. † Acts xvii. 26.

points a diversity of stations for them, so that SERM.
the rich and the poor meet together, they IX.
ought to *remember that the Lord is the maker* 
of them all. This consideration ought to
unite their affections and engage their mutual
help. How unnatural is discord, or even
indifference, among children of the same fa-
mily? Now, the great parent of mankind
has an equal interest in every one of them.
Do we acknowledge him the author of our
being? He is equally the author of theirs;
which should inspire us with tender compas-
sion towards each other. If he has distin-
guished some children of his house from
others by his bounty, it is not that he would
have others in more afflicted circumstances
abandon'd to perish, but as the apostle speaks,
in recommending beneficence to Christians,
that the *abundance of some might supply the*
want of others. If an earthly father should
make an unequal distribution of his goods,
himself still living to superintend the affairs
of the whole Family, it would certainly be
under a law of kindness, and that the rich
should not harden his heart and shut his hands
against his poor brother. Thus the living
God who cares for all, for they are equally
the workmanship of his hands, has established

SERM. a law of mutual kindness, that so far there
 IX. may be an equality as none shall lack the
 necessaries of life. The common kindred
 among men, and their proximity of blood, is
 an argument which nature strongly urges in
 favour of the needy. Thus the * prophet
 expresses the exercise of compassion to the
 indigent, *that thou hide not thyself from thine
 own flesh*, and thereby strongly enforces the
 acts of mercy there mentioned, *dealing bread
 to the hungry, and cloathing to the naked.*

But the Christian religion has superadded
 special obligations to those general ones which
 the common ties of humanity lay upon us,
 by establishing a new and intimate relation
 among the disciples of Christ. Our Redeemer
*died for this very end, that he † might ga-
 ther together into one the children of God who
 were scattered abroad.* He has || *redeemed
 a people unto God by his blood out of every
 tongue, and kindred, and nation; and col-
 lected them into one sacred society and one
 body, as the apostle says, ‡ knit together by
 joints and bands, which having nourishment
 ministered by the effectual working of the spi-
 rit in every part, increaseth to the edifying*

* Isa. lviii. 7. † John xi. 52. || Rev. v. 9.

‡ Coloff. ii. 19.

itself in love. Nay, we are members one of another *, bound, therefore, by a mutual tender care, even as the hands, and eyes, and the feet of the natural body are ready to contribute their good offices for the safety of each other as for their own.

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In the *third* place, we are with respect to God under great and indispensable obligations to the exercise of brotherly kindness and charity. This is clearly insinuated in the text, for the apostle exhorts us to add charity to godliness, intimating the necessary connexion between the things themselves, and that if the principles of the fear and love of God be in our hearts, they will naturally determine us to exercise good-will and beneficence to our brethren. It is true, the moral obligation of benevolence to our fellow-creatures may be perceived without attending to the authority of God as injoining it, or such sanctions of his law as directly operate on our hopes and fears; for so the mind of man is framed, as necessarily to approve some things, of some dispositions and actions of free agents, or to esteem them honest and lovely and praise-worthy, prior to any considerations of the consequences to ourselves or

* Rom. xii.

SERM. of happiness to be obtained by them. Piety

IX. is one of these things, and charity is another.

Propose to any man, so as he shall understand them, the moral perfections of the Supreme Being, and the relations we bear to him as his creatures and beneficiaries, preserved by him, and daily receiving favours from him, and he will immediately acknowledge that reverence, love, trust, submission, and obedience are due to him. After the same manner, if the mutual relations of men are represented, it will appear that kindness and beneficence are amiable and praise-worthy. But these two great branches of our duty are connected together, and especially, the former has a necessary influence on the latter. To this purpose we have an express declaration of the apostle St. *John* *, which shews that the natural tendency of the love of God, the sum of godliness, is to produce love to our brethren with the genuine fruits of it. *But who so hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

We cannot have a juster notion of religion than that it consists in an imitation of the

* 1 John iii. 17.

moral perfections of the Deity, and doing the things which please him. If we believe his amiable excellencies, and have an esteem and reverence for him in our hearts, we must be convinced that it is very desirable, nay, and the greatest perfection we are capable of, to be as like him as the frailty of our nature will allow; and that to be approv'd by him in our actions must be a great happiness, and most worthy of us continually to pursue. Now, if godliness imports a disposition to imitate God, then certainly it will direct us to charity, for thereby we shall resemble our heavenly father, *who is good unto all, and his mercies are over all his works.*

SERM. IX.

Nothing appears more evident to a considerate mind than the divine bounty. What a multitude of creatures depend upon him, and he gives them that which is convenient for them! The earth and the sea are filled with the riches of his liberality; in them are innumerable *living things, which all wait on him that he may give them their meat in due season; that which he gives them they gather; he opens his hand, and they are filled with good.* The human race are his particular care. How wonderful is that provision which kind providence continually makes for us?

SERM. All our daily returning wants, and we cannot number them, are plentifully supplied by him. What devotion, what gratitude to him must this excite in an attentive mind? But the best expression of it is in *following him as dear children*, that is doing good, relieving the necessitous, comforting the afflicted, giving and hoping for nothing again; *in fine*, being merciful as he is. Our goodness cannot extend to God, *nor can a man be profitable to his Maker*. He is infinitely above the need or possibility of receiving any thing from us. The principal return he requires, is, that we should exercise some little similitude of that mercy and compassion he has shewn to us. This obligation with respect to God will appear to be very strong, if we consider, not only the infinite disproportion between that beneficence he has exercised towards us and that which he requires from us in return; especially, that we owe to his goodness our redemption as well as our being, and that while we were sinners, *he gave his son to die for us*; I say, if we consider not only this, but farther, that he has a supreme and absolute dominion over all the good things he bestows on us; they are his own, no one can call him to account, he may do with his own what he

he will; whereas we are not sovereign proprietors of any thing, but have received what we possess from him in trust, and under an express condition that we shall employ it for his service, and particularly for the good of our brethren; thus are we bound to the offices of charity in point of justice and fidelity, as well as gratitude. Besides, it ought still to be remembered, that by our sins we had made a forfeiture of our lives and all our enjoyments, and what is restored by mere grace should be employed according to the will of the donor. The demand of christian charity goes so far as even to our lives, so * St. *John* teaches us, *Hereby we perceive the love of God, because he (the Lord Jesus Christ) laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* From whence it is justly inferred in the following words, that the love of God cannot dwell in that man, who *having this world's goods, and seeing his brother in need, shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him.*

Again, godliness imports a disposition to do those things which are pleasing to God, and which he approves. Now, it is apparent not only from the declarations of his word, but the

* 1 John iii. 16.

SERM. whole scheme of his providence, that he is
 IX. good to his creatures, and particularly to
 mankind; that it is his gracious and kind intention they should be happy according to the measure of their capacity. There is such an aptitude in things to that purpose, such a suitability of objects and events without us, to our wants, our inward desires, and propensities, such a constant succession of the former always answering the perpetual demands of the other, by which we still know in experience that good is done to us, no one can reasonably doubt but these objects and events are designed by providence as *means* in order to happiness as the *end*. Therefore, to do good, to communicate happiness to our fellow-creatures, as far as it is in our power, particularly, to those of our own kind, is to do the will of God, and prosecute what is apparently his intention; so that it may be justly said that unmercifulness and withholding help from the needy, is undoing, as far as we can, the work of God, destroying what he intends to build, and opposing rather than *working together with him*, and indeed, rebelling against the universal law of the creation.

But,

But, Christianity is a doctrine according to SERM.
godliness; and this is the religion we profess IX.
as delivered from God by *Jesus Christ* and his apostles. Now what are the evidences of respect to God which it prescribes? Every page almost of the New Testament is filled with earnest exhortations to charity, and the strongest and most pressing arguments are used to enforce it. Our Saviour lays such stress on mercy to all men in distress, and kindness to our brethren, that it is impossible for any one to believe his declarations and consider them impartially, and not be convinced that without these qualifications he cannot be an approved disciple of Christ. But, especially, the example of our great master is urged as a motive to this duty. The apostle exhorting to a liberal contribution to the saints *, mentions it as what must have a mighty influence on every grateful Christian's heart, *ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.* Our blessed Lord himself in the days of his humiliation practised that charity which he recommends to his followers. Though it was necessary for

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

SERM. him to appear in a very humble form, and
 IX. he was so poor as to have no place of his own
 where to lay his head, yet out of the small
 sustenance for himself and his disciples where-
 with to provide the necessaries of life, he
 always spared something for the poor; and
 for this use there was a little treasury kept by
 one who always attended him. But, if he had
 not silver and gold, such as he had he freely
 gave, for he was continually employed in mi-
 nistring to the necessities of mankind, in go-
 ing about and doing good, healing all manner
 of sickness and diseases. Again, our Lord
 expressly assures us that he will take kind of-
 fices to his needy disciples as the best expres-
 sions of love to himself; for he will say to
 the righteous at the last day, *Inasmuch as ye
 have done it (fed, and clothed, and visited)
 unto these my brethren, ye have done it unto
 me.* This will then be the great subject of
 judicial inquiry, and according to the fruits
 of charity, or according to the want of them,
 so will the rewards and the punishments of
 men be in a future state. *For he shall have
 judgment without mercy that hath shewed no
 mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment* *,
 that is, God will surely punish the unmerci-

* James ii. 13.

ful; but the compassionate and charitable rejoiceth in hope of his escaping the judgment of condemnation. There is not any foundation on which a man can with greater confidence assure his heart before God, and comfort himself in all changes of his condition. These are the works which will bear a review with the greatest pleasure, and self-approbation. With them *Job* comforted himself, and maintained his integrity and his hope in the greatest affliction. In the characters given of good men in scripture the practice of charity is always a principal part. *Job* reflecting on his most prosperous state in the 29th chapter of his book, when he was in the highest reputation, speaks of this as what procured him the highest and most universal esteem, as well as it afforded the most solid joy and peace to his own mind, at the 12th verse, *I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widows heart to sing for joy.* And, in the New Testament, this was the excellent character of *Cornelius**, honoured with singular favours from God,

SERM.
IX.

* Acts x. 2.

SERM. for he sent an apostle with special commission


IX. to instruct him, and the Holy Ghost fell
upon him even before his baptism, *he was a
devout man, and one that feared God and gave
much alms to the people.*

S E R M O N X.

Sincere Obedience the best Preparation for knowing the Truth.

John vii. 17.

If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

THE public teaching of our Saviour SERM.
very often produced admiration and X.
astonishment in his hearers, though 
the generality of them were not converted. And as they could not help wondering at the wisdom with which he spoke, it was a matter of great speculation and inquiry among them, how he came by it, considering what they knew of his education. That a man, who had never been instructed in schools, but brought up obscurely in the family of a tradesman, without applying himself to the study

SERM. study of letters, should discover such a superior understanding, and a thorough and more exact knowledge of the law and the prophets than the most learned scribes had attained to; this was certainly a very amazing appearance. But the true solution of it himself gives in the words preceding my text: for when the *Jews* marvelled, as at the 15th verse, saying, *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* It is not a doctrine of human learning and wisdom, which I attribute to my own invention and industry, thereby seeking to establish my reputation as a celebrated teacher, but immediately communicated to me from God, whose glory I aim at in the effectual reformation of men, not to please their curiosity, and acquire fame to myself.

But, here a very important question arose, How was this pretence supported, and how did it appear that he was a messenger immediately sent from heaven, and divinely instructed to deliver his doctrine to the world? For if that were true, consequences of the greatest moment depended upon it, and he justly claimed a greater respect than what was due to the highest human abilities and acquisitions,

acquisitions. For proof of it therefore, only two kinds of arguments could be adduced, and our Saviour insisted on both: The one, an external attestation from heaven by a signal divine interposition for confirming what he said. Thus, he appealed to the miraculous works which he wrought, demanding belief for their sakes; and to the evident accomplishment of ancient divine predictions in him. He called upon the *Jews*, to search the Scriptures, which they acknowledged to be divinely inspired, and the rule of their religion, and left the question to be decided by their testimony. For, says he, *they are they which testify of me* *. The other argument is taken from the nature and tendency of the doctrine itself. If it be agreeable to the principles of natural religion, and worthy of God as its author; if it aims not at the selfish interest of the teachers, but the good of mankind, by giving them just sentiments of the Deity, and of their duty; if it contains the most powerful motives to the practice of every virtue; this will prepare a well-disposed mind to consider impartially, and receive readily the other argument, the external divine attestation by miracles and prophecy, as plainly shewing the interpo-

SERM.
X.
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\* John v. 39.

sition

SERM. fiction of the power and wisdom of God, to  
 X. recommend it.



But, the prevailing disaffection of men to strict virtue, and their strong prejudices against the purity of its moral precepts, furnished the grand objections against the christian religion, and were the real causes of their not believing it. So our Saviour says, \* *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* And in the text, *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* This is certainly a fair and reasonable issue, to put the credit of christianity, or any pretended divine revelation upon. If a man be an enemy to God, and to righteousness in his mind, *by wicked works*, he cannot be a competent judge. How can he fall in with a revelation, which is supposed to be an improvement upon the dictates of natural religion, and to carry virtue and goodness higher than human reason could do without it; how can he fall in with it, who is averse to natural religion, and virtue itself, as taught by the light of nature? But if any one

\* John iii. 19.



will examine such a revelation with an honest heart, free from the dominion of sinful lusts and passions, and with integrity of disposition to admit of a reasonable conviction, and to do sincerely whatever he shall find to be the will of God, however contrary it may be to vicious affections, and to his selfish interest, let him be the judge. SERM. X.

In discoursing on these words, I shall consider,

I. The condition our Saviour proposes, or the character and qualifications of the person, who shall rightly judge concerning his, and, by parity of reason, concerning any other doctrine, whether it be of God, *If any man will do his, that is God's, will.*

II. What he pronounces of such a one: let him judge, and he shall not miss of making a true judgment: *He shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*


And then I shall draw some useful inferences.

I. Let us consider the condition our Saviour proposes, or the character and qualification of  
of

SERM. of the person who shall rightly judge concerning  
 X. this, and by parity of reason concerning  
 any other doctrine, whether it be of God.  
*If any man will do his, that is God's, will.*

It was to the Jews our Saviour spoke, and therefore with respect to them his meaning must be, that they should be qualified to pass a right judgment upon christianity, by conforming themselves, their temper and conversation to the rule of religion which they had already embraced. They acknowledged, and he agreed with them, that *Moses* and the prophets were messengers by whom God spoke *at sundry times, and in diverse manners to their fathers.* If therefore, they were the true disciples of those ancient teachers, if they sincerely received the law, and the holy oracles delivered by them, and walked according to their direction, uprightly, they might then be able to discern, whether the gospel which he taught was accompanied with sufficient evidence of a divine original.

But, a mere profession would not so qualify them, or a merely speculative and unaffectionate assent to the truth, and an external conformity to the ceremonial injunctions of the law. *Moses* himself, and the prophets did not lay the stress there: nor was their doc-

doctrine rightly understood, if that was taken SERM.  
for fulfilling the design of it. The first and X.  
great commandment of the law, which the   
*Jews* also confessed, was, *to love the Lord God*  
*with all their heart, and with all their soul, and*  
*with all their mind.* And the second was like  
it, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself\**.  
And the substance of what God required by the  
prophets was, *to do justly, and to love mercy,*  
*and to walk humbly with God †.* This was  
declared in the Old Testament to be better  
than sacrifice, and the knowledge of God,  
the fear of him, and obedience to his moral  
precepts, more valuable than burnt-offerings  
and all ceremonial observances. Here then was  
the defect of the *Jews*, which principally occa-  
sioned their disbelief of christianity: Not that  
they came short of a warm zeal for the honour  
of their religion as divine. They contended for  
it even furiously: or of a punctual observance  
of the positive *Mosaic* institutions; they ful-  
filled them to the minute circumstances of  
tithing mint, annise, and cummin exactly,  
and added to them traditions of their own:  
But they neglected faith, and judgment,  
and mercy, and the love of God, the weightier

\* Mat. xxii. 37, 39.

† Micah vi. 8.

SERM. matters of the law. They indulged them-  
 X. selves in pride and covetousness, and other  
 ~~~~~ vices, which so darkened their understand-  
 ings, and hardened their hearts, that they
 could not perceive, nor would assent to the
 truth which is after godliness and virtue.

But tho' this was immediately spoken to the Jews, and the qualification required in them for judging of the truth and divine authority of the christian doctrine, was doing the will of God revealed by *Moses* and the prophets; yet it holds equally with respect to all others, not only that obeying sincerely a former acknowledged revelation, will best prepare men for judging of a pretended new one, whether it be real or not: But they who never had any, by doing what the light of nature discovers to be the will of God, are in the best condition, indeed the only sure way, to know a doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether the teacher speaks of himself.

It is certain that God manifests himself to all mankind, by the light of nature and reason. This is his original voice, whereby we are taught the great principles of religion, his being, his perfections, his providence, and the homage and obedience we owe him.

The

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech, nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world*.

SERM.
X.


And not only are men instructed by the works of God, in the first principles of religion, from which they may infer their duty, but he has engraven on their hearts a sense of good and evil, and written in them the *work of his law*, to the rectitude of which their consciences bear witness †.

This is the original foundation of religion laid in the frame of our nature, to which any true revelation can only be supposed to be a superstructure accommodated to some special exigencies which have arisen in the state of mankind. It is as much and as certainly as any thing can be the voice of God. And being that which is the first and most clearly known to us, it is the rule whereby all doctrines said to be of God, are to be examined and nothing received as such, which is found by every one judging for himself, contrary to it.

* Psalm xix. 1, 2, 3, 4. † Rom. ii. 15.

SERM. Now, if it be so, it follows that they who
 X. do the will of God made known to them by
 the light of nature shall know a doctrine that
 is of God, and distinguish between it and that
 which falsely pretends to that character; just
 in the same manner, and for the same reason,
 that they who sincerely obey a former true
 revelation are best qualified to judge of a latter
 one. In the one case the honest mind re-
 ceives the new divine doctrine because it is
 agreeable to what he was before satisfied God
 had revealed. In the other, because he per-
 ceives it agreeable to what his reason fully
 assured him before, was the will of God.
 And in both cases it is the corrupt affections
 of men, as a *law leading them into captivity
 to sin*, which cause them to rebel against the
 light that makes *manifest their evil deeds*, or
 occasions their unbelief. Nor can we rea-
 sonably doubt but the declaration of our Sa-
 viour in the text was intended by him to be
 understood in this extensive sense. For he
 knew and designed that his gospel should be
 preached to the Gentiles who never had any
 other positive revelation, as well as to the
 Jews, who had *Moses* and the prophets,
 and that it would meet with various reception
 among both. Therefore, the character and
 qua-

qualification he gives us of those who should rightly understand and sincerely embrace it, may be universally applied to the hearers, since the reason of it is universal; and in fact we find that among the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, corrupt men under the power of vicious affections and devoted to their selfish interests, could not discern the evidences of christianity when it was published to them, but rejected it with abhorrence. As at *Ephesus*, *Demetrius*, and the craftsmen, apprehending the loss of their gainful trade, in making silver shrines for *Diana*, if the gospel were entertained, gave it violent opposition, and raised a tumultuous persecution against the apostles. On the other hand, men of probity gave it a fair hearing, and perceiving the convincing proofs of its truth, they received it with candor, of which *Cornelius* is an illustrious example. And as the apostle *Peter* excellently observes on that occasion, that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*, so from the same instance it is apparent, that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness; in other words, he

* Acts x. 34, 35.

SERM. that doth his will, shall know of a doctrine
 X. said to be of God, whether it be really so.

I shall only add, that doing the will of God, the condition mentioned in the text, must be understood in a sense accommodated to the imperfect state of human nature. Whatever dispensation men are under, whether *without law, or under a law*, as the apostle speaks; that is, a positive written law; it is the sincerity of their hearts, and the integrity of their lives in the general tenor of them, that will qualify them for knowing the doctrines which are of God: not a sinless perfection, for that is what no man can attain to in any state while he is in this world. God will communicate all necessary light to an honest mind heartily disposed to understand the truth, and to practise what is good as far as it is at present known, making gracious allowances for unavoidable infirmity.

I come, in the second place, to consider what our Saviour pronounces concerning the person qualified, as already explained, that he shall not fail of making a right judgment of Christianity, or of any other divine revelation, or pretended revelation. *He shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* If a doctrine falsely
 lays

lays claim to a divine original, it is for that very reason to be rejected. It may indeed contain some truth which ought to be still received. But the scheme is an imposture, and the author a person of the most infamous character, a prophet that *lies in the name of the Lord*. Now that we may be able to distinguish in *this* case, between a divine doctrine and a human invention, or whether the real original author be God or a man only falsely pretending a commission from him, we ought to have a standard to judge by; that is, some previous knowledge of the will of God, with which all other declarations, which really come from him, always will and necessarily must be consistent, it being impossible that he should contradict himself. It is true, God may reveal to men what is new, and could not be known without a revelation: but then it cannot be contrary, or have an opposite tendency, to what was discovered by a former certain revelation, or to the invariable law of nature, but rather must tend to strengthen it and promote its design. This is the sure ground upon which the assertion in the text rests. The good man who sincerely does the will of God, knows it best, and not having his mind biassed with any cor-

SERM. rupt affection which may mislead his judgment,

X. is best able to discern what is agreeable or disagreeable to it. Any one who is acquainted with human nature and has made observations on mankind, must be sensible that the affections and passions of men have a very great influence on their understandings, inclining them to judge of things quite differently from what they would do, if their minds were free from prejudices. And this makes the great difference between good and bad men in judging of moral doctrines. The former readily receive the truth because they are heartily willing to obey it; and the more they discover of it, the greater satisfaction they have arising from a consciousness of their own integrity: or as our Saviour speaks, * *He that doth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.* The other, the obstinately vicious, are averse to the same truth because it reproaches them for their wickedness which they are unwilling to forsake, and therefore they catch at every handle or colourable pretence whereby they may support themselves in rejecting it; or, according to our Lord's expression in the place just now referred to † *Every one that*

* John iii. 21

† Ver. 20.

doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh SERM.
to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. X.

And as thus it appears that the doctrine of the text is founded in plain reason and what may be commonly observed to be the disposition of men ; so,

Secondly, we may consider it in another view equally advantageous, that doing the will of God is a qualification so acceptable to him, that it will intitle men to farther illumination and instruction from him, in matters of so great necessity and importance. It ought to be acknowledged that God is the * *Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh down.* And, therefore, any of mankind who *lack wisdom* and instruction in their duty and in order to their happiness, may seek it from him with good hope of obtaining it: since he gives to all his living creatures that which is convenient for them, *He opens his hand liberally, and they are filled with good*, it cannot be doubted but he will give to reasonable beings those gifts which are suitable to their nature, and whereby it may be carried to its proper perfection, provided there be no obstruction on their part, no disqualification which, if I

* James i. 17.

SERM. may speak so, lays a restraint on his most
 X. communicative bounty. All valuable and
 } useful knowledge is derived from God as its
 original author. *There is a * spirit in man,
 and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth
 him understanding.* Discretion in conducting
 even the affairs of common life *cometh from
 the Lord, who is wonderful in counsel and ex-
 cellent in working,* as the prophet observes ||.

Much more may we justly attribute to him the wisdom which is necessary to men's moral conduct, upon which their highest happiness depends, and it is most worthy of him to bestow. Especially, his assistance will not be wanting, that those who are sincerely disposed and duly qualified may know the characters of a revelation from himself, since that must be supposed to be of the greatest moment and the most important consequences to depend upon their receiving or rejecting it. For it can never be imagined that God would interpose in an extraordinary manner, by making his will known to mankind without intending some great benefit to them, and conveying some very necessary instruction. And the same goodness which moved him to reveal himself at all, would determine

* Job xxxii. 8.

|| Isa. xxviii. 29.

him to favour them with those aids whereby they should be rendered capable of understanding it. Now, of all men they are the most likely to be distinguished with the privilege of receiving farther instruction from God, who have duly improved in practice the knowledge they have already attained, and faithfully done the will of God so far as they could understand it. So that we may consider the words of the text as containing a promise to sincere well-disposed persons, the lovers of true virtue and goodness, “ That God will teach them so far as is absolutely necessary, and that they shall not fatally err by receiving a pernicious imposture for a divine revelation.” And this indeed is what our notions of the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being will naturally lead us to believe.

SERM.
X.

I come now to draw some inferences.
And

First, What has been said concerning the christian scheme in general, may be applied to its particular parts. The gospel is a system which contains a variety of doctrines properly so called, or articles of belief, which are principally the facts reported in it concerning
our

SERM. our Saviour, of promises, of threatnings, and
 X. rules of life. These all being delivered by
 the divine author himself, or by his immediate messengers, the apostles guided by his Spirit, are according to his intention to be embraced by his disciples. But they are not all equally understood, either because they are not alike clearly revealed ; which in fact was the case in the first age of christianity ; some principles were but obscurely hinted by our Saviour himself which are now articles of his religion. The best of his disciples who upon clear conviction embraced this grand truth, which was the sum of the christian creed, that he was *the Messias*, a teacher sent from God, seem in a great measure, and for a long time, ignorant of his dying on the cross, as important as that doctrine now appears to be by the declarations of the New Testament. And when he was dead they were ignorant of his resurrection. For St. *John* says expressly *, that *as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead*. Or, the case may be, that though the revelation of Christianity is compleated, yet some of its particular doctrines are not alike clearly and intelligibly propounded to

* *John* xx 9.

men. For example, in very corrupt ages and parts of the church when the generality of Christians have not the scriptures in their hands, nor any means of knowing revealed religion but as it is delivered to them by their teachers, who deliver some doctrines plainly enough, others they entirely pervert and misrepresent: In such cases it is ordinarily impossible that the generality of Christians should clearly understand these latter doctrines. SERM. X.

But here may be justly applied what our Saviour teaches in the text, that such as do the will of God, shall know the doctrine which is of him. That is, they shall know whatever is *absolutely necessary* to be known. They shall not only be able to judge concerning a divine revelation, but also to discern and to understand all its essential articles. Without that they cannot be said to know it at all. And indeed if we suppose that a man by the honesty of his heart and the goodness of his life is qualified to know a doctrine proposed to him *whether it be of God*, we may well conclude that when it is gradually communicated, such persons, by conforming to it so far as it is understood, will be qualified to know what is farther necessary.

The

SERM.

X.

The plain consequence is, that a sincere Christian cannot err in a fundamental doctrine of religion. For that is a direct contradiction to the text, implying that he who will do the will of God, may not *know the doctrine which is of God*, not knowing what is of its very essence. They may be ignorant of some things contained in a divine revelation, for they are not infallible: but not of any thing which is *absolutely necessary* to the end of it, that is, to their salvation and acceptance with God. As they who were taught of God the truths of natural religion, sincerely obeying them in practice, were thereby disposed for receiving Christianity, or *coming to Christ*; so his true sheep, his faithful disciples, can distinguish between his voice and the voice of strangers, that is, true doctrines agreeable to the foundation he has laid, and the erroneous inventions of selfish and corrupt men, which have a contrary tendency. And therefore, let no sincere person whose heart witnesses to his diligence and impartiality in inquiring, and his readiness to receive whatever he can discover to be the will of God, be in a *panic* about his belief, apprehending he does err or may err fundamentally, or so as to come short of the hope of the gospel by

his error. Against that danger he has a perfect security, if we may rely on the assurance our Saviour gives us in the text. And indeed the consideration of the wisdom and goodness of God in the government of his reasonable creatures will not suffer us to think otherwise. For doing the will of God in the sense of the text comprehends all the moral qualifications which we can reasonably conceive should render us acceptable to him, and to suspend our title to his favour, or any thing which is absolutely necessary to it, on any other condition, is to represent him as an arbitrary Being, who does not deal with moral agents according to the measures of equity and goodness, which is at once to destroy the true and the only foundation of all religion and confidence towards him.

In the next place, we may infer, that our preservation from fundamental and destructive errors in religion does not depend on infallibility in ourselves or any other Christians. Our Saviour has placed it on another and an infinitely more just and reasonable foundation. Religion is every man's personal affair, and his own happiness depends upon it. If he is an infinitely good Being, and a perfect lover of righteousness in whose hands the distribution

SERM.
X.
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SERM. tribution of that happiness is, and all the
 X. knowledge, and whatever else is requisite to
 it, on what terms is it to be communicated? One would naturally apprehend it should be on the terms of our exerting our powers in the best manner we can to please him, that is, by the practice of virtue or doing his will. This is the doctrine of the text. But the pretence of infallibility and human authority in the matters of faith and conscience, sets the whole affair on a quite different foot. It puts our religion and salvation into the hands of weak and sinful mortals, and the whole virtue of Christianity intitling sinners to eternal life, must consist in a servile submission to their decrees. Let plain reason judge whether this be a doctrine of God, or whether men teaching it speak of themselves. This pretence naturally produces the effects which experience shows us it has produced where it is claimed. It establishes profound ignorance, turns religion into superstition, fills the hearts of men with pride, blind zeal and uncharitableness, and is followed with tyranny and persecution. And in proportion wherever there is any claim of human authority in the affairs of religion and conscience, it has the same tendency. Perhaps, some may
 imagine

imagine that the doctrine of sincerity as con-
taining all needful qualifications for sufficient
knowledge in divine things, tends to lessen
the value of believing aright, and to make
Christians indifferent about religious truths.
But indeed the quite contrary follows from
it. It does diminish the importance of cu-
rious speculations about which good men may
differ, and yet which some tyrannically im-
pose upon others as necessary points, thereby
throwing the christian world into confusion.
But what can lay a greater importance on
real salutary knowledge and a right discern-
ment of religious truth, and raise it higher in
the esteem of men, than making the best
thing that the human nature is capable of,
that is, sincerity in doing the will of God, the
condition of attaining it?

Another inference is, that we should al-
ways have an inviolable regard to the will
of God, I mean the weighty matters of his
law, in which all good men are agreed, and
make it a rule in judging of religious truth.
Whatever has a necessary connection with
judgment, and mercy, and honesty, and the
love of God, and a direct immediate ten-
dency to promote them, we may safely re-
ceive. Whatever has no relation to them is
of

SERM.
X.



SERM. of no importance. Whatever has a contrary
 X. tendency ought to be rejected. Judging by
 this rule, a great many doctrines which have
 been taught in some christian churches are no
 otherwise to be accounted of than as *wood
 and hay and stubble*, good for nothing but to
 be burnt, and they even risque the salvation
 of the authors and teachers of them. What
 a notion can a man have of the will of God,
 who imagines it is fulfilled by forms and ce-
 remonies, by fastings and voluntary humility?
 What connexion have these things with moral
 goodness? But they are pernicious, everfive
 of the very foundation, when substituted in
 the room of it; and so are things of a better
 character and original, even all the instru-
 mental parts of religion, when duties of po-
 sitive institution are put in the place of solid
 piety and virtue, penitential griefs for effectual
 repentance and amendment of life, and a
 presumptuous confidence in the merits of
 Christ, for faith producing by love works of
 righteousness, temperance, and charity. All
 these being doctrines which have been main-
 tained, a sincere mind universally and up-
 rightly disposed to do the will of God, will
 be able to make a true judgment of them, and
 others of a like nature and tendency.

To

To conclude, if we would make proficiency in the most useful knowledge and in the discernment of religious truth, let us be diligent in the practice of our duty, so far as we already understand it; and thus if *we follow on to know, we shall know the Lord.* The apostle * speaks of a kind of knowledge *which puffeth up, but charity edifieth.* By it we make the best and the surest progress in true Christianity. And at the third verse he says, *If any man love God, the same is known of him;* rather it should be translated, the same shall be made to know him. It is not always the greatest genius and the most penetrating judgment that understands religion best. Some men of the most eminent abilities are the most subtle defenders of error, when their minds are under the power of corrupt affections. Thus the apostle accounts for the apostacy of Christians, and experience justifies his account †. Men are drawn away with the deceits of imposture, because they *received not the love of the truth,* and are abandoned to the efficacy of error to *believe lies, because they had pleasure in unrighteousness.* But, an honest heart, sound

* 1 Cor. viii. 1.

† 2 Theff. ii. 10, 11.

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SERM. in God's statutes *, *shall know the truth and*
X. *be made free by it.* As the *Psalmist* says †,
by an affectionate meditation on God's pre-
cepts and learning them, *he was wiser than*
his enemies. For *they, says he, are ever*
with me.

* Pf. cxix. 80.

† Pf. cxix. 97, 98

S E R-

S E R M O N XI.

Of the Vanity of Man's Judgment
compared with that of God.

I Cor. iv. 3, 4.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment — — — but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

AS the apostle *Paul* was a very eminent and successful teacher of christianity, the enemies of that sacred institution in its purity and simplicity were his enemies, continually persecuting him with reproaches, and endeavouring to raise a spirit against him; not only from private envy, but with a wicked intention to defeat the design of his ministry, and render his labours for the conversion of men, and the edification of christians ineffectual. These attempts were especially made at *Corinth*, where false apostles,

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SERM. Judaising teachers, and vain pretenders to
 XI. science and to oratory, join'd their utmost
 ~~~~~ efforts to raise a party in opposition to him,  
 and lessen him in the esteem of the people,  
 who by his means had received the gospel,  
 and were formed into a christian church.  
 And since the purity of his life was such as  
 cut off all handle of calumny on that account,  
 they represented his person and his speech in  
 the most disadvantageous light ; further in-  
 sinuating that he had ambitious aspiring  
 views to establish himself in a super-eminent  
 authority, and bring others into a servile sub-  
 jection to him who were in several respects his  
 equals or superiors, and who therefore set up  
 for an equal or superior leading in the church.

By these means the apostle was laid under  
 the disagreeable necessity of vindicating his  
 own character, which he does particularly  
 in this and the other epistle to the *Corinthians*.  
 He proves largely his calling to the apostolic  
 office by the evident signs of it in the il-  
 lustrious miracles he wrought for the confir-  
 mation of his doctrine. He acknowledges,  
 indeed, that his speech was not eloquent, and  
 that he did not pretend to a high reputation  
 for human learning, but insists that this was  
 so far from being any just objection against  
 his




his preaching, on the contrary, it was most becoming the sublime excellency, the gravity, and simplicity of the gospel doctrine, which would be disparaged rather than served by the little *arts* of sophistry and the enticing words of man's wisdom ; its true authority and credit depending not on the wisdom or power of men, but the divine attestation given it by miracles and extraordinary gifts, which he calls *the demonstration of the spirit and of power*. And for insinuated reflections, that he affected pre-eminence, and carried it as a master with haughty neglect of those who had at least equal pretensions ; nothing can be farther than the whole conduct of *St. Paul* from any the least appearance of a lordly, magisterial, or a factious party spirit ; he preached *not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and himself the servant of christians for Christ's sake* ; he never studied to promote the service of a party, but of pure religion, in opposition to all party interests, names, and distinctions, which he used his utmost endeavour to have intirely taken away. But, after all, if the arts of adversaries had been able to make any impressions on the minds of the christian people to his disadvantage, so that even they went so far

SERM. as to join in censuring him, this was a matter

XI. he was not extremely solicitous about, except for their own sakes, for, says he, *with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged you, or of man's judgment.*

These words, not to insist any more on the apostle's particular circumstances referred to, and his design in speaking them, will bear a general and very useful application to all of us, in directing our regards to men, and their judgment, and indeed, in forming our temper and our whole conversations: for they contain two considerations of great, tho' very unequal importance, to the enjoyment of life, and the regulating of our behaviour, the judgment of men, our fellow creatures or fellow christians, and the judgment of God.


These considerations, I say, are both of importance. For, even the judgment of our fellow mortals concerning us and our actions, we cannot help finding our hearts in some degree affected with; the instincts of our nature determine us so, and from a respect to this judgment, we take many of our measures in life. But to a mind so constituted as *St. Paul's* was, so thoroughly religious and satisfied from itself, that is, from a consci-  
ness

ness of its own integrity, so possessed with SERM.  
the love and fear of God, so fully persuaded XI.  
of his being, his perfections, and government   
of the world, either the approbation or dis-  
approbation of men, was but a very small  
matter in comparison. Though it is natural  
for men to desire the esteem of each other,  
which renders their condition much more  
safe and comfortable, especially, to a person  
in such a public station as *St. Paul* was, his  
general good reputation must contribute  
greatly to his usefulness, for which reason he  
principally valued it; yet to a man who  
makes a just estimate of things according to  
their real value, this is of no moment at all  
when set against the divine approbation. This  
comparison I intend to insist on in the pre-  
sent discourse, and to shew that the judgment  
of men concerning our characters and actions  
is very little to be valued, if we consider  
that *he who judgeth us is the Lord*: And  
then I shall make some useful observations  
upon it.

That, whatever we may think concern-  
ing the judgment of men, indeed any of  
mankind, and whatever solicitude we may  
have to obtain it in our favour, the apostle  
concluded rightly it is a very little thing

SERM. comparatively with the judgment of God,  
 XI. will appear, if we consider the uncertainty  
 of the one, and the infallible certainty of the  
 other; the infinitely greater importance of  
 the latter in itself, and to all the purposes for  
 which approbation can be desired; and *lastly*,  
 the consequences of it to our interest.

*First*, as the subject of the judgment here meant is the moral character and the moral conduct of men, which upon serious reflection and by the very constitution of our minds, must appear most worthy of our regard, the opinion we have of a person's judgment always bears proportion to his knowledge, to his capacity of discerning, his opportunities of information, his impartiality and diligence in enquiring. On this account it is a small thing to be judged of men, because this judgment is little to be relied on. It is often erroneous; their understandings are very weak and narrow, their knowledge is very scanty, especially of the morality, the true intrinsic goodness of dispositions and works. Experience has taught wise men to make very little account of the opinion of the giddy, the unthinking, and credulous populace, whether it be for or against them; for it is very often formed without under-  
 standing,

standing, upon slender information, and upon SERM.  
circumstances which are very remote from XI.  
the true merit of persons or actions. The  judgment of the sober considerate few, does, in the estimation of a thoughtful sedate mind, outweigh numberless multitudes of such, either applauses or censures, which are often alike groundless and alike changeable.


But, in point of knowledge there is an infinitely greater disproportion between God and the wisest man, than between this latter and the very weakest of all rational beings. His understanding is infinite, ours confined within very narrow limits; he sees all things clearly, they *are naked and open before him* even to their inmost essences; we see the brightest objects but darkly, and very many not at all; he discerns effects in their causes, and extends his views to the remotest consequences and issues of things; we know nothing of causes but by their apparent effects, and that very imperfectly; and for futurity, the events of it are hid from our sight in impenetrable darkness. But, especially, the subject of our present consideration, the exact morality, or the measure of good and evil in characters and actions, is very imperfectly understood by men. We have indeed

SERM. a standard in our own minds and by it can try

XI. ourselves better than any others, as it is of  
 ~~~~~ vastly greater moment that we should; but  
 for the dispositions and works of our fellow-
 creatures, it is little we know of them, and
 the former only by the latter: and even these
 are often misapprehended; few are ocular
 witnesses, and the eyes themselves are not al-
 ways above the possibility of deception; others
 have but hearsay evidence, which, when the
 utmost care is taken to ascertain it, is far from
 being infallible. But, when the fact is settled
 as well as it can be to us, the most difficult
 part to be known still remains, that is, the
 morality. It depends upon the heart, and
 who can penetrate into the secrets of it, its
 hidden springs of action, its intentions and
 motives, which yet are of essential consider-
 ation to a true judgment of right and wrong,
 virtue and vice? But the knowledge of God
 is in all things intuitive and infallible, parti-
 cularly, he * *searches the hearts and tries the*
reins of the children of men; not only the ex-
 ternal works, but the very thoughts of all
 men, their deepest designs, unknown to all
 other creatures, are open to his view; † *there*
is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the

* Ps. vii. 9,

† Job xxxiv. 22.

workers of iniquity may hide themselves from SERM.
him. And, a book of remembrance is written XI.
before him for them that fear the Lord, and 
think upon his name ||. This is a considera-
tion often insisted on by the sacred writers as
of great and immediate importance to the
purposes of religion, which they describe by
walking before God, always as under the ob-
servation of his eye, which runs to and fro
through the earth to mark the perfect, who
are the objects of his peculiar care, and to
detect the *hidden things of dishonesty*, which
in due time shall be brought to clear light.
And, indeed, what more affecting confide-
ration can be set before the mind of man,
than that a perfectly righteous and almighty
ruler has us always under his own immediate
inspection, that we can no-where cover our-
selves, not even our thoughts, from his eye,
no-where withdraw from his presence, for it
fills the universe? *If we ascend into heaven,*
he is there; if we make our bed in hell, be-
hold he is there; † if we take the wings of
the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts
of the sea, even there shall his hand lead, his
right hand shall hold us; if we say, surely
the darkness shall cover us, even the night

|| Mal. iii. 16.

† Pf. cxxxix. 8—12.

shall

---- shall be light about us; yea, the darknes hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day, the darknes and the light are both alike to him. But as to the point before us, this makes it very evident, for it shews the great difference between the judgment of men and the judgment of God in respect of certainty and clearness; the former is often false, generally uncertain, and always imperfect; the other is infallible, perfectly discerning every thing, every circumstance which can add to or evidence real worth in any character or work, and every circumstance which can either aggravate or extenuate the malignity of any evil disposition or action.

Secondly, To show how reasonably and upon just grounds St. *Paul* esteemed the judgment of men concerning himself a very small thing when compared with the judgment of God, we must consider the importance of the divine approbation or disapprobation in itself, and to the purposes for which the one can be desired and the other feared. That we may the better understand this, it is necessary to attend one obvious part of the human constitution, the desire of honour which is natural to every man, and it seems to be
given

given us in aid of virtue our chief good. For, as that is necessarily the object of approbation to every moral agent, it must tend to strengthen virtuous dispositions in us, and be a powerful motive to virtuous actions, that we are determined to seek the esteem of other rational beings, which can no otherwise be obtained. However that be, we find in fact, that the esteem of others is a great article in the enjoyment of life; and on the contrary, their disesteem and contempt renders us extremely uneasy; so that if it be universal, or of persons highly valued, we can hardly imagine a more painful circumstance in human life. But, reason teaches us to make a great difference in this point, and that the desire of approbation together with the pleasure arising from it, ought to be according to the characters of the observers, the measure of their wisdom and their moral worth. Who would not prefer the esteem of a few wise and good men to the applause of a foolish and vicious multitude? Nay, to be thoroughly approved by one person of singular merit, of great discernment, and extraordinary probity, will support a man, and be a sufficient consolation against the rash censures of many. Now, let us remember that it is not only with our

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SERM. own kind we have to do, and our desire of
 XI. approbation is not wholly confined to them;
 if there are other intelligent and moral beings to whom our conduct is known, we find ourselves inclined to stand fair with them, and study to be approved by their judgment; above all, it is a solid foundation of inward joy and satisfaction to be accepted of God, the greatest and best of all beings, the fountain of being, of intelligence, and goodness.

This is a substantial happiness to the human mind, and fully sufficient to all the purposes of *approbation*. I do not speak now of the effects of the divine judgment in a future state, which will convey as much enjoyment as the capacity of our natures can receive, and as lasting as our existence; but honour itself, considered abstractly from any interesting consequences of it, which, according to some wrong notions of it, and as given by some persons, is the empty idol of the vain and ambitious; honour, I say, is here a solid, a real enjoyment, most suitable to the constitution of our minds, and filling them with a true permanent pleasure. All the satisfaction which arises from a sense of true dignity is strengthened, the ground of
 it

it being confirmed, by the concurring testimony of unerring wisdom ; and how can he but be pleased with himself, who knows that perfect rectitude and goodness is pleased with him ? Agreeably to the natural sentiments of our minds, our Saviour and his apostles promise honour from God as a real and important reward to the practice of virtue. As our blessed Lord himself obtained the approbation of his father by his obedience, for he *therefore loved him*, because he cheerfully fulfilled the difficult commandment of laying down his life ; so he assures his servants that by imitating his example and doing his will, they shall in like manner receive honour from God. * *If any man serve me, him will my Father honour* ; which is the most earnestly to be desired, and will yield the highest delight to every one who is not under the power of an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God ; as were the infidel Jews to whom our Saviour says, † *How can ye believe who receive honour one from another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only ?* How vain, how insignificant is all the reputation which can be attained from weak, and fallible, and depraved men ? But it is a high

SERM.
XI.
~~~~~

\* John xii. 26.

† John v. 44.

honour

SER M. honour which can never fail, and above being  
 XI. fullied by the mistakes, the malevolence, or the caprice of men, which is from God. Vain are all the attempts of men to commend themselves, to raise monuments to their own praise ; they are only approved whom the *Lord commendeth*, and blessed indeed is he whom *this great King delighteth to honour*.

*Lastly*, the judgment of God is infinitely more to be regarded than that of men, because consequences of infinitely greater moment to our happiness depend upon it. Though the divine approbation is highly valuable in itself, and will be highly valued by all sincere and good minds ; they will with the *Psalmist* desire the *light of God's countenance* preferably not only to the applauses of men, but to *abundance of corn and wine*, the greatest affluence of all worldly possessions ; yet the strong principle of self-love irresistibly determines us to pursue our own happiness in the full extent of it, and therefore, to complete the argument for the great disparity between the judgment of men and the judgment of God, we must take in the consequences of both to ourselves. 'Tis thus we make an estimate of approbation within the compass

compass of this life ; we consider the condition of the person approving, how his judgment may affect our interest, and the relation he bears to us ; thus a son distinguishes between the approbation of his father and that of a servant, and a subject makes a great difference between his prince and a peasant. But, to the case before us, there is no parallel, that is, to the difference between the judgment of God and the judgment of men. He is the supreme Governor of the world, possessed of universal dominion, *he speaks and it is done, he commands and it stands fast ; he does in heaven and in earth whatsoever pleaseth him ;* he has power to cast the objects of his displeasure, *soul and body, into hell ;* and to make his favourites happy beyond our imagination and to all eternity ; *for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the hearts of men, the good things he hath prepared for them.*

Is it not then a very little thing to be judged of men ? Should it not be so in the estimation of every man, as it was in St. Paul's, *seeing he that judgeth us is the Lord ?* Not only are we subject to his jurisdiction if he pleases to call us to an account, but he will actually bring us into judgment. We have



SERM. all the reason in the world to believe he will,  
 XI. if we consider the constitution of our own  
 minds, and his administration, which, though  
 imperfectly discovered, has to an attentive  
 mind the plain appearances of moral admini-  
 stration; for the natural presages of our own  
 thoughts, the admonitions of conscience, and  
 the promiscuous dispensations of natural good  
 and evil to men by providence in the present  
 state, which evidently appears to be a state of  
 discipline, do all of them concur in establish-  
 ing the expectation of a judgment to come.  
 But we have express assurance given us by  
 the resurrection of Christ and the declarations  
 of the gospel, that God \* *has appointed a  
 day in which he will judge the world in righ-  
 teousness by him whom he hath ordained and to  
 whom he hath committed all judgment, even  
 Jesus our Lord.* How awful is this confi-  
 deration! how affecting to the minds of all  
 who believe and seriously attend it! *Then  
 shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom  
 of their Father, as the brightness of the fir-  
 mament, and as the stars for ever and ever.*  
 Then shall the judge say to the workers of  
 iniquity, to them who were really so, what-  
 ever figure they made in this world, and

\* Acts xvii. 31.

however they were esteemed, *depart accursed* SERM.  
*into everlasting fire prepared for the devil* XI.  
*and his angels.* Then shall the former re-  
ceive the *kingdom prepared for them by their*  
*Father, from the beginning of the world,* and  
be adorned each with a *crown of righteous-*  
*ness, life, and glory;* then shall commence  
the dismal degradation of the other by the  
just sentence of the sovereign lord, they shall  
be covered with *shame and everlasting con-*  
*tempt,* and *be thrown into outer darkness,*  
*where shall be weeping, and wailing, and*  
*gnashing of teeth.*

I come now to make some useful observa-  
tions from this subject. And, *first,* it is pro-  
per to observe, that the apostle, here, is far  
from intending to depreciate all human judi-  
cature, or diminish the regard which is due  
to it for the important reasons upon which it  
is founded. What if it be called a very little  
thing in comparison with the judgment of  
God? So surely it is; it does not therefore  
follow that it is nothing at all, of no con-  
sideration to the affairs and interests of our  
present condition, and that it should be wholly  
taken away. What if it be liable to uncer-  
tainties, that its sentences either of acquittal  
or condemnation are but minute things when

SERM. set against the awful decisions of the divine  
 XI. tribunal at the great day, and the effects they  
 produce are comparatively but small, all determining with this frail life? We must not conclude, that therefore it is to be wholly laid aside. But, the truth is, that point is not at all concerned in the words of *St. Paul* here, nor does it appear that he had it in his thoughts; he is only speaking of private censures, not of publick proceedings in judgment. Some of his adversaries, rather adversaries to the purity and simplicity of the christian institution, had endeavoured to hurt his reputation with the *Corinthians*, and actually made some impressions upon them to his disadvantage; but he tells them he was not at all solicitous about that matter, for he expected a solemn review of the moral state, the religious dispositions and works of every man, before the divine tribunal, when the latent dishonesty of every wicked heart would be detected, and the injured characters of the sincere, fully cleared.

In the mean time, it is the province of them who are placed in civil authority, *not to bear the sword in vain, but to be terrors to evil doers, and for the encouragement of them that do well.* But, what in effect is the  
 good



good and evil which comes under their cognizance? Not the religion or irreligion, nor strictly the morality and immorality, of men's tempers and actions, as they lie before the judgment-seat of Christ, where the hearts are pondered and the determination is according to their sincerity or insincerity, but that good and evil which is, and so far as it is, beneficial or hurtful to mankind as social creatures in this world. This the scripture, instead of disparaging, enjoins to reverence with a conscientious respect, is very useful in its own sphere for preserving publick order and peace among men. God commands *to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's*; reserving still to himself the things which are his, the right of his infinitely superior authority to determine the true moral and religious state of men's minds and their works, and to fix their final everlasting condition according to it.

There is, besides this, a right of private judgment in every man for himself, not only to judge his own actions, which he can do indeed with greater certainty and to better purpose, being conscious of their secret springs, but also in some measure to judge concerning the actions of others. We cannot help

SERM. judging, indeed, seeing that some works of  
 XI. men are notoriously evil, and that others are  
 good; though we cannot know them infal-  
 libly, because their inward principles and  
 motives lie out of our sight, yet our know-  
 ledge is sufficient to the ends of charity and  
 social life. The use of this is to direct our  
 regards to men with whom we are conver-  
 sant, and assist us in forming the measures  
 of our own conduct; principally, to culti-  
 vate a friendly correspondence with the good  
 for our mutual advantage, and that we may  
 avoid *evil communication which corrupts good  
 manners*; but this has nothing to do with a  
 definitive sentence upon other men, upon  
 their state, upon the temper, the affections  
 and motives of their hearts, nor consequently  
 upon the religion and irreligion of their  
 works; especially, in a great variety, indeed  
 the greatest numbers of cases which are the  
 subjects of rash human judgment, wherein  
 the secret views of men's minds cannot be  
 certainly known, as not being plainly dis-  
 covered by external signs and open profes-  
 sions.

The second observation shall be in the  
 words of the apostle, at the fifth verse, im-  
 mediately following my text, that *we should  
 judge*

*judge nothing before the time, until the Lord* SERM.  
*come, who both will bring to light the hidden* XI.  
*things of darkness, and will make manifest*  
*the counsels of the heart, and then shall every*

*man have praise of God.* The praise which is justly due to his own works, according to the favourable rule of proceeding which he has declared in his word. How happy would it be for the world, the christian world particularly, if this rule were universally followed! What divisions and discords, strifes and confusions, would it prevent, and the great guilt of rash and uncharitable censures? This is a matter of so great importance, that our Saviour has thought fit to insist much upon it, particularly in his sermon upon the mount, and enforce it by strong arguments. \* *Judge not, that ye be not judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.* It is a point of such consequence, God will have a great regard to it in judgment, and in the distribution of rewards and punishments, such as treat their brethren with candor and tenderness, shall meet with great clemency from him; but such as have shewed no mercy to others, may expect a more severe doom. In short, the evil we are here warn'd

\* Matt. vii. from the beginning.

SERM. against is uncharitableness, an immediate violation of God's royal law, which, when it is fulfilled, completes a truly good and christian character. *Charity envieth not, vaunteth not itself, becometh not unseemly; it hopeth, believeth, and endureth all things; it suffereth long and is kind; it rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.* How unlike this is the spirit of a great many zealous Christians who carry it with contempt and wrath towards their brethren, who perhaps are really weak, but reputed perversely erroneous, condemned as obstinate, when it may be in truth, and in the judgment of God, more sincere, impartial, and unprejudiced, than we who take upon us to judge? Let even those who oppose the most important, the most evident, and necessary truth, be instructed with meekness; let such as are differently minded from us in more difficult and less important points, *be received, not to doubtful disputations:* Above all, let the spirit of jealousy find no room in our hearts; let us not take upon us to impute to any of our fellow Christians selfish corrupt views and sinister designs which they disclaim, or give no sufficient ground for; fixing upon them, that is, really judging the heart, whereby

*compared with that of God.*

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whereby we invade the prerogative of God as well as injure men.

SERM.  
XI.

*Thirdly*, It is a poor and mean temper, very unbecoming Christians and unworthy of sincerity, eagerly to seek after, and by undue methods to pursue human applause. Whose approbation should we be most solicitous to obtain? Are men the highest and most worthy beings which we know? Surely *then we are blind, and do not see afar off*, as the apostle *Peter* speaks concerning them who lack the christian virtues; they have not faith in God, nor *endure as seeing him who is invisible*, and they have not the settled serious expectation of the future judgment. Our \* Saviour sets this matter in a very clear light, shewing that to act sincerely in the affairs of religion, it is absolutely necessary that we act purely from a regard to God and to his judgment; and to perform good works, so called, that is, which have the most specious appearance of devotion and charity, only to *be seen of men*, from ostentation, and with no higher design than to be applauded by the spectators, this is hypocrisy, and will entitle us to no reward from God. *Take heed*, says he, *that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of*

\* Matt. vi. from the beginning.

*them,*

SERM. *them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Fa-*  
 XI. *ther, which is in heaven. \* When thou prayest,*  
 ~~~~~ *thou shalt not be as the hypocrites, for they*  
love to pray standing in the synagogues, and
in the corners of the streets, that they may be
seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they
have their reward; that which they sought
for, the applause of men, but no other; they
are intitled to none from God, for they had
really nothing to do with him, did not make
it their study and endeavour to approve them-
selves to his judgment in what they called
their religion; rather, indeed, the empty ap-
pearance they put on under that venerable
name.

But tho' this in a prevailing degree destroys sincerity, the very being of true religion, it is certainly the imperfection of some, in the main, upright and well disposed minds, that they have too great a bias towards the praise of men, from which therefore they should earnestly endeavour more and more to deliver themselves, that they may be acceptable to God, and possess the inward satisfaction which arises from a consciousness of integrity. Let them often and seriously consider what a poor empty thing it is to be honoured by

* Matt. vi. 5.


men, how uncertain and variable ; that it can afford no support to the mind in any distress ; and, especially, that it is quite dissipated by the prospect of death and judgment, in which it can be of no use, nor yield any consolation. And to conclude this head, let us always remember, that 'tis absolutely necessary to true religion and the happiness which is founded upon it, for us to consider ourselves as in the presence of God, under his immediate inspection, and that to him we must give an account ; for every work *shall come into judgment.*

SERM.
XI.
~~~~~

*Lastly*, the doctrine of this text may be applied to the consolation of good men under rash and unjust censures. This is the very case here referred to. *St. Paul*, whose character was so perfectly clear, that from the time of his conversion to the christian faith, and during the whole course of his ministry, *he knew nothing by himself*, nothing which should mar his confidence towards God and acceptance with him, consequently, nothing which should render him obnoxious to the judgment of men ; and in a particular manner who had so well merited the esteem of the *Corinthians*, and carried so inoffensively towards them ; he tells them his rejoicing was  
*the*

SERM. *the testimony of his \* conscience, that in sim-*  
 XI. *plicity and godly sincerity he had his conver-*  
 ~~~~~  
sation in this world, and more abundantly to
them wards; even he was rashly judged by
them, and they hearkened too much to the
insinuations of his adversaries imputing pri-
vate and selfish views to him. The like ill
usage some of the best men in the world
have met with; and it is often very painful
to ingenuous minds, who, conscious of their
own innocence, are sensibly affected with
injurious imputations. But how did the
apostle comfort himself under this trouble?
and how shall other upright christians com-
fort themselves under parallel circumstances?
From this weighty consideration, that there
lies an appeal to a higher and more righteous
tribunal; that the sentences passed upon men
in the matters of religion and conscience
shall be reviewed by an all-knowing and im-
partial judge, who shall bring forth the
*righteousness of the upright as *the light*, and*
*their judgment as *the noon-day*. The self-*
condemning guilty mind, is, indeed, natu-
rally diffident, and the just censures of men
made a strong impression upon it, because
they are seconded by its own inward re-

* 2 Cor. i. 12,

proaches; but the heart which approves it SERM. ·
self, rejoices and is secure, because it can XI.
appeal unashamed and untterrified to that 
judgment which is impartial and unerring,
that of the great Arbiter who irresistibly go-
verns the world, and determines the state of
every creature.

S E R M O N XII.

Of acknowledging God in all our
Ways.

Prov. iii. 6.

*In all thy Ways acknowledge Him, and He
shall direct thy Path.*

SERM.
XII.

THE supreme Being, from the cre-
ation of the world, has made the
transcendent excellencies of his na-
ture intelligible to mankind, whereby he of
right demands our adoration and dutiful ac-
knowledgments, having planted in our minds
those affections which make us capable of
them. If we set before ourselves, in our
calm and deliberate thoughts, a character
comprehending perfect wisdom, power, rec-
titude, and goodness; reverence, esteem, love,
a desire of imitation, and of approving our-
selves to such a Being, will arise in our
minds. And since God has clearly shewn
that

that this is his true character, no reason can be given for any man's with-holding, that practical affectionate regard from him, but ignorance, inattention, or impure lusts, which deprave and corrupt the mind. Ignorance is inexcusable, the evidence being so plain and strong; and for inattention, as well as corrupt lusts, 'tis what, if we reflect upon it at all, our hearts must condemn us for. Thus it is evident that the worship of the Deity, or the acknowledging him in general, the moral and principal part of it, has a just foundation in the constitution of our nature, and is as apparent to our reason as any other branch of our duty.

But, it is not only the existence of God and his perfections abstractly considered, which call for our dutiful respect; every man may discern, and the duly attentive do discern, that he is intimately present with all his creatures, every-where, and at all times, exercising his attributes of power and wisdom, righteousness and goodness; and that with him we have to do in a variety of relations, as our Maker, our Preserver, our Benefactor, and our sovereign Lord. Hence arise particular duties or exercises of piety, extending to the whole compass of our life and affairs,

all

SERM.
XII.

SERM. all imported in *Solomon's* comprehensive exhortation here, *in all thy ways acknowledge him*, which I shall endeavour to explain in the following discourse; and then I will consider, *Secondly*, the consequent great advantage which is said to attend our thus acknowledging God in our ways, namely, that he will direct our paths.

First, the exhortation is, *in all thy ways acknowledge God*, that is, in all thy designs and affairs, all thy deliberate actions and courses of action, for that is the meaning of our *ways*, morally considered, and according to the stile of the scripture. If the human life contains a variety of powers capable of being exercised with design, if we can reflect upon this so as to discern the ends of our nature, with its various parts, and the dependence it has upon God, that our powers are wholly derived from him, and preserved by him in a condition of exerting themselves, *for he works in us to will and to do, of his good pleasure*, that he has interpos'd by his law to direct our manner of acting, thereby intending wisely and most effectually to carry us on to our highest perfection and happiness, and that the divine Providence superintends the

the


the whole state and all the ways of men, disposing and over-ruling the event of them for the greatest good in the whole, and for the greatest particular advantage of every man, in exact proportion to the degree of his moral goodness; if these things be so, then hence may be inferr'd various instances or branches of acknowledgment we owe to God. As, *first*, the tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Scarcely is there any thing that appears more congruous, more becoming and laudable to the human mind, and the contrary more base and disagreeable, than gratitude, or an affectionate sense of favours received, with a disposition to make suitable returns for them. Let any man ask himself, whether he can help approving it? and whether he doth not despise, even abhor ingratitude? nay, if he thinks he could possibly enjoy himself with satisfaction, being conscious of disesteem of, or even in difference to, a benefactor? Now, the obligation of gratitude peculiarly lies upon us with respect to God, because our all proceeds from his beneficence. Whatever we are, or do, or enjoy, we owe to him, not only as the original donor, but the constant preserver and supporter by the immediate interposition of his own power, in whose hand

SERM.
XII.
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SERM. is the *soul of every living thing, and the*  
 XII. *breath of all mankind.* \* *Solomon tells us*  
 that *a man's goings are from the Lord, all*  
 the exertions of our faculties are under the  
 divine direction and controul. And *Daniel*  
 says to *Belshazzar* king of *Babylon*, † *In*  
*whose, that is God's, hand thy breath is, and*  
*whose are all thy ways:* from that consideration  
 reproving him for not glorifying or acknow-  
 ledging God. If there be any good in our ways,  
 any privilege in the exercise of our intellectual  
 capacities, if we have any solicitude about  
 the issue of our designs and affairs; all these  
 are from God, absolutely depending upon  
 him; therefore he claims our praise.

This is a duty often recommended to us in  
 scripture. In the book of *Psalms* we are fre-  
 quently called upon to employ ourselves in  
 celebrating the glory of the divine perfections,  
 manifested in the creation of the world and  
 the administration of providence. Man, by  
 his capacities, and by his situation, is consti-  
 tuted the *priest* of this earth, and the infe-  
 rior creatures it contains, as well as in some  
 sense their Lord, that is, by presenting to  
 his and their Maker, the sacrifice of their  
 praises which they offer in their silent way;

\* *Prov. xx. 24.* † *Dan. v. 23.*

and it is his office to put into form, and ac- SERM.  
tively to employ himself in rendering that XII.  
grateful tribute which they lay before his   
understanding. But, since his own being,  
his own faculties, and all his ways, the en-  
tire compass of his designs and interests, are  
from God, and in his hands; since he *lives*,  
and *moves*, and *has his being in God*, it would  
be the utmost stupidity not to praise him.  
This was the guilt charged upon the Heathen  
nations, in which they were utterly inex-  
cusable \*, *that when they knew God* (they  
could not be altogether ignorant, having so  
sufficient means of knowing him from his  
works) *yet they glorified him not as God, nei-*  
*ther were thankful.* But it will still be  
more inexcusable in us, when that which  
may be known of him, of his nature and  
perfections, of his providence intimately  
near, taking all our ways and concerns under  
its inspection, care and influence; and the  
service he expects from us; when all this, I  
say, is so clearly laid before us, by an express  
revelation. Let me only add, under this  
head, that the formal expressions of gratitude,  
without the inward affectionate sense and  
feeling of it in our own minds, can answer

\* Rom. i. 21.

SERM. no good end; they can neither satisfy the  
 XII. demands of reason and conscience, yield to  
 ourselves any true enjoyment, nor please God.  
 The least attention to our natural sentiments concerning right and good, and to our notions of the Deity, of his nature and attributes, will convince us, that the duty of thanksgiving is not fulfilled in what the prophet calls the *calves of our lips*, nor are our words of any value at all, farther than as they proceed from a sincere prevalent affection, in which gratitude essentially consists. Let us therefore always carefully attend to the habitual temper of our spirits; try whether the bent of them be to entertain a delightful sense of the daily communications of the divine goodness to us; and, whatever occurs to us in the course of things, whether ordinary, or in a peculiar sensible manner affecting our condition, to raise our thoughts to the contemplation of God's interposing as the sovereign, wise and gracious disposer. And let us constantly endeavour to cultivate such a temper, by often engaging our minds to such designed and deliberate meditation as shall tend to raise and confirm it. The natural operation of gratitude in the heart is to think often and with pleasure on the  
 benefactor,



benefactor, and all the circumstances whereby his beneficence is heightened in its esteem. And the mind which is so disposed towards God, must in all its ways find a multitude of occasions which invite to this.

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*Secondly*, another instance of our acknowledging God in our ways, is, the forming our purposes and the measures of our conduct by a regard to his will. Since he has been pleased to become our guide, he has vouchsafed to shew us that which is good and what he requires of us, by *writing the work of his law upon our hearts*, and by *giving us his word to be a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path*, our acknowledging him must import our following his direction. What can be a more natural expression of our owning God to be what he really is, and what we profess to believe he is, the supreme Lord of the universe, the purest and most perfect of all beings, infinitely wise and good; what can be a more natural expression of this, I say, than our imitating him as far as we can, and doing his will, or keeping his commandments. St. *Paul* had reason to say as he doth\* of those whose *minds and consciences are*

\* Tit. i. 16.

SERM. *defiled, the disobedient, and to good works re-*  
 XII. *probate, that, though they profess to know*  
 ~~~~~ *God, or in words acknowledge him, yet, in*  
reality and in works, they deny him. The
notices of his will or the work of his law is
written upon our hearts in so plain characters,
that it is utterly impossible to reconcile a
wicked course of life to an affectionate and
lively sense of him upon our minds.

But, the man who would practically and constantly acknowledge God in his ways, so, as to enjoy the approbation of God and of his own conscience, ought to consider the extent of his law both in its precepts and prohibitions: That it not only requires an abstinence from gross crimes, and the regularity of our external actions; but enjoins also a heavenly, a pure, a spiritual, a virtuous temper of mind upon all occasions; to preserve which a constant and careful attention to our hearts, the course of our affections and our thoughts, will be necessary. The law of God is also *exceeding broad* or extensive in another respect, that is, it takes within its direction all our affairs, every important article of business, all our counsels, our deliberate designs and measures. Whatever the particular object of our desires and pursuits
 be,

be, whatever the concerns we are immediately employed about, not merely those of religion, but which relate to our interests in this life, our commerce with our fellow-creatures, the exchange of offices with our relatives of mankind; or schemes for advancing ourselves; still, our counsels should be taken, our designs carried on, with a regard to God, to his authority and laws. Nay, *St. Paul* teaches christians to govern themselves by this rule, even in matters which seem to be the most remote from religion, * *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* These, and others like them, the most ordinary actions in life, which seem to be the functions of animal nature rather than the works of a Christian, yet the principles of piety interpose in the regulation of them; still we should take care to keep within the bounds of virtue, which is glorifying God; for it is the great end of his moral government in order to promote a rational happiness; still we should endeavour by temperance to preserve the freedom of our minds, and a just dominion over our appetites and passions; we should study to avoid whatever may give offence to our fellow-servants of

SERML.
XII.



* 1 Cor. x. 31.

SERM. God, and to advance the honour of Chri-
 XII. stianity. It is not enough barely to avoid
 ~~~~~ what appears plainly to be unlawful; it should  
 be our care to guide *our affairs with discretion*; to manage them so, as, in the best  
 manner we can, to serve the cause of truth,  
 of piety, and virtue; which is always upper-  
 most in the heart of a good man, and to  
 promote it ought to be the principal intention  
 of all.

A *Third* instance of acknowledging God in  
 our ways, is, putting our confidence in him,  
 and committing our ways and our works to  
 the conduct of his providence. We must  
 consider ourselves as in an indigent and im-  
 perfect condition. We have not in our hands  
 the government of the world, nor the dis-  
 posal of events in it, even those relating to  
 ourselves: experience shows that things fall out  
 often otherwise than we wished or expected,  
 and no project of ours can ascertain the issue  
 we desire, nor all the diligence we can pos-  
 sibly use; for it depends on causes intirely out  
 of the reach of our knowledge and power.  
 And yet we cannot help being solicitous  
 about issues; they are, some of them, of  
 great importance to our own happiness, and  
 to interests for which the best affections of  
 our

our nature determine us to be greatly concerned. In such a case, what can we do but have our recourse to a superior directing cause and ruler, since we know there is such a one, infinitely powerful and infinitely wise, who not only is able by his interposition to prevent dangers which we cannot foresee, and bring to pass events which are beyond our comprehension and beyond our strength to accomplish, but actually *sees the end from the beginning*, has the whole chain and series of things at once in his view, an absolute dominion over all creatures, and who is as merciful and gracious as he is powerful and wise? What consolation can possibly arise in the mind of man with respect to futurity, if it be not from a firm persuasion of this principle? Supposing the world to be guided by blind chance, or fatal necessity, we must still labour under distressing uncertainty concerning all our interests, even to our very being. We know not but the next moment we shall cease to be, or be extremely miserable. *When our breath goeth out*, and we hold it by a very precarious tenure, *in that day our thoughts*, not only for the present state, but existence itself, *may perish*. On the contrary, here is a solid foundation for the mind to rest upon,  
that

SERM.

XII.



SERM. that we are under the care of a wise and good  
 XII. governor, who sees the remotest issues, and  
 orders all things for the best, and who has, by clear evidence to our own reason and in his word, fixed the conditions upon which we may confidently hope for his favour, and assure our hearts before him. Thus the main end of our ways is secured; and since they are not in ourselves, as the prophet speaks, \* *O Lord, I know that the way of a man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*; (the power by which he acts and forms his designs is not self-original, but derived, and is preserved by the same cause which created it) where is the man that can ascertain the success of his ways, of his designs, and endeavours; † *for the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all*; that is, the event is to them utterly uncertain, but fixed in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, who wisely disposes things which seem to be altogether fortuitous. *The lot falleth into the lap*, says Solomon ‡,

\* Jeremiah x. 23.

† Eccles. ix. 11.

‡ Prov. xvi. 33.

*Of acknowledging God in all our Ways.*

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*but the disposal thereof is of the Lord.* What then can be more reasonable and becoming us, or what can afford more true satisfaction to the mind, than to look to the supreme Regent of nature, who by steady counsel governs its whole course, and cast all our cares upon him? And though thus we shall not know every particular future event, we shall know what is abundantly sufficient for the support of a wise and good mind, that the greatest good is constantly carried on, and it *shall be well with the righteous.* And,

SERM.  
XII.

*Lastly*, this ought always to be accompanied with resignation to the will of God, which also is an important part of the duty comprehended in acknowledging him. Since it is impossible for us to know what is best in the whole, because our finite understandings cannot comprehend the intricate connections and dependencies of things, and as there is no foundation of hope and comfort, but what arises from an implicit trust in that infinitely wise and good being who rules over all, so this is inseparable from an absolute submission to his will. For the events which seem to us for the present most grievous, and which therefore we are the most inclined to except out of our resignation, may be, for what

SERM. what we know, the best and most necessary  
 XII. in the scheme of his wise counsels for accomplishing the greatest good in the whole, and, in subordination to that, our own greatest happiness: nay, it must be so, if that good be the end of his administration, and he knows and has appointed the most effectual means in order to it. Is it not infinitely reasonable we should refer ourselves and all our concerns to that wisdom which is perfect, and that goodness to which we owe our being; which is the most free, unlimited, and unchangeable, not capable of being misled in its exercise, or abated by any mistake, any selfish affection, any prejudice, indigence, or private interest? No example of resignation among men is equal to that which God justly demands from us; no servant is so absolutely in the power of any human master; no parent, even the wisest and most affectionate, has so good a claim to the acquiescence of a child in his orders and appointments; because the disproportion is infinitely greater between the divine power and wisdom as well as goodness, and our highest privileges or endowments, than between the most exalted capacity and condition of the best earthly parent, or greatest sovereign, and the meanest subject,

OR




or the weakest child. Such submission to God's will is often recommended to us in scripture as an eminent part of our duty, and instances of it in the practice of good men recorded with high approbation. The instances of *Eli* and of *David* are mentioned with great applause, who meekly submitted to providence in very great distress, and under the affecting apprehensions of most grievous calamities. The former \*, that eminently pious man, received with amazing equanimity the terrible denunciations of divine judgments against him and his family; *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* The other of *David* †, who when reduced to the last extremity by the unnatural rebellion of his son, driven from *Jerusalem* his imperial city, and the appointed place of religious solemnities; says, *If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.* Other examples there are most worthy of our notice, but the principal pattern which we should endeavour above all others to imitate, is, that of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, who

\* 1 Samuel, iii. 18.      † 2 Sam. xv. 25.

through

SERM. through the whole course of his life upon  
 XII. earth bore a variety of grief, hunger, thirst,  
 { weariness, poverty, the contradiction of sin-  
 ners, indeed the most bitter reproaches, at  
 last a cruel and ignominious death; all this  
 he endured with the most perfect patience;  
 intirely acquiescing in the pleasure of his hea-  
 venly father, saying, *not my will be done, but  
 thine.* Let us *then walk as he did,* in all our  
 ways acknowledging the sovereignty, the most  
 perfect wisdom and goodness of God, by  
 submitting in all events absolutely to his dis-  
 posal. Having finished what I intended to  
 say upon the first part of the text, the duty  
 of acknowledging God in all our ways, I  
 proceed,

*Secondly,* To consider the consequent ad-  
 vantage which is here said to follow the per-  
 formance of this duty, namely, that *he will  
 direct our paths.* As we are rational and  
 free agents, capable of knowing the ends of  
 our being, and of pursuing them with under-  
 standing and design, and as we are in a great  
 measure entrusted with the care of our own  
 happiness, which we obtain or come short of  
 according to our behaviour, there is nothing  
 of greater importance, and that we are more  
 justly

justly concerned about, than the direction of SERM.  
our paths. Other beings, I mean, those XII.  
which are wholly passive and unintelligent,   
are carried to their proper ends, or they fulfil  
the law of their creation, without thought;  
they yield intirely to force, and are determined  
by the meer impressions of power; the brute  
animals always follow their instincts, and it is  
the law of their nature; for instincts were  
planted in them to be the sole guide of their  
active powers. But man is of a quite dif-  
ferent constitution; he is endued with fore-  
sight and with liberty, he can examine the  
springs of his own actions, compare them  
with a rule, deliberate upon the motives of  
them, and weigh their consequences how they  
are like to affect him, not only at present, but  
even in distant futurity. Hence arises a sol-  
licitude concerning the measures of our con-  
duct, especially because we are conscious of  
imperfection, and experience shows that there  
is a danger of miscarrying. Men are often  
disappointed in their expectations, and the  
issue of their ways turns out quite contrary to  
what they designed and hoped for.

To proceed the more distinctly upon this  
subject, we may consider ourselves as under  
two different characters or capacities, which  
though

SERM. though not at all inconsistent, but connected

XII. together, yet they may be considered separately, and both make the right direction of our paths highly necessary. We may, I say, consider ourselves as moral agents, and as rational beings determined to intend and to pursue our own happiness by all proper and reasonable methods in our power. The former is the highest character of man, whereby he is distinguished from other sensitive creatures. We have naturally a sense of right and wrong, of moral good and evil, and find ourselves under an obligation to avoid the one and do the other; the original of which obligation I shall not now inquire into, but suppose it known to us all, and that it is our purpose to satisfy it, particularly, according to the christian laws and profession. Now, to every one who is so convinced and sincerely disposed, it must appear of very great moment to have our paths well directed, that is, to be put and kept in such a temper of mind and tenor of conversation, as to amount to true virtue and religion, or intitle us to the character of *Christ's* sincere and approved disciples. This is to good men the object of their careful and constant attention; there is nothing so high in their esteem; nothing so employs

employs their anxious thoughts ; because they know their own weakness, their liability to error, and that multitudes of those who join with them in the same religious profession, yet are really self-deceived, being *disobedient*, habitually insincere, to *good works reprobate* or disapproved, as not fulfilling them, and at last, come short of the *rest which remains to the people of God*, through what the apostle calls *unbelief*, that is, a prevailing hardened uncompliance with, and unsubmission of heart to, the laws of God and his terms of acceptance. But it is not only the intention of a good man so far to walk in the path of righteousness as to secure his felicity in a future state ; he loves virtue for its own sake, and aspires still to higher measures of it, as the increasing glory and perfection of his nature ; and by all the motives of religion he finds himself determined, not to rest contented with low attainments, but after the example of *St. Paul\**, forgetting the things *which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. Now, such direction God has graciously given his servants encou-

SERM.

XII.



\* Philip iii. 13.

SERM. ragement to hope for ; as their desire of it is  
 XII. certainly agreeable to his will, and all men  
 who even by the light of nature had worthy  
 and becoming notions of the Deity, thought  
 he would and did interpose in human affairs  
 for that end, so we are assured expressly, that  
 it is the design of the gospel to *guide our feet  
 in the paths of peace*. It is an important ar-  
 ticle of the new covenant he has made with  
 his people, that he will *cause them to walk in  
 his statutes and keep his judgments*, which  
 strongly represents the kind assistance he gives  
 them for that end.

Another capacity in which we may con-  
 sider ourselves is that of rational creatures in-  
 tending and pursuing our own happiness.  
 This, as I observed before, has a connection  
 with the former ; for surely our greatest hap-  
 piness depends on our moral character, and  
 virtue is the solid foundation, indeed, the  
 immediate source of our highest enjoyment ;  
 yet they admit of a distinct consideration, and  
 the last is more extensive.

The human life comprehends a great va-  
 riety of powers and affections, to every one  
 of which there is a suitable enjoyment an-  
 nexed. The senses, the imagination, the un-  
 derstanding, have all their several pleasures  
 belonging

belonging to them, which we reasonably pursue within their proper limits. But they all depend upon God, as truly as the noblest, the ultimate end of our Being: it is by the blessing of God, what our Saviour calls *the words proceeding out of his mouth*, the powerful command, the energy and influence of his providence, that life is sustained, we have health, our industry is rendered successful for getting wealth, honour, the comfort of society, knowledge, in fine, every thing whereby our condition in this world is made agreeable; and without his blessing, the concurring operation of providence directing our paths, countenancing and over-ruling the issues of them for good, without this, I say, all our ways, our schemes, counsels and endeavours, would be utterly ineffectual.

From what has been said, you will observe, that the direction of our paths attributed to God contains a variety of his operations. In general, Divine Providence superintending all things, watching over and caring for even the most minute of them, (the very hairs of our heads are numbered) directs our paths, orders them aright, prevents emergents unforeseen by us which might have been fatal, guides our steps safely so as to escape from

SERM. snares and dangers, and brings our course

XII. through the mazes of life, or a particular period of it, to a happy conclusion. The \* *Psalmist* describes God's care of communities, and the † prophet particularly, his care of *Israel*, both which may be applied to individuals of mankind; I say, his care in leading them through various difficulties from a low condition in their beginnings or infancy, to an established and flourishing state. Every one of us upon a review of our own lives may discern that our steps have been marvellously conducted beyond the reach of our own counsels by over-ruling providence, so that by wisely observing, we may *understand the loving-kindness of the Lord* in preventing evil, and doing us good far above our expectation. And especially every good man may with pleasure be convinced that providence has favoured his escape from temptations which might have been most dangerous to his integrity, and happily carried him on in the paths of virtue. But as to this last mentioned, which is the greatest of our concerns, God interposes for our direction in another way, that is by the concurring influence and operation of his spirit. Let no

\* Psalm cvii.

† Hosea xi.



Christian make light of this, for there is a great and important reality in it ; our Saviour has assured us that *his Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him* ; and it is the office of the Spirit to lead the disciples of Christ in the way of truth and holiness. SERM. XII.

I will add but this one observation, that the divine direction of our paths is to be understood in a way suitable to our state, which has these two characters, it is *moral* and it is *imperfect*. The Almighty Maker exerts his influence on our nature and its operative powers agreeably to its constitution, and so as not to impair but preserve its voluntary agency. His guidance therefore doth not interfere with our choice, but over-rules it ; presents occasions of acting, and engages our attention to them in a way which we are not, nor can be, sensible of ; and when we make wrong choices, which God, seeing them permit, providence turns the event to good by methods which surpass our comprehension. Our condition in this world must continue, I may say is appointed to be, imperfect both with respect to virtue and happiness ; and therefore we are not to expect such a divine conduct towards us as shall preserve our paths altogether free either from blame or pain. Yet

SERM. is this intirely consistent with the rectitude,  
 XII. the wisdom, and goodness of the Supreme  
 Being, which do not require that he should  
 always act up to the plenitude of his own  
 perfection in every work ; but that his operations  
 should be divers, according to the different capacities  
 and conditions of the subjects, whereby a beautiful  
 variety of effects is produced, all harmoniously  
 conspiring to *shew his praise*. The path of an  
 angel, though vastly more eminent in respect of  
 its superior moral excellence and enjoyment, yet  
 is not without the divine direction ; and the path  
 of a weak sincere mortal in this state of discipline,  
 though of a far lower consideration, is as truly a  
 monument of God's goodness, wherein he constantly  
 interposes by his providence and his spirit to bring  
 it through many difficulties and infirmities to a  
 happy conclusion.

The true application of this doctrine, is in the  
 practice of universal religion ; for what is that  
 but a constant affectionate sense of God upon  
 the mind, with the dispositions which naturally  
 arise from it governing our lives, such as gratitude,  
 confidence, purposes of obedience to his laws,  
 and resignation to his providence, encouraged  
 and animated by the

lively expectation of his favour, of his daily interposing in our behalf to direct our affairs and bring them to happy issues? How is the human life ennobled and exalted by this principle? it becomes divine. The life of a man considered only as a rational creature in this world, is in comparison but low and insipid; how vastly more sublime and important is it rendered, when God is taken into our thoughts, counsels, and actions? This brings a mighty increase of light, liberty, and joy.



# S E R M O N XIII.

A Sermon preached on a public Fast, appointed by Authority, on Occasion of a Declaration of War with *Spain*.

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Ezekiel xiv. 12, 13.

*The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it.*

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**T**HE administration of providence, as we commonly call it, importing our belief of a supreme guide and disposer, or, the state of things in this world with its continued course, has so great a variety in it not reducible to any certain rules or measures which we know, that  
weak

weak unthoughtful minds, looking only to its first and most obvious face, imagine it to be without any intelligent direction at all; and the wisest men find themselves obliged to acknowledge that the series, the connexion and dependance of events which they call *the ways and judgments of God*, attributing them to governing providence, are *unsearchable and past finding out*. One very important thing relating to this subject is in a great measure hid from us, that is, whether particular events befalling the individuals of mankind proceed from the favour or displeasure of almighty God. *Solomon* \* says, *no man knows love or hatred by all that is before them, and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*. But still this is a principle to be maintained, and it lies at the very root of all true and rational religion, that God doth preside over the world and all its affairs, directing their course and determining their issues, that he preserves and exercises a sovereign dominion over all the creatures, the greatest of them are subject to his power, and the least are the objects of his care; and this he doth in a way suitable to his true character, that is, with perfect wisdom, equity

\* Eccles. ix 1, 2.

SERM. and goodness; in other words, God is the  
 XIII. intelligent and moral Governor of the uni-  
 ~~~~~  
 verse.

How shall this be reconciled to the observation just now made from *Solomon*, and confirmed by experience, that there is one event to the good and to the bad? Doth not moral government require that there should be a difference made in the state of moral agents, according to their characters, their prevailing dispositions, and the course of their behaviour? The answer is, that tho' the government of this world be really moral, yet it is but imperfectly so; rather, the state of mankind here being imperfect and probationary, the divine administration of it is only part of the grand scheme which shall be completed hereafter, when the moral perfections of the great Ruler shall be more fully manifested. Justice and goodness are principles of action in a wise agent, which do not necessarily exert themselves at all times and in all circumstances; the best of human governments find it convenient sometimes to delay the distribution of rewards and punishments, and the public good requires them to do so, that by taking a more proper season, the end may be better obtained: In like manner, God,
 who

who has all his creatures, and at all times, SERM.
equally in his power, sees fit in this state, XIII.
which is but a small part of our existence, 
to delay his final distribution, reserving it to
a day he hath appointed, in which he will
judge the world in righteousness, and render
to all men in exact proportion according to
their works.

And yet, as in this state we have clear evidences of our being under discipline ; so there have not been wanting in all ages signal instances of a wise superintending providence interposing in human affairs with a regard to men's moral conduct, sometimes recompensing eminently virtuous actions, and crowning them with honour which the most careless observers could not help discerning ; and sometimes as remarkably punishing heinous wickedness, for the necessary instruction of an ignorant, and warning of a secure generation, that if possible they may be excited to bethink themselves, to repent and amend their evil doings. Especially, this is the case of nations and kingdoms, which are the special objects of God's care, as he is the gracious parent of mankind, because they are so eminently useful for preserving order, promoting peace, and the most public good as far as the present

SERM. present state of the world will allow, all vices
 XIII. are hurtful, some more directly destructive to
 civil society; but though this results from
 the reason of things, and public calamities be
 the natural consequence of public crimes,
 this doth not hinder them to be properly called
 punishments, since the order whereby the
 calamity follows the guilt is established by the
 voluntary appointment of a wise moral Ruler,
 who by the interposition of his own provi-
 dence ascertains the event. It therefore well
 becomes us to ascribe the rise and fall, the
 increase and diminution of civil communities
 to the providence of God; to account the
 former his blessings, and the other his judg-
 ments; as in the 107th *psalm*, several such
 changes in the state of men are enumerated,
 and a divine agency acknowledged in reward-
 ing and punishing them, so that the conclu-
 sion is, *whofo is wise and will observe these
 things, even they shall understand the loving-
 kindness of the Lord.*

This leads me to the declaration in the
 text, which is the word of the Lord to *Eze-
 kiel* saying, *When the land sinneth against me
 by trespassing grievously, then I will stretch
 out mine hand against it:* indeed it is the
 great point upon which the general doctrine

of the ancient prophets turns ; and their principal design seems to be to inculcate upon men a serious attention to the public revolutions in states and kingdoms, whether prosperous or adverse, in order to promote religion ; to lead them to repentance by the means of public disasters, and encourage them to the practice of piety and righteousness by public prosperity : in order to which this is the idea they constantly give of such vicissitudes, that they are effected by the providence of God acting as the moral governor of the world. This was particularly proper for the teachers of *Israel* to insist upon, because it was agreeable to and in pursuance of the national covenant God made with that people, the established sanctions whereof were national or temporal, rewards for obedience, and punishments for disobedience. But although this be not the proper sanction of Christianity, which is the kingdom of Christ, not of this world, and not so properly a national religion like the *Jewish*, as in every nation a personal religion to all who receive it ; yet, I cannot help thinking that the common course of worldly affairs with respect to nations and kingdoms, considered as under the direction of an invisible, perfectly wise, and righteous ruler,

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SERM. a lover of virtue and hater of iniquity ; that
 XIII. this, I say, will justify the application of the
 doctrine of the text to any nation, so far, that
 nothing is more reasonable or becoming religiously disposed minds, when they plainly see that any land or people have sinned by grievously trespassing against God, than to apprehend his displeasure, or, *that his hand will be stretched out upon that land*, and therefore to humble themselves before him : and when they can discern any providential stroke threatened or inflicted, then to resolve it into their national sins as the procuring cause, *to search and try their ways, and turn again to the Lord*, as the best and most effectual way for preventing public calamities.

In the farther prosecution of this subject, I shall, *first*, make some observations to illustrate the supposition in the text, of a land, or a people, *sinning by trespassing grievously against God*. *Secondly*, consider the methods by which he testifies his displeasure against that land, signified by *his stretching out his hand upon it*.

First, I am to make some observations for illustrating the supposition in the text, of a land, or a people, sinning by trespassing grievously

vouly against God. He is not extreme to SERM.
mark the failures of his servants in any ca- XIII.
pacity; he passes by a multitude of lesser of-
fences; nay, he is slow to anger, and his
justice doth not suddenly exert itself in pu-
nishing even great crimes; as *Solomon* ob-
serves upon the conduct of providence to-
wards sinners, so may every attentive person
at all times, * *That sentence against evil
works is not speedily executed.* And the
apostle † *Paul* teaches us, that *he endured
with much long-suffering the vessels of his
wrath*, who, by their incorrigible wicked-
ness and obstinate impenitency, fitted them-
selves for remediless destruction at last. Espe-
cially, the divine proceedings in the way of
vengeance towards large communities of men
are always leisurely; and that branch of good-
ness called patience, is wonderfully exercised.
When the wickedness of the antediluvian
world was grown so enormous and universal,
that it is said in scripture ||, men were be-
come altogether *flesh* or carnal, and *the ima-
ginations of their hearts were only evil conti-
nually*, so that speaking after the manner of

* Eccles. viii. 11.

† Rom. ix. 22.

|| Gen. vi. 3.

SERM. men, God says, *it repented him, and grieved*
 XIII. *his heart*, that he had made man upon the
 earth, and he determined to overthrow their
 foundation with a flood ; yet he respited the
 infliction of that dreadful judgment for an
 hundred and twenty years, for a farther trial,
 or as the apostle *Peter* * expresseth it, in the
 days of *Noah the long-suffering of God waited*,
 that is, to see if that perverse generation could
 possibly be prevailed with to reform, and so
 prevent their utter destruction. So when the
 iniquities of *Sodom and Gomorrah* were risen
 to such a height as divine patience itself could
 scarce any longer bear, and justice required
 that at last they should be set forth as ex-
 amples, † *suffering the vengeance of eternal*
fire, that is, a ruin by fire never to be re-
 paired ; yet, before that final excision, to show
 his longanimity and *desire to the work of his*
hands, God was pleased to enter into a so-
 lemn treaty with *Abraham* upon the subject,
 wherein he offered to spare those wicked cities
 upon such terms as the utmost human com-
 passion was almost ashamed to ask ‖. Such
 divine long-suffering is universal ; that is,
 extends itself to all nations. It was indeed

* 1 Pet. iii. 20. † Jude 7. ‖ Gen xviii. 23.

signally exemplified in the *Israelites*, as their prophets often put them in mind, and give many undeniable instances of it, but not confined to them; it has been marvelously exercised towards other nations, even their enemies. If a peculiar indulgence had been shewn to the people who were called by God's name, this might have been otherwise accounted for than by his pity to mankind, and even called partiality; but the special privileges granted to some, which as absolute sovereign he may give as he pleases, for, as our Saviour speaks, * *He may do with his own what he will*, are so far from intrenching on his goodness to all, that in this particular case, though by solemn promise the land of *Canaan* was granted to the posterity of *Abraham*, yet the execution of that grant must be suspended, and the possession of the land denied to the children of *Israel*, till the iniquities of the *Amorites* should be full, as it is said †, that is, their transgressions become so odious and universal as to make them ripe for a total extirpation. So that the favourite *Israel* must be kept out of his promised inheritance, till the utmost demands of mercy, which is supreme in the government of all

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* Mat. xx. 15. † Genesis xv. 16.

SERM. mankind, be satisfied towards others, even
 XIII. the *Canaanites*.



Thus far I have explained the supposition in the text, of a land or people sinning by trespassing grievously against God, having shewn you that it imports their having heinously abused the divine patience, been obstinately irreclaimable, and defeated the means of reformation; and that the crimes committed are of a very atrocious kind, reproachful to the human nature; which was the case of those sinners upon whom the flood came and destroyed them; the case of *Sodom* and others; who were made monuments of the divine displeasure; and particularly *Israel* and *Judab*, whose transgressions were the more aggravated by being committed against the clear light which they were favoured with beyond others. We may farther observe that the grievous trespasses of a land, whereby it is prepared for the judgments of God, are universal; I mean, so generally practised, that the community is justly chargeable with them. The prophets often mention this as the foundation of God's controversy with *Israel* and *Judab*, that not a few, but the whole multitude of the people had sinned; and they enumerate the various orders of men who had
 involved

involved themselves in the crying abominations for which calamities came upon the land. Thus, God, intending to vindicate the honour of his justice and goodness in punishing the *Jews*, in the 8th chapter of this book, leads *Ezekiel* in vision to the temple, where the several species of idolatry, profaneness, and other abominable wickedness, are represented to him as committed by all sorts of persons, by old and young, by men and women, by priests and elders. And in the instance before referred to, that of *Sodom*, the corruption was so universal, that there were not ten righteous persons; if there had, the city would have been saved for their sakes. And, *lastly*, the *grievous* trespasses committed by the leading and governing part of a nation may be properly called the sins of a land, and often bring calamities upon it. In the remarkable examples we have in the Old Testament of public humiliations, and deprecating the wrath of God, the religious among the *Jews* with deep regret confess the sins of their rulers, as in a peculiar manner affecting the vitals of the nation, and exposing it to misery. This was their form of confession, *We, our Kings, our princes, and our nobles, have sinned*—

As wickedness recommended from the throne,

SERM. and from the great, becomes almost always
 XIII. universal, and the authority of such exam-
 ~~~~~  
 ples seldom fails of corrupting the gross of  
 the people ; so, partly by the reason and na-  
 tural tendency of things, but never without the  
 just judgment of God upon a people, far from  
 being themselves guiltless, the faults of gover-  
 nors produce very pernicious effects in society.

I am, *Secondly*, to consider the methods  
 by which God testifies his displeasure against  
 a land which sins by trespassing grievously  
 against him. The threatening is here ex-  
 pressed in general, *by stretching out his hand*  
*upon that land*, that is, he will exercise his  
 power in punishing the inhabitants of it.  
 The true notion we ought to have of the Su-  
 preme Being as the governor of mankind up-  
 on this earth, is, that of a gracious compas-  
 sionate parent, caring for all his great family,  
 superintending all their affairs, liberally in-  
 deed providing for all, he never leaves himself  
 without a witness of his mercy to every one  
 of them : but at the same time, using neces-  
 sary discipline for preserving such order and  
 peace among them, as he intended to pre-  
 serve in this imperfect state. When he doth  
 interpose by extraordinary dispensations in the  
 way of punishment, it is with a kind design




to put a stop to prevailing iniquities, and prevent them for the future. Thus the prophet *Isaiab* explains this matter, \* *When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.* If a city or a country be intirely ruined, it is for a warning to other nations, *that they may hear, and fear, and do no more wickedly.* And for lesser corrections, which do not terminate in the final overthrow of the transgressors themselves, they are graciously intended that they may be brought to repentance, and to the amendment of their evil doings; and it is remarkable, that as God always gives warning before the fatal stroke comes, *for judgment is his strange work*, extorted from him, he is much more prone to mercy and delights in it; so, his threatnings are always to be understood with a reserve, and leave room for repentance which will effectually prevent the execution; nay, upon the very appearance of repentance and some partial beginnings of reformation, which do not abide nor are carried to perfection, God is pleased to refrain his anger, and defer punishing the transgressors, so that they are not cut off. It is observed concerning *Abab* king of *Israel*, that extraordinary example of incorrigible wickedness,

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\* *Isaiab* xxvi. 9.

SERM. \* that under the apprehension of divine vengeance because of his sins, for which he had  
 XIII.  at that time some remorse, he rent his cloaths, and put on sackcloth, and fasted, whereupon the Lord said to the prophet *Elijah*, † *Seeft thou how Ahab humbleth himself? I will therefore not bring the evil in his days.* And when *Jonah* was sent to *Niniveh* with a determinate message that within forty days the city should be destroyed, yet upon the deep humiliations of the people and solemn professions of sorrow, it was spared.

The methods are various by which divine providence expresses its displeasure against the sinful inhabitants of a land, or stretches out his hand upon it. The prophet, in the sequel of this chapter, mentions some of them particularly, such as famine, noisome beasts, the sword, and the pestilence, which are joined together ||, and called God's four sore judgments. Other plagues there have been recorded in the scripture history, of a yet more extraordinary and astonishing nature, whereby God has punished particular guilty cities and countries; as those inflicted on the land of *Egypt*, fires, inundations, earthquakes, and many more; but these are the most common, and

\* 1 Kings xxi. 27. † Ver. 29. || Ver. 21.

this one useful observation arises from them SERM.  
all taken together, that God exercises a so- XIII.  
vereign dominion over the whole course of  
nature, animate and inanimate, and conti-  
nually interposes in directing it so as to fulfil  
his own purposes, particularly, the purposes  
of his moral government over mankind. The  
things here referred to, have, some of them,  
the greatest outward appearance of being ef-  
fects which depend upon necessary and un-  
designed causes; as famines, we know, pro-  
ceed in some countries, and at some times,  
from extraordinary droughts, or from excessive  
rains, which men can only account for in  
general, by changes in the temperature of the  
air depending on the mechanism of inanimate  
nature: like this also seems to be the imme-  
diate cause of pestilences; some noxious va-  
pours wherewith the air is impregnated, or  
it may be insects floating in it, which enter-  
ing into the human body prove so destructive  
to it. Some of the fore judgments of God  
seem to be altogether fortuitous. What can  
be more so, than the strolling of savage beasts  
from their haunts into an inhabited country,  
which rather seems to be the aversion of their  
nature? And some of them are the imme-  
diate productions of voluntary causes, but

SERM. having quite different designs from those  
 XIII. which God accomplishes by them. Thus,

the prophet *Isaiab* gives us a very elegant description of providence over-ruling the counsels and measures of the *Affyrian* king to fulfil the purpose of correcting a sinful people when the voluntary active instrument had no other views than to satisfy his own ambition.

\* O *Affyrian*, *the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge; to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to cut off nations not a few.*

His intention was only to exalt his power, to enlarge his dominion, and to satisfy his cruel thirst of blood; but providence, whose instrument he was, had a quite different design, which he never thought of, namely, to chastise a rebellious and degenerate people for their iniquity. Many other declarations we have in scripture to the same effect, which represent God as calling for far distant nations, and employing their swords in executing

\* *Isaiab* x. 5, 6, 7.

his judgments upon the lands that were become obnoxious to his just vengeance for their grievous trespasses; as first, the *Assyrians*, afterwards, the *Chaldeans*, were sent to correct *Israel* and *Judah*: in like manner it pleased the great Ruler of the world to make the *Medes* and *Persians* the ministers of his vengeance against great *Babylon* devoted to utter destruction.

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Now, how grand, how awful an idea doth this give us of the divine administration! The supreme Ruler, tho' to us invisible, is intimately present in all parts of his vast empire, inspecting their affairs, guiding their motions and changes. In the first chapter of this book, this is represented in vision to the prophet *Ezekiel* by animated wheels; teaching us that the elements, and course even of corporeal nature, are under an intelligent direction. The vast orbs, which continually and regularly move on in that appointed order, not only serve their more general and obvious purposes, but fulfil the more particular purposes of the governing spirit presiding over them: and, especially, it is to be observed that the administration of the great King in his natural dominion is adjusted to the designs of his moral government.

*Elibu*

SERM. *Elihu* says\*, That by watering, he (God)  
 XIII. *wearieth the thick cloud, which is turnea*  
 { *about by his counsels, to fulfil whatever he*  
*pleases on earth; and they come, either for*  
*correction, or for his land, or for mercy.*  
 Nay, the superior celestial influences minister  
 to the same purposes, the stars in their courses  
 fought against *Sifera* †. How glorious is  
 God? How weak are defenceless mortals  
 against him? how vain their devices? Uni-  
 versal nature is ready to arm in his cause,  
 and every part at his command to serve the  
 ends of his goodness or justice. But the  
 things which seem to be the most for-  
 tuitous and contingent, are as much under  
 his direction as those that move by the  
 most steady unchangeable rules. What can  
 appear more giddy, more capricious, than the  
 ramblings of wild beasts seeking their prey,  
 and yet these are guided by providence to  
 make their inroads upon inhabited lands,  
 for the punishment of sinners that dwell in  
 them. And, lastly, the designs of men,  
 even the most cunning, the most secret, and  
 the most violent of them, are under the  
 guidance and controul of superior divine  
 counsels. If the rulers of one nation are me-

\* Job xxxvii. 11, 12.

† Judges v. 20.

ditating mischief against another, they can neither form their projects nor execute them, without the permission of divine providence; which therefore is always to be adored, to be feared, always to be depended on.

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Let us now apply what has been said to the particular design of our present assembly, which is to humble ourselves before God, confessing the sins of these nations against him, and deprecating his deserved displeasure. That the lands have sinned against the Lord, will in general be readily acknowledged; but to affect our minds the more sensibly, and that we may the better discharge the duty which on this occasion is incumbent upon us, we ought in our reflecting thoughts to lay before ourselves the more grievous trespasses which may be justly charged upon us. I have shewed what transgressions may be justly called national; among them the iniquities of governors have an eminent share, and often are attended with most fatal consequences to the people. Indeed it becomes subjects to carry it with great reverence to the higher powers ordained of God, that is, by his providence, to rule over them, and to speak of them with all the respect which is

con-

SERM. consistent with truth; but when an adm-  
 XIII. nistration is notoriously corrupt, and the mis-  
 ~~~~~chievous effects of it to the public are felt, or  
 are most apparent, then to acquiesce silently,
 without complaint to God or man, is not a
 just deference to civil authority, but a servile
 stupidity and infatuation, whereby we parti-
 cipate in the guilt. Nor have *Britain* and
Ireland been without instances of this sort.
 The reigns before the late revolution were so
 infamous for tyranny, cruelty, wickedness,
 and hypocrisy, that no true lover of his coun-
 try and of the protestant religion, can reflect
 on them without detestation. And in the
 later times which immediately preceded the
 accession of the present royal family, it is
 scarcely doubted by any of us, but that wicked
 men, then exalted to great power, had formed
 pernicious schemes for the utter subversion of
 our religious and civil rights, from which we
 escaped by an almost miraculous interposition
 of providence. Nay, it may be justly feared
 that the dismal effects of that unhappy mis-
 conduct still hang over our guilty heads; for
 it is certain great advantages were then trea-
 cherously given to the power, which of all
 others in *Europe*, is, and long has been, the
 most dangerous to the protestant interest and
 the

the liberties of mankind, to recover its broken force: and we now actually see it raised to such a state, as to *cause its terror in the land of the living*, to threaten the *laying waste nations not a few*, or changing their constitutions and government by policy or by violence, and even to *hurt or destroy in God's holy mountain*. I mention these things, that we may make proper reflections upon them to the purposes of our humiliation before God, and praying that threatned evils may be averted, and that we may do what is fit for us in our several stations for preventing the like for the future: not that we should rashly censure our rulers, or entertain causeless jealousies concerning them, but it becomes every wise and good man according to his capacity to be attentive to a national interest, and serve it as far as it is in his power; above all, that we should implore the divine mercy to them who are set over us, that they may be preserved from evil counsel, and that they may, as the scripture speaks, *feed the people committed to them in the integrity of their hearts, and guide them with skilful hands*.

But, let us also consider those sins which may be called national, upon a different, and a very proper account, because they are very

gene-

SERM. generally committed. And, surely, of them
 XIII. there are many, and of a very heinous kind.

It is notorious that debauchery is so common and so bare-faced, as to be the plain character of many, and they are not ashamed of it. Some men in high stations are ring-leaders in wickedness, in drunkenness, fornication, adultery, which however profligate sinners may make light of them, I hope *you* will consider as crying abominations, for which God hath threatened that *his soul will be avenged* on any land that is stained with them. From the wicked of distinguished outward condition, the more infamous because they are great in titles and riches, these vices have spread through inferior ranks down to the lowest of the people. Women quite abandoning that modesty which is naturally the honour of their sex, even professedly live by the scandalous gain of their prostitution, and the adulterers *assemble in troops*, as the scripture expresses it, *in the harlots houses*. Men endeavour by subtle arts and bribes (nay and impudently pique themselves upon their success) to corrupt virgin innocence, and thereby bring poor creatures into the greatest disgrace and misery; nay, they treacherously and villainously pollute the marriage bed, and are guilty


guilty of adultery with their neighbours wives I call this *villainy*, after the prophet *Jeremiab* *. He says of eminent persons for their stations, *they have committed villainy in Israel*, which he explains by adding, *they have committed adultery*. What indeed can be more villainous than such a causeless injury to an unoffending neighbour in the tenderest part, and involving the unhappy partner of the crime in the most horrid perfidiousness?

That luxury is the true character of our degenerate times, is too plain to be doubted. Delicacy and expensiveness in eating and drinking, in apparel, and in all the external show of life, are grown to an enormous height, which is a forerunner, if not reformed, of misery, not only by the just judgment of God, but by the natural tendency of things: for it enervates the spirits of men, exposes them to consuming distempers, and is followed with a numerous train of other destructive evils. The *Roman satyrift* observes concerning that imperial city, the mistress of the world, that in his time, cruel luxury, more terrible than invading enemies, got possession of her, and by her ruin revenged the conquered nations.

* Jer. xxix. 23.

SERM. This sin, the more shameful in our case, because we justly complain that we are a poor nation, is attended with grievous oppression; a guilt that cries loud for vengeance. The poor tenant groans under a grievous burden; for his sweat, and toil, and penurious living, must support the extravagant expence of his voluptuous landlord. And the almost starved manufacturer complains as piteously, being reduced to the utmost extremity of distress, by the expensive gaiety of those in higher life, which will be satisfied with nothing but what is foreign and costly.

And to close the melancholy scene, profaneness is risen to a great height. What can be imagined more impious, a more daring outrageous indignity to Almighty God, than openly to blaspheme his name by prophane cursing and swearing, which yet is the common language of our streets. And here the poor vie with the rich, for their execrable oaths cost them nothing, but the violation of their consciences, which they are as prodigal of as the highest sinner in the land; and shew an equal disposition to imitate their superiors in other wickedness, if their condition would allow. This has been long complained of,

of, and some attempts have been made to re-SERM.
strain it, even by the public authority of XIII.
laws; but what is the consequence? why, 
instead of amendment, it increases, *even from
the days of our fathers*, to the great dishonour
of religion, and augmenting *the anger of the
Lord*.


Now, if this be a just representation of
our state; and that it is true, is very certain;
indeed it is defective, for many more sins
might be added to the score of our guilt;
but if it be so, may it not be justly said that
these lands have sinned by trespassing grie-
vously against God, and that there is reason
to apprehend that he will stretch out his hand
upon them, according to the threatening in
my text, and according to the usual course of
his providence? Let us never imagine that
we are not under the observation of his eye,
or that he is not displeas'd with ours, as well
as with the iniquities of others. We have
long persist'd in our disobedience; and the
evils mentioned, with many more, have been
growing upon us. His first essays for re-
claiming us have been, most agreeably to the
infinite goodness of his nature, in the way of
mercy and forbearance. In the last reign our

SERM. enemies made some attempts against us, but
 XIII. met with disappointments, in which the
 hand of God appeared very signally. In the
 present reign we have enjoyed profound peace.
 But these means have been unsuccessful, we
 continue in our provocations; what then are
 we to expect but that he should stretch out
 his hand in anger? If there were no out-
 ward appearance to strike terror into our
 minds, and call us to humiliation and repen-
 tance, it would certainly be our duty, upon
 a due reflection on the demerit of our tres-
 passes, but more especially, when we are
 actually entered into a war, the event of
 which, what it may be, none of us can tell.
 The sword is one of God's four sore judg-
 ments, or the methods by which he stretches
 out his hand upon a nation. It is true our
 present danger does not seem to be very great,
 and humanly speaking, our strength is suffi-
 cient for our defence. I am afraid this is car-
 ried too far by some of us. We think and
 speak of our enemies with contempt. What
 are the *Spaniards* but a poor and dastardly
 people? What power have they wherewith
 to make head against the naval force of *Great
 Britain*? But if they be the rod of God's
 anger,

anger, and if the staff in their hand be his indignation, that can make them formidable enough; or however that be, he has many arrows in his quiver, he can call for another more powerful nation, or inflict other strokes of a different kind, for the punishment of a rebellious people. Therefore, take our Saviour's warning whom you shall fear, whatever courage you preserve against men, and I should be sorry to see us meanly dejected because of any enemies and their preparations; yet fear the supreme Ruler, who has an unlimited power over all nature, and to whose justice our iniquities have rendered us obnoxious. But it may be said, what can such a particular society as this do? They can have very little influence, rather none at all, for effecting a national reformation, which can only prevent national judgments. I answer, I hope it will always be a principle with you, that religion is not in vain. It is remarkable, that in the 9th chapter of this book, when the destroying angels are commissioned to make dreadful havock among sinners, yet they cannot stir in execution of that power, till some are marked out to safety, and their character is, verse the 4th,

SERM.

XIII.


SERM. men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof; but, XIII.  in all events, God hath said to the righteous, it shall be well with them.

S E R M O N XIV.

Prudence necessary in conversing
upon Religious Subjects.


Matt. vii. 6.

*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs,
neither cast ye your pearls before swine,
lest they trample them under their feet, and
turn again and rent you.*

OUR Saviour having, in the preceding SERM.
part of this his excellent sermon, XIV.
delivered many useful instructions to 
his hearers upon the most essential branches
of religion and virtue, from the beginning of
this chapter teaches them the measures of
candor, equity, and mercy, which they were
to observe, and which men at all times ought
to observe, in their behaviour to each other.
And first, he warns them against censorious-
ness and rash judgment, which is a common
fault indeed, but a very heinous one, and
A a 3 highly

S E R M. highly displeasing to God; and it shews such
 XIX. a bitter malevolent spirit as provokes him to
 { treat men with greater severity than other-
 wife he would do. On other occasions the
 same divine teacher assures us that the sove-
 reign ruler and just judge of the world, whose
 proceedings are all according to the exactest
 rules of equity, will, in the distribution of
 recompences to his servants, have a great re-
 gard to the usage they give their fellow-ser-
 vants, as here he expressly says, *with what
 measure you mete it shall be measured to you
 again.*

To divert us from this evil, our Lord points
 out to us the true, the more proper and pro-
 fitable use, which is to be made of our re-
 flecting powers, our reason and the sense of
 good and evil which is planted in our minds;
 and that is, in examining ourselves, our own
 tempers, and our lives, that we may apply
 ourselves carefully to the amending of them.
 Besides other and greater advantages which
 would accrue to us from thus employing our
 thoughts, namely, the perfecting us in all
 virtue, and preparing us for the highest hap-
 piness of our nature, it is a most necessary
 qualification for the office of reprovng others
 effectually and successfully. For how appa-
 rently

rently unreasonable is it, severely to condemn SERM.
lighter offences in our neighbours while much XIV.
greater ones are chargeable upon ourselves? 

And what skill can we pretend to in instructing, what authority in urging others to reformation, while it is notorious we have not wisdom and integrity enough to discover and correct our own greater errors? Here also, as in other parts of the sermon, there seems to be a regard had to the temper and way of the scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, against which our Saviour would have his disciples very cautious: for they were severe in animadverting upon minute failures, as in ritual matters, while they indulged themselves habitually in heinous vices, in pride, covetousness, and oppression. Let every man therefore, who sets up for an instructor, and reformer of others, *first cast the beam out of his own eye, and then he will see clearly to cast out the mote out of his brother's eye.* Let him first discharge himself of all ill habits, purify his heart from corrupt affections, and cleanse his life from vicious practices; then will he be able both with greater understanding and efficacy, to direct others in the necessary work of reformation.

SERM. But when all this is done, when men have
 XIV. settled accounts with themselves, when their
 ~~~~~ consciences are clear of indulged vices, and  
 their reputation free from any such blemishes  
 as would bring them into contempt and render  
 all their admonitions ineffectual, still  
 there is discretion to be used in reproof.  
 Great consideration is to be had of men's  
 tempers, and what probability there is of  
 success, or what effect any instructions we  
 can give may have upon them : which is di-  
 rectly the subject of the text ; *give not that  
 which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye  
 your pearls before swine, lest they trample  
 them under their feet, and turn again and  
 rend you.* It is an excellent disposition to  
 propagate the knowledge of the true religion  
 and virtue, and one of the best offices we  
 can do, not to suffer sin to lie upon our bro-  
 ther, but reprove and endeavour to re-  
 claim him : *for he that converts a sinner  
 from the error of his way saves a soul from  
 death :* but at the same time, this is a work  
 to be gone about with great prudence. In  
 some cases, and some persons, no attempt at  
 all is to be made, because there is no ap-  
 pearance of any good to be done but hurt.  
 They must be quite unpractised in the world,  
 who

who do not know that there is a great diversity in the sentiments and dispositions of men towards the things of religion. Some seem to be very susceptible of them ; their minds are easy of access ; they have ears to hear and hearts to receive the instructions which even bring their faults to remembrance, and reproach them with their folly. There are others who have hardened themselves against reproof and become altogether impatient of it : they do not care to be troubled any more with such matters ; and hold them only as officious meddlers, the fit objects of their resentment, who teize them with discourses of religion. SERM.  
XIV.

Now our Saviour's intention here is to teach his followers how they ought to carry it to these persons, so directly opposite to each other. The former they have great encouragement to converse with upon religious affairs, and endeavour to amend in them whatever they can discern to be amiss : the other are not to be meddled with lest they become worse instead of better, and even return outrage for admonition. This is what we are to understand by *that which is holy, and pearls* ; the precious doctrine and rules of religion, which the friends of them ought to treat

SERM. treat with great caution and tenderness ; not

XIV. to throw them out so promiscuously on all  
 occasions as may expose them to contempt :  
 but by all means make a choice of the persons  
 with whom they have communication upon  
 such points, that so their honour and dignity  
 may be preserved. It is to be observed, that  
 when the apostles were sent out to preach  
 the gospel, as unconfined as their commission  
 was, and they suitably furnished for executing  
 it with a power of working miracles and  
 extraordinary divine illumination, yet their  
 master gives it them in charge to make a  
 distinction among men in applying to them.  
 They were not immediately to accost all per-  
 sons they saw with their message from hea-  
 ven, but make diligent inquiry in every place  
 they came to, *who in it were worthy*; that  
 is, who were men of probity and candor,  
 that it might be expected would give a fair  
 hearing to the gospel of the kingdom of  
 God. Agreeable to this was St. Paul's  
 conduct \*, when after fourteen years tra-  
 vels and continual labours in the conver-  
 sion of the Gentiles, he returned to *Jeru-  
 salem* by revelation, or by the immediate  
 direction of God's spirit ; he communicated  
 the gospel which he preached, that is, pure

\* Gal. ii.

Christianity without Judaism ; but to whom did he first communicate it? not to the bigotted *Jews*, lest he should have run in vain, lest *they should have trampled it under their feet, and turned again and rent him*: but he communicated it *privately to them who were of reputation*. Against this general and most reasonable rule many have trespassed. Men of an enthusiastick turn, who under a strong persuasion of truth on their side ; and not only so, but that their minds were under a divine influence, have applied themselves to the work of reforming the world with a great deal of zeal, but very little skill, either in the manner of their address, or the choice of the persons on whom they made their attempts ; and the success has been answerable enough to the temerity and imprudence of their undertakings : their counsels have been neglected, and themselves treated with contempt as very weak or frantick. We see in the instance of the apostle's just now referred to, that when the spirit of God moves men, he does not deprive them of their reason but rather strengthens it, and in executing an immediate commission from him, though he does not leave them without extraordinary credentials, they are still to use their own  
under-

SERM.  
XIV.

SERM. understandings. And therefore concerning  
 XIV. pretenders of this sort it may be said, that  
 the less sense and discretion appears in their  
 management, the more justly they are liable  
 to suspicion, either of an intention to de-  
 ceive, or rather for the most part, of being  
 deluded themselves by a warm imagination,  
 which without ground they attribute to a  
 divine impulse. But this I shall not any far-  
 ther insist on: for the text, as I understand  
 it, does not relate particularly to apostles or  
 other inspired persons, but to ordinary Chri-  
 stians, pretending to act from no other prin-  
 ciples or directions than those of conscience  
 and reason which are common to all.

In discoursing farther from this text, I  
 shall,

*First*, Consider the bad characters and dis-  
 positions of some men here represented by  
 the allusion of *dogs* and *swine*, with respect  
 to holy things, or the doctrines and precepts  
 of religion.

*Secondly*, The necessity and reasonableness  
 of treating religion with great caution, on ac-  
 count of these bad characters and dispo-  
 sitions. And on both these heads I will make  
 some useful reflections.

*First*,



First, the bad characters and dispositions of some men here represented by the allusion of *dogs* and *swine*. We may be sure they are extremely bad, unworthy of the powers the privileges, and dignity of the human nature, else our Saviour would not describe them as he doth, by figures, which shew that they dishonour and degrade humanity itself. And, therefore, this cannot be the common condition of mankind, nor the condition of any man without a voluntary contracted depravity : for our state by nature, weak and imperfect as it is, is not brutish, unless we ourselves have corrupted it. But the men whose dispositions are become like dogs and swine towards the purity and goodness of the christian religion, are those who have made them so by habitually indulging their sensual affections and passions, and who through the deceitfulness of sin have hardened their hearts into an obstinate, nay furious disaffection to holiness and virtue. Every human mind, not debauched by its own fault, is capable of good impressions, and hath those sentiments and feelings to which the laws of christian morality are agreeable. But these may be stifled, and in a  
great

SERM.  
XIV.

SERM. great measure conquered, and men may  
 XIV. acquire very vicious and malignant tempers,  
 not without having first done violence to  
 their own consciences, and great indignities  
 to the laws of God, and the gracious methods  
 he uses for reclaiming sinners.

There are two ingredients in this bad character which we should beware of as far as we discover them by their fruits, in others, and especially every man should guard against them, even allowing any degree of them, in himself. The one is stupid impurity; and the other is a passionate and wrathful malignity. First, I say, stupid impurity, which is signified by the similitude of the swine; a voracious kind of animal devouring every thing it can feed on that comes in its way, and far from that delicacy, or even cleanliness, which is observable in other kinds of brutes: a fit emblem, therefore, of sinners who by custom grow to be grossly dissolute and indecently voluptuous. In like manner the apostle describes apostate sinners with a reference to their former virtuous beginnings, nay and progress in a reformation through the knowledge of Jesus Christ; I say, he describes them by this true Proverb \*, *the dog has*

\* 2 Pet. ii. 22.

returned to his vomit again, and the sow that SERM.  
was washed to her wallowing in the mire. It XIV.

is really amazing to what a height of insensibility men will arrive who allow themselves time after time, in a repeated violation of their consciences, making breaches in the ingenuity of their natures, and casting off the restraints of shame. Things, which would have been shocking to them at the first, and they could not have borne them without an inward confusion, become familiar at last, nay, and perfectly easy to them. The men, *whose God is their belly*, who are wholly devoted to their sensual appetite, which is the lowest, the most unmanly, indeed brutish, of all human characters, they even *glory in their shame*. What appears to an ingenuous spirit sensible of the excellence of the rational nature, the most deformed and vile, to have an unsufferable turpitude, and greater odiousness to the mind than the most abominable things in the world have to the outward senses, they are perfectly reconciled to, and take pleasure in them. The most sublime and important things of religion, which, to an unvitiated spirit,

SERM. spirit, have the most transcendent beauty  
 XIV. and dignity in them, they treat with neglect, nay with scorn: and, as swine do pearls, they trample them under their feet. All this the apostle expresses very plainly and without a figure, in representing the unhappy, and, morally speaking, most deformed case of the Gentiles, by degrees risen up to the most abominable vileness and consummate wickedness: only let it be observed, that where it is the case of Christians it is still worse, because they have enjoyed, and abused, better means of knowledge and virtue. \* *Who walk in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts; who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.* A dismal conjuncture of evils, most disgraceful and unhappy to the reasonable nature! Vanity, ignorance, blindness, and hardness of heart, that is, insensibility and incorrigible obstinacy, and eagerness in vice.

\* Eph. iv. from ver. 17.

The second ingredient in this bad temper, SERM.  
 is, a stubborn forwardness and angry resentment, XIV.  
 which is a degree yet beyond stupidity itself. This is represented by the allusion of dogs turning again, and rending those who would correct them for their faults. There are some so perverse, so irreclaimably fixed and resolute in their sinful courses, that instead of submitting to necessary discipline for reformation, they conceive an utter abhorrence against such as attempt to use it with the clearest evidences of a kind intention. They snarl at admonitions, and would even bite and devour their charitable instructors. *Solomon*, long before our Saviour's time, made the same observation, and in his excellent proverbs, which are very instructive rules for the conduct of life, he advises us to have a great regard to the tempers of men in giving instruction and reproof. \* *He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man, getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee; rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.* By the scorner here, and a wicked man, we must understand the same who in the text is compared to a dog; the man who to his in-

\* Prov. ix. 7, 8.

SERM. corrigibleness in sin has added a canine disposition, a peevish and angry forwardness; who, absolutely bent on wicked purposes, is impatient of any thing which would divert him from them; who has a fond conceit of himself, and supported by some trifling pretences of wit and humour, in his perverse ways, despises all who would take upon them to correct his errors: whereas the truly wise man has his mind always open to conviction, and is disposed to hearken to good counsel for his amendment. Again, *\* smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.* Let the proud and haughty sinner, who disdains private instruction, be left to the penal effects of his obstinate folly from the hands of public justice, which ought to be impartially inflicted for a warning to others, and to prevent the offences of men, whose tempers are more flexible: but private pains will be better bestowed on better natured and more docile spirits, who will be humbler and more inclined to hear reason,

We see in these instances, how deplorably the human nature is capable of being corrupted, and what lengths in wickedness it may

\* Prov. xix. 25.

run to. As, on the one hand, it may be raised by a diligent improvement to moral attainments next to angelical; so, it is possible, it may degenerate, we do not know how far, even to be like the beasts that perish; nay, and to be in depravity next to devils. This depends in a great measure on ourselves; and our condition, whether it shall be good or bad, happy or miserable, is put in our own power. It may be raised to a high measure of perfection and enjoyment by a due improvement of our faculties; and it may be depressed into a deplorable abjectness, if we will not consider and shew ourselves men, if we will not exert our intelligent and moral capacities. But, particularly, see how the order of nature is reversed when men are turned into dispositions like those of dogs and swine. When a desire to brutal gratifications is become so impetuous, and the relish for them so strong, that there is no more taste for, no sense of dignity and excellence in, moral worth; but it is trampled under foot: when the passions which were originally designed to minister to the ends of our being, become the slaves of sin, and are only employed to secure its interest. Anger was planted in us for our defence against violence;

SERM. and indignation, in a right temper of mind,  
 XIV. rises against vice as base and dishonourable,  
 ~~~~~ disparaging to our nature, and originally intended as a preservative from it: but when these passions are lost to the proper use they were designed for, and not only so, but are exerted in defence of sin, and are the securities of its interest by hindering all approaches of the proper remedy, how pitiable, how wretched is the state of that mind!

Another reflection upon what has been said, which I recommend to your serious thoughts, is, that we should all of us constantly watch against all tendencies towards, and beginnings of, these evil dispositions in ourselves. It is true the text takes notice of them as in others with whom we have an opportunity of conversing, and teacheth us how to behave in that case. But as they are not unfrequently met with even among professed Christians, should not we then take heed that they be not our own? the rather, because in thoughtless persons they grow up by unobserved degrees to a dangerous, almost incurable height; still under plausible but deceitful pretences. This is in effect the same caution which the apostle gives the

Hebrews,

Hebrews, from the example of their ancestors, SERM.
 * Take heed lest there be in any of you an XIV.
 evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the
 living God, but exhort one another daily
 while it is called to-day, lest any of you be
 hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. It
 becomes every man who has the religious
 state of his mind much at heart, and makes
 it the principal object of his attention, to be
 continually jealous over himself; to be fre-
 quently observing what progress he makes in
 virtue, or whether he be not rather declining;
 just as a man who is very solicitous about his
 worldly concerns, will look often into his
 accounts, that he may know how he pros-
 pers. And we may reckon that when this
 vigilance is omitted, and we become careless,
 our spiritual affairs are then in a dangerous
 way. Particularly, let us take heed what
 tender feelings we preserve of the evil of sin;
 and what sensibility to the beauty of holi-
 ness, the dignity, and excellence of virtue.
 While these perceptions are strong and lively;
 sin appears odious and deformed; the things
 of God's law, and the works which discover
 his perfections, wonderful in our eyes; we
 count all things with *St. Paul* but loss for

* Heb. iii. 12, 13.

SERM. the excellency of the knowledge of *Jesus*
 XIV. *Christ*; that is the *pearl of great price*, for
 which we are willing to sell all, according to
 our Saviour's parable; when these are the
 ruling sentiments in the heart, and their
 strength still increasing, virtue is, as it ought
 to be, in a healthful prosperous state. But
 on the contrary, when such objects appear
 little to us, or indifferent; when they lose in
 our esteem their beauty, grandeur, and im-
 portance; when the deformity of sin is less-
 ened, and the thoughts of indulgence in vi-
 cious pleasures sit easy upon our minds; these
 are the symptoms of a distempered condition,
 and we have reason to be afraid of our going
 into that temper which our Saviour marks
 out as so odious. And let us beware of grow-
 ing impatient of the reproofs of instruction,
 which *Solomon* calls the way of life. The
 mind which is easily ruffled with admoni-
 tions, and cannot bear the most affectionate
 rebukes of a friend, without falling into pas-
 sion, as if an injury were done, shews itself
 too much interested in its own errors, and
 unwilling to part with them. But let us re-
 member the words, and endeavour to imitate
 the excellent spirit of the Psalmist, * *Let the*

* Psalm. cxli, 5.

righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me, it shall be excellent oil, which shall not break my head. I come,

SERM.
XIV.

Secondly, To consider the necessity and reasonableness of treating the affairs of religion with caution and prudence, in our conversing with others, because of these bad characters and dispositions in men, which have been explained. Since we know that sacred things are so liable to be abused by prophane persons, we should therefore take care to give no handle for such abuse, and not to throw them out indiscriminately on all occasions, lest instead of good, our doing so may produce very bad effects. There are two inconveniencies particularly here mentioned, which we should always beware of. One is the bringing the great and momentous matters of religion into contempt, expressed by trampling them under foot: and the other exposing ourselves to ill usage from ill-disposed persons; lest they turn again and rend you. Good men will always be solicitous, that the honour of God and divine things may be preserved, and that they may be treated with a becoming respect. *David* often expresses his great concern for the indignities done to God

SERM. and to his word by finners. *Rivers of tears,*
 XIV. he says, *run down his eyes : and horror took*
 hold on him, *because wicked men transgressed*
 the divine law. For, proportionable to our esteem for any person will be our resentment against the dishonours which are offered to him : and therefore if our love to God be supreme as it should be, *with all the heart and soul*, the profanation of his name and laws will be grievous to us. Consequently, we should take all the care we can to prevent such profaneness ; and in a particular manner by preventing the occasion of it. It is easy to see that some men are disposed to take every opportunity of doing despite to religion ; and surely, then, the Psalmist's way is the best, * *I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence. I held my peace even from good.* And indeed charity to men, to finners themselves, requires this, as well as a zeal of God. One would, even in compassion, avoid giving them opportunities to increase their guilt : and if we believe that to trample on the venerable things of religion will draw down misery on men, a merciful spirit would, as far as it can be done, shun the occasions of

* Pf. xxxix. from the beginning.

it. There are offices of humanity to the worst of men, from which nothing can discharge us; not even their own greatest faults, their enmity against ourselves, nor their impiety against God. But it is an ill-judged charity, however well meant, to lay before some very profligate sinners, whose notorious wickedness and obstinacy proclaim to every observer, that the fear of God is not before their eyes; I say, to lay before them such solemn serious counsels of piety, as the least consideration might satisfy us, will in all probability be the occasion of their contracting greater guilt.

Another reason why religious instructions and admonitions should not be proposed promiscuously to all men, is, that it may be attended with the bad consequences of ill treatment to ourselves from some persons of rough and passionate tempers. *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, lest they turn again and rend you.* Common sense, and the principles of self-preservation planted in every human heart teach us to avoid sufferings, especially from the hands of our fellow-creatures, with whom the social affections of our nature incline us to cultivate peace; and it is a great article in the enjoyment of life. And though indeed

SERM. XIV.

SERM. indeed Christianity requires our warmest,
 XIV. most affectionate zeal for its propagation and
 a resolved adherence to the profession of it,
 even though we should suffer by the hands
 of men, so far as to the losing of life itself; yet
 it no where requires us to precipitate ourselves
 into dangers from the adversaries of the gospel,
 and to provoke their persecuting rage by our
 rashly and indiscreetly endeavouring to force
 it upon them by our importunity, while they
 manifestly show an utter aversion to it. On
 the contrary our Saviour enjoins his disciples,
 though they should never betray his cause
 for fear of persecution, nor procure ease to
 themselves by denying the truth, but be pre-
 pared to endure the most grievous sufferings
 rather than forsake their profession; yet, I
 say, he enjoins them to shun persecution
 whenever they could do it with a good con-
 science. When they were persecuted in one
 city, their orders were, to flee to another,
 both that they might save their own lives,
 which should not be thrown away unneces-
 sarily, and that they might seek an oppor-
 tunity of bestowing their labours in the pro-
 pagation of Christianity where they might
 hope for a better reception. But the general
 rule

rule to Christians is, * *See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but wise: redeeming the time*, when the days are evil or calamitous; and in the degree in which they are so, through the opposition of bad men to the cause of religion: that is, endeavour to prolong the time of your tranquility by such a prudent and discrete conduct, as may avoid persecution and other inconveniencies. The same direction is given, † *Walk in wisdom towards them that are without (Jewish and heathen infidels, enemies to the truth,) redeeming the time.*

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XIV.



The general foundation upon which this rule rests, is, that as God has put men here in a state of probation and discipline with respect to virtue and happiness, at the same time in a social relation to each other, requiring them to perform all mutual good offices, and to cultivate peace, he would not have them lost to their freedom as rational creatures in what concerns their duty to him, even though they abuse that freedom, and to carry it to each other with a blameless unprovoking prudence. The consequence is, that good men, however zealous for religion and compassionate to sinners, must not use

* Eph. v. 15, 16.

† Col. iv. 5.

violence


SERM. violence to reclaim them (which God him-
 XIV. self does not, though infinitely more jealous
 ~~~~~ for his own honour, and good of his crea-  
 tures, as well as powerful to do them good)  
 nor must they be teased with unseasonable  
 clamorous importunities, which will be re-  
 sented as a kind of encroachment on their  
 liberty, and irritate their peevish tempers,  
 disturbing the peace which ought to subsist  
 among men as social creatures in this world,  
 even abstracting from the exercise of piety.

The only reflection I shall make on this  
 last part of the text, is, that we should apply  
 it for our direction in the ordinary state of  
 things, and in the particular circumstances  
 wherein we are placed. These words were  
 spoken by our Saviour in the beginning of  
 Christianity, when it was but making its en-  
 trance into the world, and had many ene-  
 mies. It was then necessary for its friends  
 to behave circumspectly, and with wisdom,  
 that they might not hurt its interests, nor  
 mar its propagation. And at all times, even  
 where it is the most firmly established, care  
 should be taken by the professors of it to do  
 all they can for preserving its reputation, and  
 that men do not receive prejudices against it.  
 Particularly there are two cases in which the  
 rule



rule should be attended to, and applied in proportion. One is the divided state of professed Christians, when they have formed themselves into different parties, fiercely opposing one another: which is just now the case in fact, as it has been very often almost in every age of the Christian church. How should these parties so directly opposite carry it towards each other, and particularly the best to the worst, the most violent and obstinate gainfayers of the truth? Just, I think, in the main the same way as towards unbelievers; that is, upon the foot of humanity, bringing the affairs of religion as little into question as may be. For in proportion the methods which recommend the gospel itself to the world, and preserve peace, in the case of a different reception given to it, will contribute to the promoting some of its parts, its particular doctrines and institutions, which may be opposed by some who are not avowed adversaries to the whole. And the same prudent conduct which softens infidels, and disposes them to peace, may allay animosities among Christians, which are reproachful to their common profession, and prevent their being devoured one of another.

SERM. The other case in which the rule of the  
 XIV. text should be applied is more private, di-  
 recting our behaviour towards others, within  
 the narrow circle of our own acquaintance  
 and friendship. It often falls out, that our  
 friends differ from us, and some things hap-  
 pen in their conduct which appear to us  
 blameable. It is certainly very kind to set  
 them right. But in endeavouring to do so,  
 great discretion is to be used, and nothing is  
 more necessary than to study men's tempers.  
 There are people by no means to be numbered  
 with those who are proverbially called dogs  
 and swine, and yet not at all easy of access  
 in the way of friendly admonition. When  
 you meet a man under a vehement prepos-  
 session, or know him to be of a spirit easily  
 enflamed, it is not best to attack his faults  
 directly, at least till time, and some con-  
 curring circumstances dispose him more to  
 hearken to advice. I confess what I have  
 been now insisting on, is not a common fault,  
 yet it may be useful for some to be warned  
 against it. We are generally now got into  
 the other extreme, so far from giving that  
 which is holy to the dogs, and casting pearls  
 before swine, we scarcely give them even to  
 those who are holy, and esteem them as  
 much

much as, perhaps more than, ourselves. I SERM.  
mean in the way of conversation we have lost XIV.  
the inclination, or the skill of introducing   
grave and serious subjects. But after all it is  
needful to be cautious and to walk circum-  
spectly: for though zeal be very commend-  
able, yet still wisdom is profitable to direct.

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## S E R M O N XV.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION recommended.

Malachi iii. 16, 17.

*Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name: and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I shall make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*

SERM.  
XV.

**T**HE essential foundation of true piety is a firm persuasion concerning divine providence as governing the world with perfect wisdom, equity and goodness; as inspecting all the actions of men, and even their secret dispositions and purposes, keeping an exact record of them, and finally appointing suitable recompences.

This

This is a first principle of natural religion, and the constant doctrine of the law and the prophets, of Christ and his apostles. But there is a certain state of things in the world wherein an affectionate attention to this principle, and forming men's tempers and practice upon it, is peculiarly difficult, therefore eminently praise-worthy, and when it is observed by the supreme Being with a peculiar measure of approbation; and that is, *when iniquity aboundeth, and the love of many waxeth cold*, when the generality of men in any particular place abandon themselves to heinous impiety, and even go into atheistical notions.

This is the case referred to in the text. The prophet *Malachi*, whose book concludes the canon of the Old Testament, or the catalogue of books which were universally received by the Jews as of divine authority for the rule of their faith and religious practice, was sent to that nation after their return from the Babylonish captivity, and when the second temple was built, and the antient form, both of religion and civil policy, was restored, as far as it then could be, under the direction of *Ezrah* and *Nehemiah*.

SERM. *Iachi* was to the worthier and better sort of  
 XV. that people a messenger of glad tidings, for  
 he foretells the speedy coming of the *Messiah*,  
 the consolation of *Israel* in every age. He  
 describes his character very particularly, and  
 the great work of reformation he was to ef-  
 fect, instituting a purer form of worship, pre-  
 scribing a more rational and spiritual obe-  
 dience to the divine moral precepts than had  
 formerly been practised or understood, and  
 effectually persuading men to come into it.  
 And he foretells our Saviour's sending his  
 fore-runner to prepare his way, which is ex-  
 pounded in several passages of the New Testa-  
 ment concerning *John Baptist*. And to  
 him the description exactly agreeth. But,  
 from the seventh verse of this chapter, the  
 prophet severely reproves that crooked and  
 perverse generation for their great wickedness.  
 He chargeth them with imitating the bad  
 example of their fathers, notwithstanding  
 the many signal dispensations of providence  
 both in the way of judgment and mercy  
 whereby God had interposed to reclaim them;  
 especially the exact completion of more an-  
 cient threatnings by former prophets of the  
 lamentable desolation of *Jerusalem*, and the

captivity they had endured for seventy years ; and the no less remarkable fulfilling of the gracious promises God had made, particularly by *Jeremiah*, concerning their restoration at the end of that time. He charged them with what he calls *robbing God* by a sacrilegious detaining of the appointed tithes and offerings which were necessary for maintaining the instituted worship ; and with an impiety which grew up to atheism itself : they conceived blasphemy in their hearts, and are represented so boldly profane as to utter it with their mouths. They said, *it was in vain to serve God, and there was no profit in keeping his ordinances, and walking mournfully before him : nay, they called the proud happy, and said, they that work wickedness, are set up, yea they that tempt God are even delivered ;* in effect, that religion is an unprofitable thing, not at all the way to happiness ; for that providence, if there be such a thing, does not govern the world with a regard to it, nor distinguish men by their moral characters. The wicked, the profane, who treat God and divine things with scorn, are as much the objects of his care, and in all

SERM.  
XV.



SERM. respects as happy, as the most pious and vir-  
 XV. tuous men.

It was at such a time as this when a flood of impiety overspread the land, when irreligion became so universal and so rampant, bidding open defiance to Almighty God, when *the godly ceased, and the faithful failed from among the children of men*; it was then, I say, that the righteous few, instead of falling down the popular stream, and going with the multitude to do evil, distinguished themselves more eminently, and became more affectionately zealous for God; they that feared him, thought on his name, and spake often one to another; which, far from treating it with neglect, he was attentive to, honoured it with his acceptance and a proportionable reward. These are the remarkable heads of discourse contained in the text, and I will consider them distinctly.

*First*, the disposition and behaviour of these, and which becometh all pious persons in a time of prevailing irreligion.

*Secondly*, the distinguishing regard God shews to them; he observes them attentively,



tively, they are the objects of his peculiar care, and shall at last be highly honoured and happy in his favour.

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XV.

*First*, the disposition and behaviour of these pious persons in a time of prevailing irreligion. *They that feared the Lord, thought on his name, and spake often one to another.* Their general character is, that they *feared the Lord*, which every one knoweth is in scripture a short and comprehensive description of good and religious persons, because the fear of God is a powerful principle of sincere and universal obedience to his laws; not a servile dread of his vengeance, which may indeed restrain men from some heinous crimes, but can never produce an ingenuous imitation of his moral perfections, and an inward respect to holiness and virtue; this, I say, is not what the scriptures mean by the fear of the Lord, but a pious and affectionate reverence for the transcendent purity and goodness of the divine nature.

This principle exerted itself, and it always will naturally exert itself, in thinking frequently, seriously, and with pleasure, on the name of

SERM. God, on his attributes, and the manifestation  
 XV. of them by his works and by his word;  
 especially, when they are called in question  
 or derided, and the very being of religion  
 struck at by the profane multitude. We  
 know that the affections and practical prin-  
 ciples of our minds naturally manifest them-  
 selves in our thoughts, not the perceptions  
 occasioned by the presence of external objects  
 which necessarily arise, but in our chosen,  
 voluntary, and pleasing meditations. Scarcely  
 can a man refrain from entertaining himself  
 in solitude with what is uppermost in his  
 heart, or what appears to him grand and  
 important, interesting or delightful; and such  
 are the sentiments which the true believer  
 hath concerning the supreme Being. He is  
 considered as existing in a manner different from  
 all other things visible and invisible, as their  
 great and sole efficient cause, as their almighty  
 Preserver by the same word of his power  
 which created them, and as their sovereign  
 Lord, who doth what pleaseth him in heaven  
 and on earth, as intimately present in all  
 parts of the universe, irresistibly directing  
 the whole series of events, and over-ruling  
 all the counsels of men and other designing  
 agents,

agents, with infinite wisdom and uncontrollable power, though many of them are so stupid as not to see him. And the essential rectitude and goodness of the Deity are to a well-disposed intelligent being the most amiable of all objects, contemplated with the greatest satisfaction; and the exercise of these perfections, as they are immutable and always active, is not doubted, even under the most gloomy outward appearances, though it is not discerned, or not attended to, by such as wilfully corrupt themselves and darken their understandings, so that they cannot see afar off.

The scriptures represent in very strong terms the ignorance of bad men concerning God, and their inattention to his ways, as quite contrary to the spirit which ruleth in them who fear the Lord, and to their way of thinking; they are said to forget him; and the Psalmist tells us, *\* that the wicked through the pride of his countenance doth not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.* The root of this ignorance and unthoughtfulness is disaffection. We know that what men are disinclined to, they very little think

\* Psalm x. 4.

SERM. on, and are easily induced to disbelieve. Thus  
 XV. the apostle \* *Peter* speaketh concerning the  
 scoffers, whose true character is, *they walk after their own lusts*, that they doubted of, or denied, the truth of God's promises, and the stability of his counsels in the government of the world, because they were willingly or wilfully ignorant of the proper evidence which might have convinced them; and thus the author of the epistle to the *Hebrews* emphatically describes unbelief, not from weakness of understanding, but the malignity of depraved and rebellious dispositions: it is *an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*. Here then is the first and a principal distinction between the impious and atheistical, and such as fear the Lord; the former abandon themselves to an utter neglect of God and his works, from an aversion against his perfect purity and justice; they say to him in their hearts, *depart from us, for we desire not the knowlege of thy ways*; the other, the fearers of the Lord, make his name, his glorious perfections, his works, his judgments, and his precepts, the sub-

\* 2 Pet. iii. 21.

ject of their daily, serious, and pleasing meditation. SERM.  
XV.

*Secondly,* We may observe in the behaviour of them that fear the Lord, and as the genuine fruit of that divine principle ruling in their hearts, that they spake often one to another. The subject of their conversation was surely the same with that of their thoughts, the name of God and his ways. If they found themselves obliged to *keep their mouths as with a bridle, while the wicked were before them, to hold their peace even from good;* if prudence required them to keep silence before the profane multitude, *because it was an evil time,* their zeal sought an opportunity of expressing itself, and could only find it in the company of the few who were like-minded with themselves, sincerely pious, filled with indignation against popular profaneness, and earnestly solicitous to revive decayed religion, at least, to save themselves from that untoward generation. As agreement in principles and affections, an union of interests and designs, naturally begets friendship amongst men, and is the foundation of mutual freedom in communicating their thoughts to each other, so true religion particularly is the firmest bond

SERM. bond of union, the strongest as well as the  
 XV. noblest cement of a lasting amity; the kin-  
 dred souls who fear the Lord embrace one  
 another with tender generous affection; they  
 love with pure hearts fervently; they are  
 under a strict law of brotherly kindness, be-  
 ing the children of one father, and heirs of  
 the same glorious hopes; in the mean time  
 struggling with the same difficulties and suf-  
 ferings for one glorious cause. This will de-  
 termine them to take the opportunities of  
 free conversation, and wherein they give vent  
 to their common sorrows and to their holy  
 zeal, which burns as a fire while it is violently  
 suppressed.

And not only do pious principles thus exert  
 themselves; naturally, there is a great deal of  
 reason why good men should speak often one  
 to another, in a time of abounding iniquity  
 among others, because it is a means of  
 strengthening the good dispositions which  
 remain in themselves, and which otherwise  
 may be in danger of being weakened and of  
 perishing at last. There is nothing surely  
 of greater importance to be preserved, no-  
 thing which requires greater attention and  
 more constant care that it may be improved,  
 and

and there cannot be a more natural and effectual means for that purpose than religious conversation. \* *As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend*; comforts him under sadness, revives his drooping spirits, giveth a lively turn even to his understanding, and quickeneth his active powers. And, especially, as religion more than any thing else in the mind laboureth against opposition both from temptations without, and our own infirmities, it needs and receives peculiar benefit by the affectionate counsel of pious friends; and evil communication doth not more tend to corrupt good manners, than good communication doth farther to purify and raise them to perfection. Therefore Christians are earnestly exhorted by the sacred writers to be aiding and assisting to each other in this respect. The apostle advises † *to take heed that there be not in any of us an evil heart of unbelief*; and to prevent it, he adds, *exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*: and exhorts that they should

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\* Prov. xxvii. 17.

† Heb. iii. 12, 13.

\* *bold*

*Religious Conversation recommended.*

SERM. \* *hold fast the profession of their faith*

XV. *without wavering; and for this end, that*  
 *they should not forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is, but consider one another, to provoke to love and to good works, and by mutual exhortations to confirm each other in virtue, so much the more, because they see the day of divine vengeance approaching, for that sinners are ripening themselves for destruction by filling up the measure of their iniquity. We see, then, the true reason of Christians shyness in speaking one to another upon the affairs of religion, which is the faulty omission of a very important duty, an excellent means of increasing piety and virtue, manifestly tending to their own great disadvantage; and it is no otherwise to be accounted for than by the weakness of good affections. For, since social communication is natural to mankind, indeed we could have very little relish of life without it, and the greatest part of our enjoyments would be quite insipid, and it always is according to the prevailing dispositions and inclinations of the heart, we may thus judge of the strength of our affections,*

\* Heb. x. 23.



for out of the abundance of the heart the SERM.  
mouth speaketh. The interests and affairs of XV.  
civil communities, and of parties in them, of  
voluntary associations formed for commerce,  
for the advancement of learning, and other  
concerns in human life, of which there is a  
great variety; all these furnish abundant  
matter of conversation. But religion, which  
if there be any reality in it must be acknow-  
ledged to be of greater importance than they  
all, lies dormant in the mind; friends can  
find nothing to say upon it; too plain an in-  
dication that we have it little at heart, and  
are little solicitous either about its progress  
in the world, or in our own souls; and the  
case of Christians is such, that the words of  
our Saviour prophetically describing the worst  
times, may well be applied to it; and \* *be-  
cause iniquity shall abound, the love of many  
shall wax cold.* Indeed, great prudence is to  
be used in discoursing on religious subjects,  
and the tempers of men carefully considered,  
lest an indiscreet freedom be attended with  
bad consequences, lest that which *is holy be  
given to dogs, and pearls cast before swine*;  
that is, sacred things be exposed to the con-

\* Mat. xxiv. 12.

SERM. tempt of the profane, and ourselves to ill  
 XV. usage from them ; but that caution must not  
 be carried so far as to make Christians wholly  
 and perpetually silent upon the subject of  
 piety and goodness. Surely no time is so bad  
 wherein we may not hope to find some  
 in the judgment of charity, which is a suffi-  
 cient foundation of confidence, so well dis-  
 posed as either to receive or to impart spiri-  
 tual counsel and comfort ; especially we ought  
 to consider the great encouragement God  
 hath given them who fear him and think  
 upon his name, to act this good part, and  
 shew by doing so their zeal for his honour and  
 service ; which leads me to the

*Second* head of discourse proposed, namely,  
 the distinguishing regard which the Lord  
 sheweth to the fearers of his name who thus  
 speak often one to another ; he observes them  
 attentively, they are at all times the objects  
 of his peculiar care, and shall at last be highly  
 honoured and happy in his favour. *The*  
*Lord hearkened and heard it ; and a book*  
*of remembrance was written before him*  
*for them ; and they shall be mine, saith*  
*the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make*  
*up*

*up my jewels, and I will spare them as* SERM.  
*a man spareth his own son who serveth* XV.

It is thus that the supreme, omniscient, infinitely wise and just Ruler of the world is represented as inspecting narrowly into the hearts and actions of men, as applying his ear attentively to receive information, in order to his judicial proceeding with the strictest equity. Which figurative manner of speaking is not intended to signify that he hath any need of external evidence or means of finding out the truth; for *all things are naked and open before him, neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight*; at one direct view he beholds the most remote and the most secret things, the hearts of men, and their hidden recesses, as clearly as their public actions: but the design of the sacred writers in such forms of speech is to assert God's perfect knowlege of all the ways and thoughts of men; by him actions are weighed, and he pondereth the heart; a more perfect knowlege than men can possibly have by the strictest inquiry they can make; and that true inward goodness, the hidden man of the heart, a meek and quiet and pious spirit, though proceeding no farther

SERM. ther than the thoughts, or what is next to  
 XV. them for privacy, the closeſt communica-  
 ~~~~~ tion of intimate friends; that all this, I  
 ſay, is *in the ſight of God*, and of great
price.

And this indeed is to religious minds of the greateſt moment to their comfort and ſupport under all their difficulties, and a powerful motive to preſerving ſtedfaſtneſs in true piety. As nothing can be more juſtly dreadful to wicked men, if they well conſider it, than that God's eye is always upon them, obſerving their moſt ſecret evil deſigns, and their cloſeſt conſultations for perpetrating the miſchiefs they have meditated, in order to call them afterwards to account, and teſtify his juſt indignation againſt them; ſo on the contrary, it is a never-failing ſpring of conſolation to good men, that God is ever at their right hand, that *his eyes run to and fro through the earth to mark the perfect*; that not one truly devout thought upon his name in the miſt of a perverſe generation furiouſly bent on wickedneſs, nor one hearty expreſſion of honeſt zeal for his ſervice in the moſt ſecret retirement, ſhall be loſt, or eſcape his notice without approbation.


If

If we should even abstract from the future recompence of reward, which yet is most firmly to be believed as unchangeably established in the divine righteous counsels, here is a perpetual source of joy and pleasure to the mind; for how small a thing in comparison is it to be judged of men, since the most perfect and righteous of all beings sees and approves integrity of heart, however undiscerned by them, and exerting itself with the greatest privacy.

SERM.
XV.

The next instance of God's distinguishing regard to them that fear him, to their thoughts upon his name, and their religious conferences with one another, is, his remembering or keeping an exact record of them, thus expressed, *a book of remembrance was written before him.* This, as the former part of the text already explained, is spoken after the manner of men to shew the infallible security of the divine promises made in favour of the righteous, and the reward that shall be adjudged to them, fully proportioned, nay greatly exceeding all the good they have done. God hath no need of registries which human governments find themselves obliged to have recourse to, because of the imperfection of

SERM. those to whom their authority is committed.

XV.  What confusion would ensue, how precarious would the administration of public justice be, if the business of civil societies were wholly entrusted to men's memories? But God knows all things past and future as well as present with equal clearness. Nothing can escape his memory, nor can there be any more uncertainty in his knowledge and remembrance than if the objects of them were written before him in indelible characters. This then is the meaning of his book of remembrance; his special notice of the conduct of his faithful servants, his keeping their actions in mind, and the undiminished perspicuity of his righteousness and goodness in all his proceedings towards them. *He is not unrighteous to forget their labour of love which they have shewed to his name.* With men, often both good and ill offices are forgotten; recent impressions are strong, the affections and passions are engaged, prompting to retaliate; but these impressions abate, and at last wear off, so that they produce no effect. With God it is quite otherwise; he is liable to no emotion, no passion; all his measures are directed by perfect reason which
suffers

suffers no diminution of its force by length of time; and particularly he is not slack concerning his kind promises to them that fear him, however they may be tempted to suspect the contrary by appearances which may intervene before the accomplishment, and how long soever it may seem to be delayed; for this we should not be ignorant of, *that a thousand years are with the Lord as one day, and one day as a thousand years*; time makes no change in his mind or in the measures of his conduct, and with him there is no variableness or shadow of turning. SERM.
XV.

The next, and the concluding instance of God's distinguishing regard to them that fear him and think on his name, is the promise that they *shall be his when he maketh up his jewels, and he will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him*. The great and essential article of religion which good men build all their hopes upon, which infidels deny or doubt, and all bad men so neglect that it is not the principle by which they form their tempers and conversation, is, that God as the moral governor of mankind will finally separate between the righteous and the wicked, adjudging the for-

SERM. mer to complete happiness, and the other
 XV. to everlasting destruction from his presence
 and the glory of his power. For this
 Christianity teaches that there is a particular
 time appointed or a day fixed in the di-
 vine counsels, and that the judgment shall
 be executed with great solemnity, before the
 whole world of intelligent beings, a vast
 assembly, by the Lord *Jesus Christ*, whom
 the Father hath commissioned for that pur-
 pose. At present, the good and the bad
 live together in one promiscuous state of pro-
 bation, without any visible universal diffe-
 rence in their outward condition, which is
 represented in scripture by a variety of allu-
 sions; they are like trees, profitable and un-
 profitable, in one vineyard; like corn and
 chaff lying in one heap till the householder
 giveth orders to winnow, and then the corn
 is laid up in his barn, while the chaff is burnt
 with unquenchable fire; like wheat and tares
 growing up in the same field till the harvest,
 when the reapers gather the wheat to be
 preserved, and bind the tares in bundles to
 be consumed. The expression in the text
 hath the same meaning, and refers to the
 same time in its principal sense; for God
 will

will then most eminently make up his jewels when he gathers the general assembly and church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven; when all nations shall be assembled before him, and he shall separate them, the one from the other, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. When he shall say to them on his right hand, *Come, you blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,* and shall say to them on his left, *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

SERM.
XV.


There are some differences between the conditions of men even in this world, made by the interposition of God himself as righteous governor, and they may, perhaps, be comprehended in his making up his jewels. A very eminent distinction was made in favour of *Noah*, when he and his family were saved from the flood which destroyed the world of the ungodly; and the deliverance of just *Lot*, whose soul was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked every day, I say, his deliverance from the fire which consumed *Sodom*, as the scripture relates it,

was

SERM. was certainly a very remarkable dispensation.

XV. Although God's moral government, so far
 as it is administered in this state, and without reference to the future judgment which completes it, is but an imperfect scheme, yet hath not God left himself altogether without witness of his justice in such memorable instances as these just now mentioned, in which the scripture expressly saith, some are *set forth as examples, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.* So St. Jude speaketh concerning the destruction of *Sodom*, from which overthrow others were saved.

At least, it seems evident enough that the last words of the text relate to the present state, *I will spare them, saith the Lord, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him:* which cannot so properly be understood concerning the final and unchangeable happiness he will confer on them at the last day as their complete reward, as concerning that lenity and indulgence with which he treats them in their state of imperfection, when he shews tender compassion for their unallowed infirmities, and doth not strictly mark their failures. It is *now* that
 that

that God hath such pity for them that SERM.
fear him, and remember his command- XV.
ments to do them with a filial affection, 
as a father hath for his children; and their
sincerity, though not without sinful defects,
renders them the objects of his care, so that
they are preserved from many snares and
calamities to which they are liable, and
kept by *his power through faith unto sal-*
vation.

But, upon the whole, let every one of
us for ourselves seriously consider, whether
all that the prophet hath here thrown to-
gether, most agreeably to our natural no-
tions of the Deity and his providence, and
to the current of the scriptural declarations,
concerning God's hearkening and hearing,
his observing with approbation the pious
thoughts and the words of them that fear
him, who separate themselves from prevail-
ing irreligion, his keeping an exact record
of their singular good works in order to
distinguish them by his parental care in this
world, and reward them openly in the next;
whether all this, I say, be not a sufficient
encouragement for us to take part with the
pious few, in opposition to profane multi-
tudes;

SERM. tudes ; in effect, whether, as the apostle says,
XV. godliness be *not great gain, profitable unto*
~ *all things, having promise of the life which*
now is, and of that which is to come.

F I N I S.



