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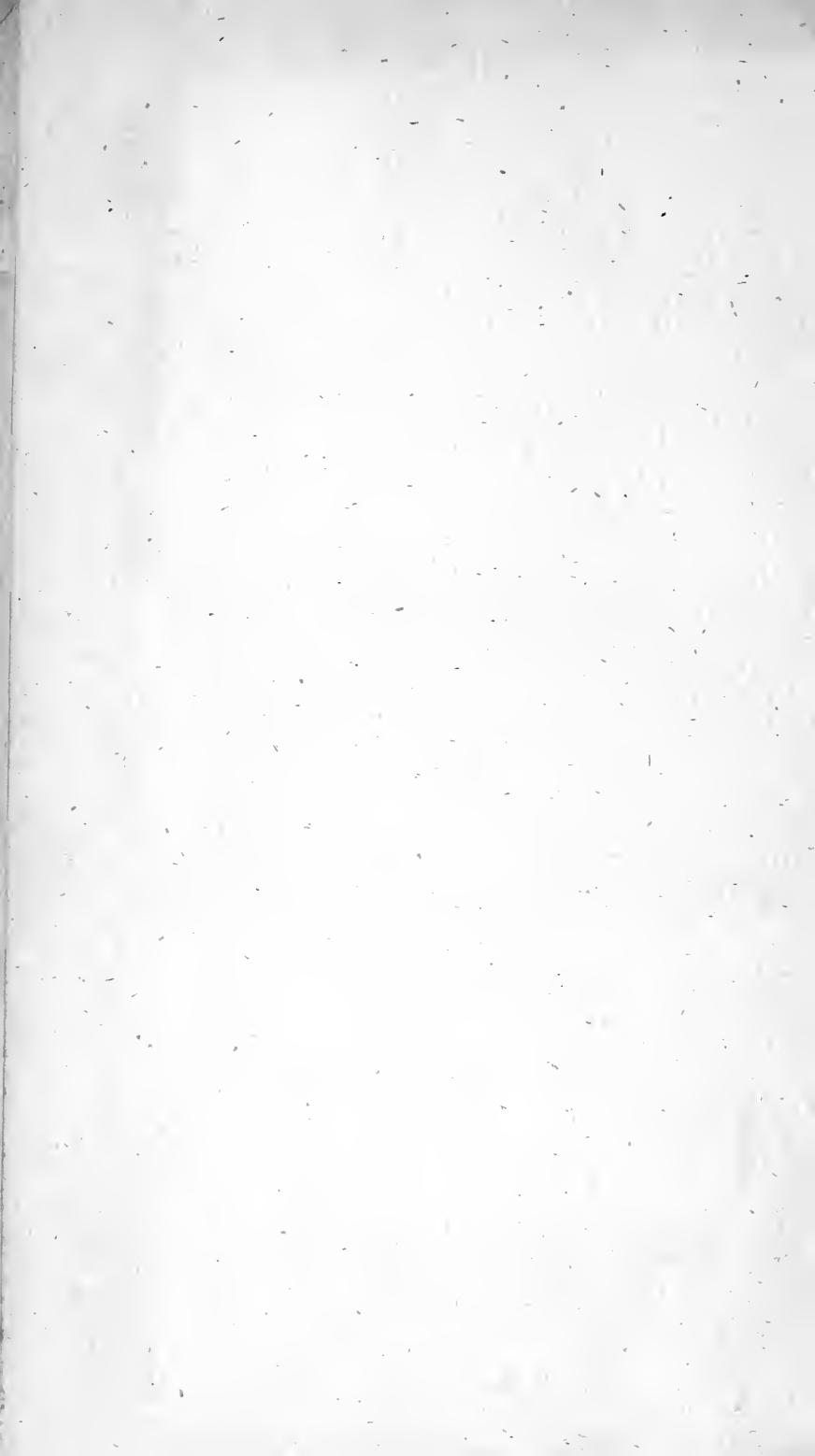
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THE  
WORKS

Of the Most Reverend

Dr. *JOHN SHARP,*

LATE

Lord Archbishop of *YORK.*

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VOL. IV. CONTAINING,

EIGHTEEN

SERMONS,

PREACHED ON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

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The FIFTH EDITION.

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LONDON:

Printed for J. and P. KNAPTON, T. and T. LONGMAN,  
C. HITCH and L. HAWES, A. MILLAR, and J. and  
J. RIVINGTON. M.DCC.LIV.

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# S E R M O N I.

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Against too great anxiety about worldly affairs.

PHIL iv. 6.

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*



HIS is the philosophy that was taught by Christ and his apostles, and ought to be learned and practised by all of us, if we would make good the name we give ourselves of being Christ's disciples. We should take no thought for our lives, as our Saviour expresseth it, but in all things depend upon the divine providence, without whom a sparrow doth not fall to the ground; and by whom the very hairs of our heads are numbered.

We should cast all our care upon him that careth for us, as the apostle expresseth it; and be so satisfied with every thing that comes from his hands, as to rejoice evermore, and in every thing to give thanks, which is the will of God concerning us.

We should not discompose our minds either with tormenting reflections upon our present circumstances, or with solicitude for what is to come: but leave the government of the world to God, refer to him the management both of the public and our private affairs; no further concerning ourselves about the events of either, than only to do our own duties in our place and station, and by hearty prayer, and supplications, and thanksgivings, to recommend ourselves and all our concerns to the mercies of God. This, I say, is the christian philosophy; and oh! what happy lives should we all of us lead, if we lived up to it! what outward condition could be made so bad as to render us miserable! how many anxieties, and fears, and disquietudes, should we be freed from, which do imbitter oftentimes the most prosperous fortune! and what ease and comfort should we find in the most calamitous! in our prosperity we should rejoice in the enjoyment of that portion of good things which God had vouchsafed to us, and even in our heaviest afflictions we should in hope and patience possess our own souls.

But, alas! though we call ourselves christians, yet few of us do practise this point of christianity, or so much as endeavour to do it: where is our indifference to the world, and our dependance on God? where is that moderation of ours which St. Paul, in the verse before my text, requires us to make known unto all men; that equanimity and contentedness which we ought to express in every estate and condition in which God hath placed us; that absolute resignation of our souls to the will of God? alas! we are so far from letting this be known unto all men, that, on the contrary, we live in the world, and pursue

purſue our deſigns, as if there was no God that took care of human affairs, or from whom we were to expect either rewards or puniſhments. Our life is a perpetual drudgery, our heads are always full of care and thoughtfulness, anxiously labouring for this or the other thing, carrying on this or the other project, without either looking up to God in the choice of our deſigns, or depending upon him in the management of them, or acquieſcing in the ſucceſs and event that he gives them.

But ſince we are thus affected, what wonder is it that the moſt of us live miſerable all our days, ſome ſtarving in the miſt of plenty, others murmuring at their low condition, both ſorts diſcontented at every thing, fearful of every thing, reſtleſs and impatient, and ever complaining? theſe are the natural effects of carefulneſs, without depending upon God.

Let us all therefore, if we mean either to live like chriſtians, or to enjoy a tolerable happy life in this world; let us, I ſay, charge ourſelves with the practice of St. Paul's advice in my text, *to be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer, and ſupplication, and thanksgiving, to make our requeſts known unto God.*

*Be careful for nothing*, that is the firſt part of the advice here given us; and of this point I ſhall treat at this time: and that which I ſhall now do, is to give an account of this precept or advice, and with what limitations and reſtrictions it is to be underſtood: indeed, if we do not rightly inform ourſelves about this, we ſhall make mad work of it.

Some, when they hear it ſaid, *be careful for nothing*, in general terms, take no thought for your lives, and the like, will be apt to draw very comfortable doctrine from hence to themſelves, in favour of their idle

dissolute lives. This advice suits with their humour as much as is possible; for they matter not how little care they take. All the happiness they court in this world, is a life free from thoughtfulness and business, and wholly employed in the present pleasures that are before them.

These are the sluggards that Solomon so often speaks against, that would spend their days in a profound ease and rest, without forecasting or designing, without employing either their heads to think, or their hands to labour, but living from hand to mouth, and taking what chance, or their provident forefathers, without any care of theirs, have given to them.

But this precept we are upon, gives little encouragement to men to live at this rate. For though the proposition be so worded as to seem to forbid all manner of carefulness, yet it means nothing less.

Indeed it is impossible to live without caring, at least to live happily: the souls that God Almighty hath given us are in their own nature infinitely active and vigorous, and their powers must constantly be exercised in pursuing some design or other, doing some work or other; otherwise we shall live the lives of plants, or brute creatures, but not of men: and what designs soever they pursue, their natures will incline them to attend to, and lay out themselves vigorously upon. The blessedness of mankind doth not consist in sitting still, but in being constantly busy, constantly in action; only that action and business ought to be such as is suitable to the nature of our spirits, that is to say, such as is exercised about the noblest and best objects, and is managed by the rule of reason and virtue.



Careful then we must be. But what then doth St. Paul mean when he saith, *be careful for nothing?* why certainly he doth not exclude all objects from our care, but only those of one kind, that is to say, the things of this world, the things that concern our bodies, and our outward condition; such as food or raiment, wealth or reputation, the success of our designs, and the like. We are to be careful for none of these things, but to refer ourselves wholly to God's pleasure concerning them. But there is another sort of things which it concerns us all to be infinitely careful about, that is to say, the affairs of our souls; to serve God, to do good in our generation, to get virtuous habits, to live innocently, and piously, and usefully, and by that means to lay up a good foundation against the time to come, that we may obtain eternal life. As to these things, we must not say we will refer it to God to work them in us; he made our souls, and we will trust them with him. No! (as one of the ancients expresseth it) he that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves. Our care about these things cannot be too great: nay, in truth, if we do not lay out the greatest part of ourselves about them, we are in danger of falling short of our aims. For the gate that leadeth to life is (as our Saviour tells us) a strait gate, and whoever will enter into it must not only seek, but strive; that is, must use the same diligence and earnestness, and vigorous application, that those do who strive for mastery. We must press forward, as St. Paul testifies of himself, towards the mark, in order to our obtaining the prize of our high calling in Jesus Christ, imitating those that run in a race, who put out their whole strength to be first at the goal. Lastly, if we will

obtain salvation, we must work it out with fear and trembling, as the same apostle hath told us; that is, our highest care, solicitude, and watchfulness, will be little enough to effect it.

This therefore is the first thing to be observed in the explication of this text, that it is the care of worldly things only that is here forbidden us. But what then, is all care for worldly things forbidden us by our religion? God forbid! for that would open a door to sloth and laziness, and all the evil consequences of it. No certainly (which is the second thing I desire to take notice of in the explication of the text); for all this command of being careful for nothing, a just care even for worldly things, is not only allowable to christians, but incumbent as a duty upon them. We are so to take care of food and raiment, as honestly to labour for them; and he that will not work, ought not to eat, as this very apostle hath elsewhere told us. We are so to take care of our family, as by our diligence and good husbandry to make competent provision for them, suitable to their degree and quality; otherwise we are worse than infidels, as he tells us in the same place. What wants, or necessities, or evil circumstances soever we are under, or do fear may come upon us, we are to take such care of ourselves, as to use all the means we lawfully can to get out of them, or to avoid them. We are not to think we are so to depend upon God for all outward things, as to abandon the use of means; though we must in all conditions, and for all things, make our requests known to God by prayer and supplication, yet we must never expect to obtain what we pray for, unless we ourselves contribute our endeavours towards it. It is enthusiasm, even to madness, to think that  
all

all we have to do in this world, is to give up ourselves wholly to contemplation and devotion; and as for the things that are necessary for our outward being and conveniency, only to look up to God for them; as if he was to find us with meat from heaven, or cure our diseases, without our making use of physic. No! God's blessing and our care always go together. If we do not stir to help ourselves, and vigorously put forth all those powers that he hath given us for that purpose, we do in vain look for help from above, how earnest soever our prayers and supplications be.

Care therefore we must, even for our worldly concerns, if we would have any of them to prosper: nay, so necessary is this worldly care I speak of, that it is questionable whether any man can light into such circumstances of life, that he can be lawfully excused from it.

All those that have callings (as the greatest part among us have) are certainly bound to follow them with a conscientious care and diligence: and as for those, whose circumstances do not oblige them to follow any particular direct calling or profession, yet ought they to have care too; idly and slothfully they must not live; some designs and business they must pitch upon, wherewith to employ themselves innocently and usefully; otherwise they will not be able to give any tolerable account of their time or their talents unto God. And no design can be pursued to any purpose, without care and application of mind. But if it be thus, what kind of care is here forbidden? or what are the limits or the measures within which we are to bind our cares for earthly things, and which if we transgress, we sin against the precept that is here given us, of being careful for nothing?

Why, in answer to this, I say, in the third place, that all the unlawful cares here forbidden may conveniently enough be reduced under these two heads; immoderate care, and solicitous care: of both these I shall speak; but of the first more largely, because it requires a little more explaining.

First then, in the precept of *being careful for nothing*, is forbidden all immoderate care for worldly things; that is to say, when the degree of our care exceeds the worth of the thing cared for; or, which comes all to one thing, when our care for temporal things, which are of smaller concernment, is greater than for spiritual, which are much more momentous: as when we take more care to be rich, than we do to be good: when we study more to get a reputation amongst men, than to approve ourselves to God: when we are more solicitous to get out of the present evil circumstances, in which we perhaps are, than to avoid eternal damnation. What is excessive or immoderate care, if this be not? and yet the greatest part of mankind, God knows, are guilty of it; but it is just the same extravagance, as it is for a man to be more concerned at a prick of his finger, than for a gaping wound in his side, through which his soul is ready to depart. The greatest interest we have to secure in this world, is the everlasting happiness of our souls, and in order to that the fear and service of God. This therefore we ought in reason to place our first and chiefest care upon. This is to be our main design, and all our other designs are to be subservient to this, and to be managed wholly in subordination to it, so as they may best promote it. If now we do indeed thus think with ourselves and thus act, then is all our care for the world, how great soever

ever it be, lawful and commendable. *If we first seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof,* then, be we never so busy and careful of our secular affairs afterwards, we do not amiss; our care is sanctified, it is not immoderate. But when we either serve mammon only, and God not at all, or would serve both God and mammon, divide ourselves between religion and the world, and not make religion our main business, to which the other is to yield (as it is most usual amongst men); in this case our care for the world is immoderate, it is greater than it ought to be, and we are justly to be reprov'd for it. And whatever we may at present think of ourselves, we shall, it is to be feared, if we do not amend this matter, prove at last the thorny ground in the parable, where, the good seed being sown, the thorns sprung up and choaked it; that is, as our Saviour interprets the parable, the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, will render the word of God, and all our good purposes, unfruitful and ineffectual.

This point is of so great importance to every one of us, that I cannot think it sufficient to have given this general account of it, unless I also caution you against some particular things, which, wheresoever they are found, are either instances, or expressions, or shrewd signs, of an immoderate care for worldly things; such a care as cannot consist with the minding the better part; the one thing necessary.

And, in the first place; one instance of this unlawful care is the giving so much of ourselves to our worldly business and concernments, of what kind soever they be, that we do not allow ourselves sufficient time for the exercise of devotion and acts of religion properly so called.

Far am I from thinking it necessary, that christians should spend either all or the greatest part of their time in prayer and meditation; no! there is a great deal of other work and business very needful to be done, which our callings, and the way of living God hath put us into, will exact from us, in which we shall find enough, and sometimes too much employment, for ourselves; and I cannot say, but this worldly business, though it be drudgery and toil, in comparison of the work of religion, yet if it be managed conscientiously, and in the fear of God, is as truly an instance of serving God, and is as acceptable to him in its season, as even the being at our religious offices, and sometimes perhaps more. But then whosoever doth so wholly attend upon this, as to allow himself no time for the immediate service of God, or but little and seldom, it is impossible that ever religion should prosper in such a man's hands.

As God who gave us all our time, ought, in reason, to have some portion of it devoted to him, and accordingly hath so commanded; so, if he had not, the very nature and temper of our minds would have made it necessary, if ever we meant to preserve them in a religious frame.

We may talk what we will, but it is no more possible to maintain the spiritual divine life within our souls, without frequent and constant retirements, and taking times for reading, and prayer, and meditation, than it is to maintain the life of our bodies, without a constant supply of meat and drink.

I could heartily wish this was seriously taken notice of; for the not observing this point hath, I am afraid, done mischief to many souls. Several there are that at some times, through some extraordinary providence

providence of God, and the motions of his Holy Spirit, are awakened to a very lively sense of their duty, and very strong and vigorous resolutions they make; and for some while they live up to them, that is, so long as that sense lasts, being very careful of their actions, and having a very comfortable relish of God and goodness upon their spirits.

Why now might not these men always live thus? Why certainly with due care they might, and not only so, but daily grow better and better; but alas! we see they often do not; for you shall find many of these that began to live so well, after some time to lose all their sense of piety, and to grow as careless and unconcerned for their souls, as ever they were. I do not deny but there may be many concurrent causes to produce this alteration in them; but this I am very confident of, that a main one is that I am now speaking of; namely, the neglect of frequent recollections, the not taking constant times of prayer and reading, and renewing their holy purposes, and fetching new supplies of strength and vigour from the throne of grace, but suffering worldly business or cares to steal away their hearts insensibly.

This therefore you must fix as a certain immovable principle in your minds, that how urgent and pressing soever the business of your calling or of your lives be, it must not put the thoughts of religion out of your head for any long while together: there must be a time and leisure found for the minding the work of that; nay so necessary is this, if you mean to save your souls, that the allowing yourselves time for eating and sleeping is not more.

To define or prescribe the precise portion of time that every one is to give to God, and the concernments

ments of his soul, is a thing not only unnecessary, but unreasonable; because the conditions of men are so infinitely various, both as to their outward and their inward circumstances; some men can allow more time from their necessary business and occasions than others can; and some likewise stand in need of more retirements, and set devotions and meditations, than others do: however, one day in a week God Almighty has bound us all up to, by consecrating it to his immediate service; and he that makes no conscience of observing that day religiously, it is certain he hath no sense of religion at all, but is either a perfect worldling or epicure.

But one day in a week spent in devout exercises, will hardly, I fear, be sufficient to secure, much less to advance, our spiritual concerns. We every day think fit to give food and refreshment to our bodies: why is it not as fit we should every day be as kind to our souls, by giving them the repasts of prayer, and other holy exercises? Whoever doth not take that course, will, I dare say, advance but little in holiness and virtue. Nay, if we mean to thrive in spirituals, so far must we be from letting our business hinder or stifle our daily devotions, that we must live so above it, and have our thoughts so loose from it, as to be at leisure several times in a day to raise up our minds unto God; and to think of the great work we have undertaken, and to implore the divine grace to carry us on in it, to thank him for his continued mercies to us, and to reinforce our purposes and resolutions of serving him all the days of our life.

O that we would all thus have our conversation in heaven, thus maintain communion with God, while we are a doing the work of this world!

But:



But however, if we cannot or will not raise ourselves to this pitch of devotion, yet as we love our souls, no business, no worldly care, must hinder us from setting apart every day some portion of our morning and evening for religious uses; and not only doing so ourselves, but allowing all our servants the same liberty, and calling upon them to make use of it: but I leave this.

In the second place, our care is then also immoderate and unlawful, whenever it puts us upon the use of unlawful or suspected means for the gaining our ends: let our designs be what they will, never so innocent, never so laudable, nay, never so necessary to our well-being, or even being in this world, yet if for the accomplishing of them we can find in our hearts to strain a point of conscience, or to engage in any practice that we have reason to believe is against the laws of God; this is an undeniable argument that we love the world better than God; are more the servants of mammon, than we are of our Lord Jesus. *For if we will be his disciples, we must not do the least evil, that good may come of it: if we do, our damnation is just,* as St. Paul hath told us.

They therefore, that, in their conversation or dealing with others, can cheat, or over-reach, or defraud, nay, can deliberately tell a serious lye, or make use of the least indirect art or trick for the serving their own ends; such men have their affections too much set upon the things of this world, to be ever able to approve themselves sincere disciples of Jesus Christ: and of the same strain are those that practice any superstitious art, for the bringing about their worldly purposes; as for instance, applying to wise men, as they call them, for the resolving hidden questions,  
making

making use of charms, or other magical tricks, for the recovery of stolen goods, or the cure of diseases, or the like. These things are perfectly unlawful to christians, as being a departing from the ordinary methods of providence (wherein alone we are to seek for help under our necessities) to ways of the devil's finding out.

The sum of this point is this : so long as we prosecute our designs in honest and regular ways, our care is laudable ; but to make use of the least indirect means for the bringing them about (nay, though it were for the saving our own lives), is an argument of immoderate worldly care, and we ought not to do it.

But, thirdly, our cares for this world are not only immoderate, when they put us upon the practice of such courses, as are apparently unlawful for the bringing about our designs, but also in this other instance, when our hearts are so set on the business we are upon, as that we lose all sense of what is fit and decent with respect to ourselves, or others ; when, for the bringing about our worldly ends, we matter not how we defraud either our bodies or our credit, or our families, or our neighbours, of what is their due ; though perhaps nobody can say, that, by any one of these single instances, we do any thing that is directly unlawful or forbidden ; or, if it is, at least it is not commonly thought so.

To explain myself a little : to our bodies we are unjust, when we drudge and toil, and take more pains, in our worldly concerns, than our strength or our health will bear, or when, out of covetousness, we deny ourselves the necessary refreshments and supports of life.

And

And so likewise we are unjust to our credit, when we do not live like ourselves; that is, suitably to that degree and quality we are in, or to that estate and fortune that God hath blessed us with; but, out of a scraping penurious humour, live meanly and sordidly.

The same thing makes us also defraud our family of their due; namely, when we do not make necessary provision for them, such as befits our condition, or when, to save charges, we do not give our children that education which their birth, and our estates, intitle them to.

Lastly, our neighbour hath also a due from us, which our worldly-mindedness doth too often hinder us from paying, but which yet God will severely require from us: as for instance, when it makes us churlish, or unkind, or inhospitable, to those about us; when it shuts up our hearts, and our hands, against the poor, and those others that have need of our charity.

All these are instances of inordinate care; and in whomsoever we meet with them, we may too truly say of that man, that he is too much addicted to this world, his heart is viciously set upon it.

And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of immoderate care for worldly things, together with the usual expressions and instances of it, which is the first thing here forbidden: But this is not all.

In the second place, as our care for worldly things ought not to be immoderate, so neither ought it to be solicitous: that is another and indeed the main thing that we are cautioned against, both in this text, and in some other passages of the scripture, that speak of care in an ill sense. They mean such a care as is  
accompanied

accompanied with fear and anxiety, attended with doubts and distrusts; such a care as grates upon our minds, and disturbs our repose; such a care as is restless and impatient for success, and discontented at all success that is not just according to its own desires; lastly, such a care as will needs carve for itself, and will not let God govern the world. This is that solicitous care that is here spoken of: *Be careful for nothing*, saith the apostle: *Take no thought for your lives*, saith our Saviour.

What! no care? no thought? that, I have already told you, is idle and extravagant: but thus; let not your concerns for the most necessary things of this life distract your minds, or draw you off from an entire dependence upon God, and submission to his will; but whatever circumstances you are in, whatever designs you are carrying on, endeavour to preserve yourselves in an even, peaceful, composed temper, absolutely resigned to the will of God: set not your hearts so much on any thing in this world, as to desire it with passion and anxiety: nor let any disappointment transport you to anger or impatience. Take care to do your part towards the effecting your designs by doing your honest endeavours, and using such means as a prudent man in such cases would do: and likewise take care to recommend yourselves, and your concerns, heartily to God by prayer; but, when you have done this, trouble not yourselves about the success; much less doubt of his goodness or providence, but leave the event of all wholly to him: let him do as he sees fit; and whatever it be that he sends, be the issue of things answerable to your expectation, or be it not, murmur not, repine not; but let your heart rest satisfied, and thank  
the

the divine goodness. You are perhaps in poor and low circumstances in the world ; you have just enough to live from hand to mouth, and that is all. Why, do not disquiet yourselves for this, nor torment your minds how you, and your poor children, shall be able to live in time to come, when age or sickness shall seize upon you : leave that to God : do you, for the present, labour honestly to get a livelihood, and commit the rest to him : thank God for the present, and be not solicitous for what is future : and thus in all other cases, wherein you happen to be concerned. This, my brethren, is that spirit and temper, which all of us, that call ourselves christians, should labour after ; for this was the temper of our Lord Jesus, and this he hath most earnestly recommended to all his followers.

I own, that to bring ourselves to such an indifference to the things of this world, as this temper supposeth, is a very high attainment, and seems extremely difficult to flesh and blood. But yet, methinks, to flesh and blood, assisted by the omnipotent spirit of Christ, it should not be difficult ; or, if it be, I am sure we shall surmount those difficulties, if we could once prevail upon ourselves seriously to set about this work.

Now, for the engaging all of you so to do, I shall briefly lay before you some of those arguments and reasonings, that are made use of in the New-testament for the enforcing this duty : which is the second head I proposed in speaking to this point.

Many excellent discourses upon this subject are to be met with in the gospels, and the writings of the apostles ; but none, I think, more strong, more moving, more persuasive, than our Saviour's discourse in the ten last verses of the sixth chapter of St. Matthew ;  
where

where indeed the chief arguments that can be offered against this worldly carefulness and solicitude, that we have all this while been speaking of, are summed up, and brought together, in one view.

These, therefore, I shall just give an account of, and so conclude. His first argument, why we should not be careful or solicitous for the things of this world, is, that the greatest blessings and enjoyments which we have, come to us without our care and solicitude: and therefore why should we trouble ourselves much about the least? Thus (in the 25th verse, where he begins this discourse), *I say unto you (saith he), take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink; nor yet for your bodies, what ye shall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

The force of which argument lieth here:

God hath given you your lives without any care or study of yours: and is he not much more able to give you food to maintain that life without your care? God hath given you your bodies without any labour of yours: and is not that a more desirable and extraordinary gift, than the cloaths that cover that body? if therefore God hath taken care to give you the greater things without your study and contrivance, can you imagine, that he will refuse to give you the lesser?

A second argument against care and thoughtfulness, our saviour gives us in the next verse: *Behold, saith he, the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them: are ye not much better than they?* what can be more strongly said to the present purpose than this? if God takes care of the meaner sort of creatures,

creatures, that have life in them, the fowls of the air, so that they shall be provided of all things that they need, and that without any care of theirs; is it not unreasonable to suspect his kindness to mankind, who are a thousand times more dear to God than the fowls of the air? Can it be supposed, that God will forget them, when he remembreth the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field, and the most inconsiderable things that creep upon the face of the earth? And, as for matter of cloathing, as our Saviour goes on, who can be more gorgeously and splendidly appavelled, than the flowers of the field? and yet they toil not, neither do they spin; yet admirable cloathing God hath given to them, even that beauty, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them: and can we imagine, as our Saviour urges, that these poor things, which to-day flourish, and to-morrow are withered or burnt, that these shall partake of the care of God Almighty, and that mankind shall be neglected and overlooked by him?

It is therefore a very unreasonable thing, to be anxious and solicitous about either food or cloathing, which yet are the most necessary things in the world; since we see these creatures, that take no care at all about them, are yet continually supplied out of the divine bounty. And certainly, if God's providence extends to the meanest of his creatures, much more will it be concerned to make provision for the best and the worthiest, supposing they live as they ought to do, and do not, by their wickedness, put themselves out of God Almighty's care and protection.

A third argument our Saviour useth upon this occasion, is drawn from the unprofitableness of our cares for worldly things. *Which of you, saith he, by taking thought,*

*thought, can add one cubit to his stature?* if you had never so much a mind to be taller than you are, yet you cannot, with all your solicitous endeavours, add an inch to your height. Nay, as he elsewhere speaks, with all your care, you cannot make one hair white or black; but those things come by the providence of God, and not by your care: and the case is the same as to all other worldly events; you may harass your minds, as much as you please, to obtain this or the other thing; but still, unless God pleaseth to send you the thing you desire, you are never the nearer obtaining it. You can no more procure to yourselves health, or greatness, or children, or long life, unless God pleaseth to give you them, than you can add half a yard to your stature: for the success of all your endeavours about these things depends upon such causes, as you have not the disposal of, but only God Almighty. To what purpose therefore should you place your care and thought upon such things as are not in your power? especially, in the fourth place, considering that God hath prescribed you a method of obtaining all those things you stand in need of, without an anxious care and thoughtfulness: and that is the fourth argument our Saviour here useth.

*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you:* that is to say, in vain it is to bestow your whole care and endeavours upon worldly things, when you may come by them a much easier way, and a way too that is certain, and will not fail you; and that is this: do but make it your main business to secure to yourselves the kingdom of heaven, and, in order thereunto, to possess yourselves of that righteousness, and purity, and holiness, that will qualify you for it; and then  
 God



God will take care, that you shall never want food nor raiment, nor any other thing that is needful for you in this world. If you will study to serve God, and approve yourselves to him by living piously and virtuously, you need not trouble yourselves any further; for God will reward your pains with heaven, and eternal happiness, at last; and, as for all earthly things, that are fit for you, they shall be added to you over and above; for he that hath provided for you such a glorious eternal city, will certainly order matters so, that you shall want no *viaticum*, no necessary provisions, in your journey to it.

And then he concludes all with these words: *Take therefore no thought for the morrow; but let the morrow take thought for the things of itself: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Which words contain a fifth argument against all solicitude for future things; and it is to this effect:

Why should you be concerned for to-morrow, or for that which is to come, when that concern is not only fruitless and unprofitable (as has been said), but is extremely uneasy and troublesome, and tends to make your lives really more uncomfortable and grievous, than otherwise they would be? God knows, the condition of mankind in this world is always hard enough; there is no man in such prosperous circumstances, but that every day of his life he meets with enough to disturb and discompose him: his cares to get rid of the present incumbrances lie sufficiently heavy upon him: where then is the wisdom of adding new cares, about future things, to those present ones, that every day brings upon him? if therefore you be wise, let every day have its proper care (and indeed it requires some virtue to be able to bear that care);

but

but do not incumber yourselves with the cares of other days, that are not yet in being; those will come soon enough without your anticipating them: it is sufficient that you manage the present to the best advantage; but, as for what is future, it is time enough to think of struggling with the inconveniences of that, when it comes. Why should you torment yourselves before you need? Sufficient, abundantly sufficient, for the exercising your patience, is the evil and trouble that happens to you every day; and you need not increase it, by putting upon your shoulders new loads of that which is to come.

These are our Saviour's reasonings upon this argument; and admirable ones they are. I know nothing like them, nothing comparable to them, to be met with in the most refined writings of the philosophers. I leave them with you, and I pray God they may ever have a due effect both upon you and me.





## S E R M O N II.

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About the nature, and obligation, and efficacy of prayer.

PHIL. iv. 6.

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*



Have done with the first part of this text, which is a caution against the sin of worldly carefulness, that I dispatched the last time.

I now come to the other branch of it, which is a recommendation of the duty of prayer: *In every thing* (saith the apostle), *by prayer and supplication, &c.*

Prayer then, you see, is the argument I have before me: and a very noble argument it is, and withal a very useful one: for prayer is, or ought to be, the continual exercise of our life; for it is to our souls what meat and drink are to our bodies, their repast, their support, their nourishment. Prayer is the great universal instrument, by which we fetch down blessings

sings from above, and get ourselves possessed of whatever we want. Prayer is our defence and preservative against sin, and against temptation ; it is the security of our virtue, and the especial means to advance it.

Prayer is the wing of our souls, whereby we raise up ourselves above this lower world to the God above, and with whom while we therein converse, we become more and more transformed into his nature.

Lastly, whatever anticipations of heaven there be here upon earth, whatever foretastes we christians have, in these bodies, of the happiness of eternity, they are all brought about by the means of prayer.

Fit therefore and just it is, that what is so great a duty, and so great a privilege, should be much in our mouths, that it may be more in our hearts, that we should be often called upon and stirred up to the practice of it, and instructed how so to practise it, as to obtain effectually all the great and glorious benefits, which it is designed by God to derive upon us.

I do not think there is need of spending time in giving an account of the terms of my text ; for they are all plain enough. As for the phrase here used, *Let your requests be made known unto God* ; the word is, in the original, *αἰτήματα*, that is, all those things that you have need to ask of God, or to address yourselves to him about ; it is the general word to comprehend all kind of things to be prayed for or against.

Well, but are not all these things known to God already ? how then should we make them known to him ? I answer, yes certainly ; our heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him, as our Saviour hath told us : all therefore that is meant by that expression is, that we are to utter  
these

these things ; we are to express them, or present them to God, by the way of prayer and supplication. Well, but what is the sense of these terms, prayer and supplication, here used? are they the same, or do they mean different things? I answer, in our language we commonly put them for the same thing. In the Greek they are often distinguished, especially when they are joined together : but then the difference is no more than this, that the word *προσευχή*, which we render prayer, doth usually signify such a kind of prayer as is put up for the good things we need ; but the word *δήσεις*, which we render supplication, signifies such a prayer as is put up against the evil things we fear. They both of them come under the name and notion of prayer ; but they have their different objects : the one we properly call petition, the other deprecation : but thus much for the critique on the text.

I now come to my business : *In every thing, saith the apostle, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*

These words may be taken two ways, either as commanding a duty, or as proposing an instrument or means for the obtaining what we desire or stand in need of.

Prayer certainly falls under these two considerations : and we cannot have a true notion of it, without taking in both of them ; that is to say, without considering it both as it relates to God, as due to him ; and as it relates to us, as useful for the procuring of what we want. Under both these notions therefore I shall now discourse of prayer : and accordingly these three things I propose to do.

- I. I shall discourse of the nature and obligation of prayer, considered as a religious duty we owe to God.
- II. I shall discourse of the efficacy and successfulness of prayer, considered as an instrument for the procuring blessings to ourselves: And,
- III. I shall discourse of the requisites or conditions of prayer, which we must take care to observe, if we would have our prayers either acceptable to God, or beneficial to ourselves.

The two first of these heads, I shall dispatch at this time.

I. I shall begin with prayer, considered as a religious duty.

It may perhaps, at the first hearing, appear strange to some, that prayer should at all be accounted a duty of religion, that is to say, any act of piety towards God, to which mankind should in duty be obliged: for (say they) all acts of religion, in the very nature of them, ought to respect the honour of God; whereas prayer seems only to respect our own benefit, and little, if at all, God's honour: when a beggar asketh an alms at your door, doth he thereby mean to do you any worship or respect, or rather purely to serve his own needs? Certainly the latter. It is true, to give thanks for benefits received (which is one part of prayer, in the large sense of the word), is an instance of respect and honour done to God; but prayer strictly so called, that is, the putting up requests to God for mercies which we want, seems not to be so, but only to respect ourselves. Thus perhaps it may be said; but those that reason at this rate seem not to have sufficiently considered this matter. Though prayer be put up for the obtaining benefits

benefits for ourselves, yet that doth not hinder but that it may be an act of religion properly so called, and an instance of that honour which we are bound to perform to God. And certainly we must think so, if we will ever believe God's own declarations in this matter, or reflect on the nature of prayer itself.

First, as for the holy scriptures, prayer is always therein accounted an act of God's worship, and strictly enjoined as such to all mankind. In the 15th Psalm, 13th verse, where God is declaring to his people how he will be served; *Thinkest thou (says he) that I will eat bulls flesh, or drink the blood of goats? offer unto God thanksgivings, and pay thy vows unto the most high, and call upon me in the day of trouble.* As therefore he that offereth unto God thanksgivings is in the same Psalm said to honour God (*he that offereth me thanks, he honoureth me*); so he that calleth upon God honoureth him also. Nay, so great a part doth prayer make of religion, that the whole of it is sometimes expressed thereby, and to call upon God, to pray to God, and to seek God, is in the scripture language the same thing as to walk religiously before God; nay, it is sometimes put to express and signify the whole condition that is required of us in order to salvation. Thus Romans xii. 17. *The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him, for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* And on the other side the character by which wicked men, such as have no sense of piety and religion, are described in scripture, is, that they do not practise this duty of prayer, they do not call upon God, as you may see, Psalm liii. 4.

I wish this was seriously taken notice of by those that live in a general neglect and disuse of this point

of piety. Whatever other laudable qualities they have to recommend them, yet if they live without praying, without calling upon God, they must be numbered among those that have no fear of God before their eyes, but are workers of wickedness, as that Psalm expresseth it.

But in the second place, let us consider the nature of prayer itself. I grant that prayer hath this peculiar to it, that it doth more directly and immediately, in its own nature, respect our benefit, than any of the other acts of piety and religion strictly so called: but yet if we will seriously consider it, we shall find that, for all this, it doth as necessarily respect God, and is as great an instance of his service as any of the others. For prayer, if we will form true notions of it, is a payment of that homage we owe to God as he is creator and governor of the world; it is the owning him to be the sovereign lord of all his creatures, and that he hath a right to order and dispose of them as he pleaseth: it is the acknowledging our dependence upon his providence for all we have, and for all we are; actually professing, to his honour, that in him we live, move, and have our being, and that from him descends every good and perfect gift. Now surely, these are actions that do directly respect God, and are prime instances of that honour and service that we poor creatures are able to pay him, even every whit as much as fear, or love, or thanksgiving is.

There is more in prayer than speaking to God, or representing our desires to him, though that be all that is generally taken notice of in it; that which makes it a virtue, and stamps religion upon it, is the acknowledgment it makes of our own vileness and impotence,



impotence, and of God's sovereign power and goodness: and in the dependence it professeth upon him, and him only, for the supply of our wants, and the obtaining whatever good we do desire; in this, I say, consists the very life and soul of prayer, and if we take away this, it has nothing valuable in it; nor indeed will it find any acceptance with God, or answer from him.

By this account it appears, that prayer and thank-givings do not so much differ as one would imagine; they are both the expressions of our dependence upon God, and making our acknowledgments to him; only the one (that is thanksgiving) looks backward, and considers the mercies or benefits acknowledged, as already given; the other (that is prayer) looks forward, and considers them as not yet given, but only as desired and expected; that is all the difference.

To make this notion of prayer yet a little plainer, if I can: to every religious prayer that we put up (if we put it up as we should do) there will go these four things.

First of all, there is supposed a sense of our wants, and a desire of the supply of them, but withal, a conviction of our own impotence and inability to help ourselves.

Secondly, There is supposed a sense of God's presence, and providence, and goodness, and a belief that God doth see our condition, and knows what we want, and hath also that love and kindness for his creatures, that, upon prayer, he will supply our necessities, and give us either what we pray for, or what is more convenient for us.

Upon these considerations there follows, in the third place, a looking up to God, a waiting upon

him for those blessings we stand in need of, disclaiming all help in ourselves, and entirely depending on his care and kindness for the supply of whatsoever we desire. Now, in the fourth and last place, when we come to form this sense, and those desires, and this dependence, into direct addresses to God, when we make expression of them by actual application to the throne of his grace, whether in thought alone, or in thought and word too, then is our prayer completed.

This I take to be a true account of this duty of prayer, which being admitted, we may from hence observe, in the first place, not only that prayer hath an immediate respect to the honour of God, as well as any of the other duties of piety, most properly so called, and consequently is no such mean selfish business as some profane wits are apt to account it; but also, that it is a duty which we do so indispensably owe to God, that we must be horribly injurious to him, as well as to ourselves, if we neglect it: nay, we must first be supposed to be none of his creatures, before we can be excused from it; for is not every creature, in the very nature of creatureship, bound to renounce all self-sufficiency, and to take all opportunities to acknowledge to his creator the sovereignty he hath over him, and to express his dependence upon him for every thing he hopes for? but what is this but the very essence of prayer, as we have described it? nay, though we had no advantage of our own to be promoted by prayer, as being sure that God would supply all our necessities without our asking him, yet even in this case would prayer be as necessary a duty as it is now, because it would for ever become us to pay our homage to God, and to own him as the author of all those blessings we expect from him;

him ; it will for ever be as reasonable, and as great an instance of piety, to depend upon God for his mercies to come, and to express that dependence, by address of prayer to him, as it will be to acknowledge his mercies past, and to express that acknowledgment by address of thanksgiving to him.

Secondly, From this account we have given of prayer, it appears not only that it is a duty that we owe to God, but that it is a duty we owe to him only, and that no being in the world besides himself, hath right thereto.

For if prayer be one of the principal instances of that honour, and an expression of that dependence that we owe to the creator and governor of the world, (as we have seen it is) then certainly to be prayed unto is, and for ever will be, one of his incommunicable peculiarities, one of the rights and prerogatives of his sovereign majesty, incompatible to any creature. And consequently to invoke or pray to any creature in a religious way, though it be the highest creature in heaven, whether angel or saint, not excepting the blessed virgin herself, must needs be an affront done to God, as giving that honour to one of his creatures that is only proper to himself. How the papists will be able to justify their practices in this matter, either to God or the world, I know not ; let them look to it. Their ordinary distinctions, I fear, will not bring them off ; but I have not time to insist upon this matter.

Having thus considered prayer as a duty, or an act of religion respecting God, I now come to consider it as an instrument, or a means that God hath appointed for the obtaining benefits to ourselves ; which is the second point I am to speak to.

Here then my business is to treat of the efficacy of prayer; to shew that it is not any vain unprofitable advice that the apostle here gives us, by prayer and supplication to make our requests known unto God in every thing that we need; but that prayer, whenever it is put up as it ought to be, will be really effectual for the obtaining what we want; that it will be a means to supply us with the good things we desire, or to prevent the evil things we fear, when all our other cares and endeavours will not. For prayer is not breath spent in vain, such as when it is out of our mouths mingles for ever with the common air, but it pierceth the clouds, and reacheth the ears of the King of the world, and opens his hand to dispense his blessings upon those his servants that sent it.

This is a point that all of us ought to fix deeply in our hearts, and as firmly to believe it as we believe any thing; that so in all conditions, and upon all occasions, we may be encouraged to have recourse to this expedient of prayer, and may put up our prayers likewise with the greater faith, and hope, and constancy. I shall therefore, at this time, offer something for the confirmation of your faith in this matter.

I meddle not here with the atheistical crew: a set of men, in this prophane age, that endeavours to jeer all devotion out of the world, making the whole business of the returns and answer of prayer, which pious men so much talk of, a mere piece of fancy, the effect of an over-heated brain, attributing all the events that come either upon the good or upon the bad, either to chance or necessity, or mechanical powers as blind as that; and saying, in the language of those learned persons which Job mentions, chap. xxi. 15. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should*

*Should we have if we should pray unto him?* With these, I say; I here meddle not, both because I hope there are no such persons here present, and because it is not now my work to enter upon a point of the first principles of natural and revealed religion; as for instance, the being of a God, his providence over the world, his dispensing rewards or punishments to men according to their good or evil actions, and the truth of the holy scriptures, which are the grounds upon which our belief of the efficacy of prayer is founded.

Those that I now apply myself to are such as own both natural religion and christianity, as I hope all of you here do. And my design is to endeavour to possess you with as lively a sense, as is possible, of God's readiness to hear all your prayers, and to grant all the requests you put up to him, if you go to work heartily and seriously, and with the observation of all those conditions and requisites the holy scripture hath prescribed to you in this matter. I might here largely insist on the general belief and practice of all mankind, in all ages, for the proving the point we are now upon. No sort of men that ever owned a God, or professed any religion, but they constantly thought that they received benefit by the sacrifices and prayers they put up to God; and accordingly the main of their religion was always made up of those exercises.

I might likewise largely insist on the many illustrious instances and experiences that good men in all ages have had, and still daily have, of the efficacy of their prayers, testified in such mercies and deliverances, and they so circumstantiated, that there is no room for any doubt that they were owing purely to

the goodness of God, that heareth the supplications of his people.

I say, these things might very well be insisted on in this argument; but I rather chuse to confine myself to the holy scriptures, as affording matter the most effectual, both for our conviction and encouragement.

And four things we may there take notice of, very pertinent to our purpose :

First, That God hath in the scriptures made the most exprefs promises, that he will hear his people when they pray unto him.

Secondly, He hath, in all times, most remarkably made good these promises, as appears by many instances and examples.

Thirdly, He hath given other testimonies what mighty force and power the prayers of his servants have with him.

And Fourthly, Lest we should think it was all one whether we prayed or no, he hath declared that our prayer is so necessary in order to the obtaining the good things we stand in need of, that without it we shall not have them.

Of these four things very briefly.

First of all, God hath in scripture given such exprefs declarations of his willingness and readiness to hear and answer the prayers that are put up unto him, nay, hath tied up himself by the most solemn promises so to do. *The Lord (saith the Psalmist) is nigh unto all them that call upon him in truth; he will fulfil the desires of those that fear him, he also will hear their prayer, and will save them, Psal. cxlv. 18. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers, Psal. xxxiv. 15.* And accordingly

ly one of the attributes that is given to God in scripture is, *That he is a God that heareth prayers, and therefore to him shall all flesh come*, Pſal. lxxv. 2. And accordingly he himſelf invites every creature ſo to do, promiſing deliverance upon their application to him: *Call upon me*, (ſaith he in the fiftieth pſalm quoted before, *call upon me*) *in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou ſhalt glorify me.*

Thus much for the Old-teſtament: and then for the New, hear what our Saviour ſaith to his apoſtles, John xiv. 13. *Whatſoever ye ſhall aſk in my name, that will I do*; and again he repeats it, *If ye ſhall aſk any thing in my name, I will do it.* But if it ſhould be thought that this promiſe was made to the apoſtles only, and doth not concern us, let us hear what St. John writes to all chriſtians, 1 John iii. 21, 22. *Brethren, if our hearts condemn us not, then we have confidence towards God; and whatſoever we aſk we receive of him.* And again, our bleſſed Saviour in thoſe words of his in the famous ſermon upon the Mount, which concerns all chriſtians to the end of the world; *Aſk*, ſaith he, *and it ſhall be given you, ſeek and ye ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be opened unto you; for every one that aſketh receiveth, and he that ſeeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it ſhall be opened*, Matt. vii. 7, 8. What promiſe can be more gracious, more comfortable than this? eſpecially if we take notice how our Saviour enforceth it in the following verſe: *What man, ſaith he, is there among you, whom if his ſon aſk bread will he give him a ſtone? or if he aſk a fiſh will he give him a ſerpent? if ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more will your heavenly father give good things unto them that aſk him?* As if he had ſaid, if

ye who are not always willing to give, but, on the contrary, are often covetous and close-handed, without bowels of pity or affections, yet when your children ask victuals, or other necessaries of you, you are ready to supply them with what they want; can you doubt that God, who is infinite goodness, and love, and bounty, will be backward to supply you with every good thing, if ye ask it of him? assure yourselves God hath greater kindness and affection for his creatures, than any parent can have for his children: if, therefore, you would not question the readiness of a parent to give bread to his hungry child, when he asketh it of him, much less ought you to call in question the readiness of your heavenly father to grant whatsoever requests you make unto him, provided the thing you request be good for you.

But, secondly, As the holy scriptures give us many promises and assurances that God will hear our prayers, so they afford us many instances of his making good those promises at all times, and to all persons, and that in a most wonderful manner. To mention all the miraculous returns of prayer that are recorded in the book of God, would put me upon transcribing too great a part of the scripture: indeed we have no instance there of any good man that ever put up his prayers in vain; but of wonderful amazing things, effected by the prayers of good men, we have instances a multitude.

The prayer of Moses quenched the devouring fire,  
Numb. xi. 2.

The prayer of Elias brought down fire from heaven,  
1 Kings xviii.

The prayer of Elisha restored the dead to life,  
2 Kings iv. 33.



The prayer of Hezekiah slew one hundred eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians in one night, 2 Kings xix.

The prayer of David stopped the destroying angel, when his hand was lifted up to destroy Jerusalem, 2 Sam. xxiv.

The prayer of Jonah delivered him out of the fish's belly, Jonah ii. 1. To number no more instances.

If it be said, that these examples signify nothing to us who live in an age where no miracles are to be expected, pray we never so heartily; I answer, they do signify a great deal to us for all that, for we may from such examples draw a good argument to the world's end, of the efficacy of the prayers of good men: for if, in those days, they were so prevailing with God as to move him to leave the usual methods of providence, and to step out into extraordinary actions, nay, even to do violence to the course of nature, that he might answer them; then surely we have reason to believe that God will not be deaf to the prayers that we now put up, which require no such things, but only those blessings which he dispenseth to mankind in the ordinary way of his providence.

But, Thirdly; It is worth our while to take notice what a mighty force and virtue the holy scripture attributes to the prayers of good men; this, methinks, is lively set forth to us in the story of the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites in the xviiiith of Exodus. There we find, that so long as Moses held up his hands in prayer the Israelites prevailed, but when he let them fall, then the Amalekites had the better; so that in order to the obtaining a complete victory, Moses's hands were held up

to the going down of the sun, that is (as the Chaldee paraphrase renders it) his hands were stretched out in prayer unto the going down of the sun. Again, when the angel, in the xxxiid of Genesis, with whom Jacob wrestled (who, indeed, as the ancient fathers do unanimously conclude, was no other than the angel of the covenant, the Son of God, that did in the fulness of time appear in human flesh), I say, this angel would have been gone from him upon the breaking of the day: no, saith Jacob, *I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me*, and accordingly a blessing he obtained. Earnest prayer doth a kind of violence to God, if we may be allowed so to speak; *As a prince* (saith the angel there to Jacob) *hast thou power with God, and with man, and hast prevailed.*

Again, when God was so grievously displeased at the people of Israel for making the golden calf, saith he to Moses, *Let me alone that I may destroy this people, and blot out their name from under heaven*; intimating, that if Moses by prayer interceded for them, he would prevent their destruction: and this indeed the event shewed; for notwithstanding what God had before said of his purpose to destroy them, yet upon Moses's prayer he repented of the evil, and was prevailed upon to spare them. Lastly, how prevalent the prayers of good men are with God appears from this, that when God is absolutely resolved not to have mercy upon a people, he expresseth his unalterable purpose to this effect, that though his chiefest favourites, such as Noah, and Daniel, and Job, should intercede with him on behalf of that people, yet their prayers should do them no good, as you have it four times repeated in the xivth chapter of Ezekiel: which is as much as to say, that if any thing

thing in the world could prevail with God to spare that people, it should be the prayers of such men.

But Fourthly and Lastly, to conclude,

Let it be farther considered for the shewing the efficacy of prayer, that the scriptures have declared it so necessary in order to the obtaining the good things we stand in need of, that if we do not pray for them, we shall not have them.

This is sufficiently evident from that passage in St. James, chapter iv. verse 2. *Ye lust (saith he) and have not, ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, and yet you have not, and why so? Because (saith he) ye ask not.* That is to say, all your coveting and envying, and fighting and contending, bring you in no kind of profit; you are never a whit, by these means, the nearer the obtaining what you desire; and the reason is, because praying to God, which is the chiefest means of obtaining, is not practised by you.

All these things considered, I think every man in the world, that hath any sense of religion, must needs be convinced, that serious and solemn prayer is not only of great use, but of absolute necessity for the obtaining what we want; that there is no prospering in our affairs without it; and when it is put up devoutly and heartily, and in that manner it ought to be, it never fails to bring down the blessing of heaven upon us.

I should now proceed to the third head proposed to discourse of, and that is, of the requisites or conditions of prayer, that we must take care to observe, if we would have our prayers either acceptable to God, or beneficial to ourselves; but this I shall reserve for another time. Now to God, &c.



## S E R M O N III.

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About the conditions and requisites  
of Prayer.

MATTH. vii. 7.

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*



HIS Text is a part of our Saviour's famous sermon on the Mount, which may be justly called a summary of all christian duties. In these words he is treating of the great christian instrument of obtaining from God whatever we stand in need of, and that is hearty prayer to him. He had delivered to his disciples, in the former chapter, a form of prayer for them to use; and now he comes to recommend and enforce the constant practice of that duty, by giving them assurance, that if they did practise it, they should not fail of having their requests granted, and being supplied with every thing they stood in need of.

A great and unspeakable comfort this is, to be able, at all times, certainly to say, whatever is fit for me, it shall be given me, if I do but ask it, if I do but seek it, if I do but knock at the gate of mercy for it. And yet this every christian may say, if our Saviour's affirmation may be relied on; for words cannot be contrived to express more plainly, or more strongly, the constant never-failing efficacy of hearty prayer, than these are, which our Saviour here delivers; *Ask, faith he, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* Which promise of his, for the further possessing our minds with a stedfast belief of it, he repeats again, in the next verse, by way of an universal proposition; for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened: and the more to enforce this, he doth in the next words put the case of an ordinary father, who though he may be supposed to be otherwise a churlish or unkind sort of man, yet if his son, when he is an hungry, should ask bread of him, he could not be thought so hard-hearted as to give him a stone for bread, or a serpent for a fish: *If, therefore, as our Saviour infers, we that are evil know how to give good gifts unto our children, when they ask us; how much more will our heavenly father (who has nothing of evil or churlishness in his nature, but is perfect love and goodness itself), how much more shall he give good gifts unto them that ask him?*

But then though all this be so, though God hath by his son Jesus made this plain promise, that every one that asketh shall receive; and though we may be as certain as we are of any thing, that God will to all christians always make good this promise, yet we

we cannot imagine, that every thing that any of us ask shall be granted to us ; for we may ask foolish unreasonable things : neither can we imagine that every kind of asking will prevail with God to hear us ; for we may ask in such a manner that our petitions shall rather be affronts than prayers, and so may justly merit indignation and contempt, rather than acceptance ; so that before we can apply this promise to ourselves, or expect that God should make it good to us, it is absolutely necessary that we should rightly understand it ; that is, know both what we are to ask, and how we are to ask, if we hope to receive the comfortable effects of our Saviour's words.

And indeed this is the only material point to be discoursed of from this text ; that God will, on his part, always perform what our Saviour hath given his word for, I hope nobody among us doubteth, and therefore it is needless to insist on the truth of that. All that is to be done is to shew, what, and how we may so ask, so seek, so knock, as that we may receive what we ask ; find what we seek ; and obtain admittance upon our knocking.

My business then at this time, is to give an account of the requisites or conditions of prayer, which we are to take care to observe, if we expect to have our prayers answered.

Now these requisites or conditions of prayer are, as I just now intimated, either such as concern the matter of our prayers, or the things we are to pray for ; or secondly, such as concern the manner of our prayer, or the qualifications with which they are to be accompanied ; both these therefore must be here considered.

I begin with the first, the matter of our prayers, or the things which we are to ask at God's hands.

Now here the general proposition is; that the things which we ask of God (if we mean he should answer our prayers), must be such as are agreeable to his will. This is the rule laid down by the apostle in the first epistle of St. John, v. 14. *This (saith he) is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:* And most certainly if we do not ask according to his will, he will not hear us: well, but how shall we know what things are agreeable to God's will, and what are not, that so we may know what things we are to pray for? In answer to this enquiry, I lay down these four propositions:

First of all; It is certain that whatsoever is not just, is not agreeable to the will of God, and consequently ought not to be prayed for; as for instance, to pray for revenge upon our enemies, to desire God to prosper us in our wicked courses, and the like; in these cases the matter of our prayer is unlawful in itself; and consequently to put up such prayers to God must needs be an affront to the divine majesty, because it is to suppose him inclined to abet and patronize our impious desires and designs.

But, secondly; Several things may be very just in themselves, but yet it will be very unjust in us to ask them; as for instance, when we ask good things but to evil purposes: now here also our prayers must needs be disagreeable to the will of God. *Ye ask (saith St. James) and receive not, because ye ask amiss;* and why so? *Ye ask that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* I wish we all did seriously examine our own hearts as to this point, when we put up such earnest prayers to  
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God for this or the other worldly thing that we have set our hearts about. As for wealth, or learning, or success in this or the other project we have in hand; have we not at the bottom some secret ends of pride and vain-glory, or covetousness, or luxury, to be served hereby, if God should grant our request? if we have, in vain it is to put up our prayers to God, or if he do hear them, it will be in anger, and by way of punishment to us.

But, thirdly; The matter of our prayers may be lawful in itself, and we may ask with honest and innocent designs, and yet the things we ask may not be according to the will of God: the reason is, because God perhaps sees they are not convenient for us, or he sees that some other things will better besit our circumstances. And truly this is the case of all that sort of things which we call worldly blessings: we cannot tell when they are good for us, or whether it be not better for us to be without them; and therefore we cannot tell whether it be agreeable to God's will that we should have them, or no; and consequently we cannot, with assurance of success, pray for them. We cannot, for instance, positively and absolutely put up such a prayer as this; Lord, remove this sickness from me; Lord, grant me a long life; Lord, let me have children, and the like: to desire these things absolutely, is to desire something that, for any thing we know, may be evil to us, or at least will not be so great a good as the being without it; and therefore we may be sure God, if he loves us, will not grant it. Thus it fared with St. Paul, in the twelfth of the second epistle to the Corinthians, who upon his being apt to be exalted above measure for the abundance of the revelations that

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were vouchsafed to him, there was given him (as he tells us) *a thorn in the flesh*, that the messenger of satan might buffet him; that is, in all probability, he had some great infirmity of body inflicted on him, which would sufficiently abate the tumour of his mind, because it did expose him and his preaching to the contempt of the false teachers, whom he elsewhere calls the ministers of satan. Well, now upon this he tells us that he prayed thrice unto God, that it might depart from him; what now was God's answer? No other than this, *My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*; that is to say, it is enough for thee that this is sent to thee for thy good, and that I support thee under it; as for the removal of it, it is not so convenient, because my strength and power that goes along with thee in thy preaching, is the more illustriously shewed in this thy weakness.

But what then, are we not to pray against any particular temporal evils that we lie under, or for any particular temporal blessing that we want? I answer, yes, certainly, we not only may, but, in some cases, ought: but then we are always to do it with submission to the divine will; we may put up our requests for any lawful thing, but then it must constantly be with this condition, if God sees it fit for us, if it be agreeable to his will; so long as we pray for outward conveniencies with that reserve or limitation, our prayers are allowable enough, and will, without doubt (if all the other requisites be there), find a gracious answer from God; that is to say, he will either give us in kind what we pray for, or something that is better for us.

Our Saviour hath given us a most remarkable example both of this kind of prayer, and of this kind of answer. Three times in his agony did he fall down before God, and in the most earnest manner that could be, with strong cries and groans, as St. Paul in the Hebrews expresseth it, *prayed, that that cup might pass from him* (that is, that painful ignominious death that was then approaching), *nevertheless, saith he, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* What answer now had he of this earnest prayer? Why St. Paul tells us, Heb. v. 7. *That he was heard in that he feared; or, as the expression may be better rendered, he was so heard as to be delivered from his fear.* Not from suffering death, but from the fear of it; for an angel from heaven was sent to strengthen him, as St. Luke tells us. God granted his request not in kind, but by giving that which was much better for him.

But it may be said, are there no particulars then that we can ask of God absolutely, and with assurance that they shall be granted? I answer, in the fourth place, we may peremptorily ask all spiritual blessings in particular, and be assured, if the other requisites of our prayer do concur, we shall obtain them. There is this difference between spiritual blessings and temporal, we are not certain, as I said, whether the temporal things that appear most desirable will be real blessings to us or no, and therefore we cannot positively ask them of God. All that we can do as to these things is heartily to recommend ourselves and our circumstances to God's wisdom and goodness, desiring him to give us what he sees most prosperous or most convenient for us; and as for this or the other particular thing we think we need, if we do mention it in our prayer, it must be with intire submission to God, whether he will grant it us or no. But

But now spiritual things, such as the pardon of our sins, and all kinds of virtue, and graces of the holy spirit, and the like ; these are always blessings : blessings to us, and to the world ; and we can receive no hurt from them, and therefore we may confidently and absolutely ask them of God, and we may be earnest and importunate with him for them, and take no denial at his hands ; all along supposing that we ask them upon no other terms, than upon what he hath promised them.

The sum of this whole point concerning the matter of our prayers, is this : We must not pray for unlawful things ; we must not pray for lawful things with a design to put them to an ill use, to make provision with them for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. We must not pray for any particular worldly thing but with absolute resignation of ourselves and our wills to God's will : so that the chief matter of our prayers, or the things that we are importunately to ask of God, will be temporal mercies in general, and spiritual mercies both in general and particular : I say, the temporal mercies in general, that is to say, we are to pray for the peace and happiness of the whole world, and more especially of the church and kingdom unto which we belong ; and as for our own private concernments we are most heartily to recommend ourselves, and all our affairs, to the mercy and to the protection of God, desiring him to take care of us, and to dispose us into such outward circumstances as will most tend to his glory, and the good of the public, and the advantage of our own souls. He knows what is best for us, and therefore to him we offer ourselves ; we beg of him to give us all good things, and to keep us from all

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evil things (which was Socrates's prayer): but as to what things are good or evil for us, we leave it to his wisdom to determine.

But then for spiritual mercies we are to be a great deal more particular. We are not only to pray for the pardon of our sins, and the grace of God's Holy Spirit; and eternal life in general; but we are to consider all our particular infirmities, and wants, and necessities, and to beg God's favour in the one, and supply of the other. We are to mention to God all our particular sins, as we happen to fall into them; and to implore his mercy and forgiveness: we are to mention to him all our particular weaknesses of nature, and the temptations we are exposed to, and to beg his grace to overcome them. We are daily to pray to him to carry on the good work he hath begun in us; to strengthen and confirm our purposes and resolutions to serve him; to enable us to give up ourselves with more chearfulness and sincerity to him; to help us to watch over our thoughts, and words, and actions, that we be not drawn into any sin; to increase every day our faith in Christ, our hope and trust in him, our dependence upon him, and our love to him; to make us more meek, and more humble, and more temperate, and more charitable; to give us a greater and more lively sense of his presence, and his goodness, and his infinite love to us, that we may make more pure returns of love and thankfulness, and be more forward to every good work. In a word, whatsoever is matter of our duty, that ought most especially to be the matter of our prayers; and whatever we pray for of that kind, God will always grant it us, if we be not wanting to ourselves, and not only so, but together with those things

things which are the greatest blessing he can bestow, he will, upon our general prayer, give us every other thing that we stand in need of: for our Saviour will never fail to make good his promise; *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.* And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of the first point requisite to our effectual asking any thing of God; namely, that the matter of our prayers be good, and such as is agreeable to the will of God.

I now come to my second general head, namely, in what manner we are to ask of God if we mean that our prayers should be effectual.

Now as to this, several things the holy scriptures require of us, which it will highly concern us to observe, if we would put up our prayers so as that they may be acceptable to God.

I cannot make a better distribution of them than into these two heads:

- I. First, The things that are necessary for the preparing or disposing us to pray as we should do.
- II. Secondly, The things that must accompany our prayers, if we would have them effectual.

I. The first sort of things I call preparatives to prayer, and they are these three:

1. First, That we purge our hearts from all actual affection to sin.

2. Secondly, That we have fit and becoming apprehensions of ourselves, and our own condition.

3. Thirdly, That we have fit and becoming apprehensions of God.

II. The second sort of things which must accompany our prayers, as they are set forth in the scriptures, are these four :

1. First, That our prayers be fervent and constant.
2. Secondly, That we pray in faith.
3. Thirdly, That we put up our prayers in the name of the Lord Jesus.
4. Fourthly, That to our prayers for any thing, we add our own endeavours to obtain it.

I shall, at this time, confine myself to the first of these heads, namely, what concerns our preparations for prayer, or the qualities and dispositions we must possess ourselves of, in order to the putting up acceptable prayers to God, referring the prosecution of the latter head to some other opportunity.

Now the first thing required of us for the preparing and disposing us for the putting up our prayers as we should do, is, that we purify our hearts from all actual affection to sin ; that we come not to God with any of our wickedness about us, but that we do at least in purpose and desire put them away from us : this is so absolutely necessary, that there is no praying without it. *If I incline unto wickedness with my heart (saith David) the Lord will not hear me. We know (saith the man in the gospel) that God heareth not sinners ; but if any man be a doer of his will, he will hear him.* Nay, God doth not only not hear sinners, but their prayers are an abomination to him : the sacrifices of the wicked, saith Solomon, are an abomination to the Lord. But what then, are not wicked men to pray ? Yes certainly, how else shall they ever come to be good ? But they must leave off their wickedness ; or, if that cannot be done at once, or in a moment, they must at least sincerely

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purpose and resolve against it, and then put up their prayers to God. If they do not do this, they affront God instead of praying to him, they defy him, and put a mockery upon him. For is it not a plain mockery, is it not a defiance of his justice and holiness, to come and to pretend seriously to beg pardon for my adultery, or my drunkenness, or the like, and to implore the grace of the Holy Spirit to forsake these sins, when yet, at the same time, I know, in my own heart, that I mean the next opportunity or occasion that offers itself to commit them over again? Till therefore we can seriously resolve to quit our evil courses, to forsake every known wilful open sin, that we are conscious to ourselves we live in; let us not think ourselves prepared and qualified to put up our prayers to God. That is the first thing.

Secondly, Another thing required in order to the disposing of us for prayer, is, that we have fit and just apprehensions of ourselves, and our own condition. Now, this consists of two things: first, in getting our hearts deeply affected with a sense of our wants: And, secondly, with a sense of our meanness and unworthiness. First of all, we must endeavour to get our minds seriously affected with a sense of our manifold wants and necessities. If we be not heartily sensible of what we want, it is impossible we should heartily pray for redress and supply; and without such earnest prayer, as I shall shew hereafter, we are not to expect that God will hear us. We are then fit and prepared to pray as we should do, when we have the same real feeling of our spiritual needs, that a hungry stomach has of the need of meat and drink. Thus, without doubt, was the devout Psalmist affected, *As the hart (saith he) pant-*

*eth after the brooks of water, so longeth my soul after thee, O God; my soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God, Psal. xlii. 1, 2.* Would we therefore bring ourselves to a praying temper? Let us often take an account of the state of our souls, and examine what wants we have to be supplied, what sins to be pardoned, what evil affections to be mortified, what virtues and graces of the Holy Spirit to be attained. And when we have done this, let us make it our business to impress the most lively sense of these things upon our souls that is possible: To which purpose, let us often represent to them, that it is no trifling employment we go about, when we make our addresses at the throne of grace, but an affair of the last importance to us; our work there is to get strength and power against our corruptions, to obtain deliverance from the wrath of God due to our sins, and to get our natures transformed into the image of God by righteousness and true holiness. We are undone for ever, if we fail in any of these things. We cannot live without them; we need them more a great deal than the air we breathe in: sure therefore it will concern us to be in good earnest. Let us think with ourselves, Was I now a slave among the infidels, and had for some years endured the misery of that condition, should I not be deeply sensible of my chains? Should I not groan after a redemption? Should I not pray with the utmost earnestness, if I had any hopes that my prayers would work my deliverance? Why, under as hard a bondage I am, if I seriously consider it, so long as I live under the power and dominion of any sin: Nay, and a far harder; for death will put an end to the misery of my bodily captivity, whereas it will only be the beginning of the sorrows and miseries of my spiritual.

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Can I then be insensible of my danger? Can I be cold and indifferent, when I am to beg of heaven so great a blessing as to be rescued from the bondage of the devil into the glorious liberty of the sons of God? O, my soul, think of these things; think of thy pressing necessities: Remember thou art undone, if God do not take pity on thee; and how dost thou think he should pity, if thou dost not pity thyself? Let us never leave our souls till, by these, and such other considerations, we have wrought them to a hearty feeling of their own needs, and to most vehement desires of having them supplied, which is one great step towards a praying temper.

But, *secondly*, as we must get our hearts affected with a sense of our wants, so must we also with a sense of our own meanness and unworthiness. Of all kinds of men the proud, and those that are full of themselves, are the most unfit for prayer, and the most offensive to God when they make addresses to him. He resisteth them, he beholdeth them afar off, as the scripture expresseth it; that is, with an eye of scorn: But the humble he giveth grace to; the broken and the contrite heart he will never despise. Accordingly, we find that all the men that have been dearest to God, and most powerful in their prayers, have been of this temper. Abraham, who was stiled the friend of God, and from whom God would hide none of his counsels, yet, when he approacheth to his Maker, thinks himself no better than dust and ashes. Behold, saith he, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes. David styles himself a worm, and no man. Job, who was one of the powerful intercessors with God, that Ezekiel speaks of; his way of speaking to God is, *Behold I am vile, what shall I*

*answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

But that which doth most remarkably shew the necessity of this humble temper, this mean sense of ourselves, when we approach to God, is the parable of the pharisee and the publican, that went into the temple to pray; which our Saviour delivers in the eighteenth of St. Luke. *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself; God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* Thus far the pharisee, and without doubt he said nothing but what was true. *But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.* What now was the effect of these prayers? *Verily, saith our Saviour, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.* This man, this publican, who was a great sinner, yet coming with humility and contrition, with a hearty sense of his own vileness, and a great shame for having offended God, this man was justified; his prayer was accepted, and he himself acquitted: Whereas the other, the pharisee, who was no scandalous sinner, but framed his outward conversation according to the precepts of the law, yet, because he thought too highly of himself, was not sensible of his defects, but took a vain complacency in the goodness of his own performances, and despised others; this man and his prayer were rejected. And so shall it ever fare with men of that temper; for, as our Saviour concludes the parable, *Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* But then we must take care that we  
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be not abused with false shews of humility : This humility and sense in our unworthiness, that I speak of, doth not consist of bitter declamations against ourselves, and presenting unto God, by way of confession, long catalogues of such sins as it is to be hoped we were never guilty of ; no, there may lie great pride and vanity under this veil of modesty. The temper of the publican, which our Saviour recommends to us, is another kind of thing ; it is more quiet and still, it hath more sense, but less noise and boisterousness. It is a prostration of our souls before God, in the most feeling apprehensions of our own nothingness : It represents us to ourselves, neither better nor worse, but just as we are, that is to say, the creatures of God, that had been nothing without him, that are now nothing of ourselves, but all that we are, or have is from him, and so must all that we hope for be : So that we have no kind of thing in the world, but our sins and follies that we can call our own ; and those, God knows, are so far from affording matter of boasting to us, that they ought to fill us with shame and confusion. So far are they from intitling us to the favour of God, or any blessing from him, that we look upon them as instances of great ingratitude, for those he hath already vouchsafed ; and which render us utterly unworthy of his mercies for the time to come. Upon a lively sense and apprehension of these things, we absolutely quit ourselves ; we renounce all creature-dependencies, we throw ourselves at the foot-stool of the great God, confessing our meanness, ashamed of our follies, bewailing our unthankfulness, acknowledging our inability to help ourselves, and professing to rely on God, and God only, for every thing we expect, or desire, or hope for.

And thus much of the second requisite to a due preparation and disposition of mind for prayer.

I proceed to the third and last, and that is the possessing our minds with worthy and becoming apprehensions of God : Now this likewise consists in two things especially :

First, In having a lively sense of God's greatness and majesty.

Secondly, A full and hearty belief of his goodness. Of these two things briefly, and I have done.

First, In order to the further preparing and disposing our minds for prayer, we must labour to possess our hearts with a deep sense of God's infinite and incomprehensible majesty. Would we be in a temper and disposition to pray as we should do ; let it be deeply impressed upon our minds, who it is that we pray to : even no other than the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, that was from everlasting and is to everlasting. It is he that by his breath made us and every thing that is ; and by the same breath of his mouth can sink us and the world into its first nothing. It is he, in comparison of whom all nations are not so much as a drop of the bucket to the ocean, or a dust of the balance to the whole earth, before whom ten thousand times ten thousand glorious angels do daily minister. It is he that hath all perfections in himself, and of himself, being infinite in knowledge, and wisdom, and power, and all other excellencies. He that is present to us and to all the world at the same time, being about our beds, and about our paths, and understanding all our ways, so that there is not a thought in our hearts, nor a word in our tongues, but he knoweth it altogether. Lastly, it is he that is all holiness and purity, all perfect light, and in him there is no darkness at all, nor  
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can he behold the least iniquity with approbation. These conceptions, these apprehensions we are to have of God, if we would put ourselves into a temper fit to approach him; and not only to have them in our understandings, but to impress them most powerfully upon our hearts; to get a lasting sense of them upon our spirits, that so at all times, when we come before God, we may behave ourselves to him, as becomes us, and certainly if we were thus affected with the excellencies of his majesty, we should so behave ourselves: We should prostrate ourselves before him in the lowest humility of our souls and bodies: We should be careful of our thoughts when we speak to him, that they did not wander from him, and spend themselves vainly and unprofitably, when they should be fixed upon him. We should be careful of our words, that they were never rude and unseemly, but such as became such poor creatures to so great a king. In a word, we should take care to perform all our offices of worship to him, with the greatest fear and reverence, with seriousness and attention, with modesty and zeal, with the least straying of thought, or discomposedness of mind, that the infirmities of our nature will allow of.

But, secondly, Among all the rest of God's excellencies and perfections, we ought more particularly, in order to the praying as we should do, to get our hearts possessed with a sense of his goodness. This is that, which above all other things, will put life and vigour into our prayers, will both stir us up to this duty, and support us in the performance of it. *He that cometh to God* (saith St. Paul) *must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* Whoever is fully persuaded of this, will affectionately

fectionately seek God, and will find the greatest comfort in the world in so doing; but he that is without this sense of the love and kindness of God, will but move heavily in his devotions, all his services will be coldly and languidly performed, because they are in a manner forced, they sprang not from love and hope, but from fear and awe.

Let us therefore take care to represent God to ourselves, the most kind, and loving, and benign being that is conceivable. Let us be persuaded heartily that he loves us, and takes care of us; that he pities our infirmities, and hath a sense of our wants, and is as ready to relieve us, and to give us whatsoever we stand in need of, as we can be to ask him. Certainly we have all the reason in the world to believe this: The notions we have of this nature, do lay the grounds for such a belief, the revelations he hath made of himself in his word do confirm it; and all his dealings with mankind, from the beginning of the world to this day, are but so many experiences that we have of the truth of it. Can he that made us at first, and that still preserves us, renewing his mercies and compassion upon us every moment (nay, there is not a minute of our lives wherein we are not indebted to him for a thousand benefits); can such a being be harsh, or severe, or penurious to his creatures? Can he be forgetful of them, or want bowels of pity, when they cry to him? He that sent his own son to die for us, shall he not, with him, freely give us all things? He that gave us the greatest blessings, shall he not give us less ones? as the apostle argues. No, let us assure ourselves, *No father doth in that degree pity his children, as the Lord is merciful to them that fear him*; so the psalmist tells us: Nay, a heathen poet could say, That man is more  
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dear to God than he is to himself: And if we do not feel more effects of his love (tho' those that we do feel are not to be named), it is because we will not open our hearts or our hands to receive them. The communications of God are as ready at hand as the air we breathe in, and they press into all rightly-disposed souls: But those souls that are narrow and sensual, that grovel upon the earth, and will not cast up their eyes, tho' it were to make a purchase of the stars, it is no wonder that those men continue in darkness, and partake but little of the light of God's countenance; since *they love darkness better than light*; they value the gratification of a sensual brutish appetite before the possession of the greatest good in the world.

Thus have I given you an account of those general qualifications or dispositions, that are requisite in a man to make him fit for prayer: And this, I believe, I may say, that whosoever will take care to get his mind into such a frame as I have been now representing, it will be very easy to him to perform all such other particular conditions required in the scriptures to make his prayers acceptable, and which yet remain to be spoken to: That is to say, he will hereby be the better enabled to pray fervently and constantly, he will be in a better disposition to ask in faith; he will the more easily see the necessity of putting up prayers in the name, and for the merits of our Lord Jesus. He will be the more inclined to be in charity with all the world, when he comes to beg mercies for himself: And lastly, he will hereby be convinced how necessary it is, that to his prayers for good things, he should also add his own endeavours for the obtaining of them: But another time must be taken for that.



# SERMON IV.

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About the conditions and requisites of  
prayer.

MATTH. vii. 7.

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*



THE last time I preached upon this text, my design was to give an account of the requisites or conditions, which we are to observe in our prayers, if we expect to have this promise of our Lord's in the text made good to us; that is to say, how we are to ask, and seek, and knock, in order to the receiving what we ask, finding what we seek, and obtaining admittance upon our knocking.

Now these conditions, or requisites of prayer, are either such as concern the matter of our prayers, or the things we are to pray for; or, secondly, such as concern



cern the manner of our prayers, or the qualifications with which we are to put them up.

The first of these I have already largely discoursed of, and what I said upon this head may be reduced to these four propositions :

First, Whatever is not just or lawful in itself ought not to be the matter of our prayers ; for to ask such things is really to affront God Almighty.

Secondly, Several things may be very just in themselves, and yet it will be very unjust in us to ask them ; as for instance, when we ask either things that we need not, or ask them to evil purposes, for the making for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Thirdly, Even such things as we think we have need of, and which we may very lawfully pray for, yet if they be things of a temporal nature, we cannot ask them absolutely and peremptorily of God, but only with this condition, if God sees them fit for us ; for all temporal blessings we must put up our prayers, with such perfect submission to God, as to say from our hearts with our Saviour, *Not my will, O Lord, but thine be done.* And the reason is, because we are at no time certain, whether any of those outward things we desire are really good for us : They may prove either real evils to us, or there may be something which is much better for us, for which reason it is very unfit we should be our own carvers, but refer ourselves intirely to God, who alone knows what our true interests are.

And therefore, fourthly and lastly, there remains but one kind of thing, which we can positively, and with assurance of success, pray to God for ; and these are all spiritual blessings : All the things that concern either our living a holy life here, or a happy eternal life here.

hereafter; these we may peremptorily ask of God, and depend upon him that he will grant them, provided we ask as we should do; for these can never be hurtful either to us or to the world, and therefore will always be agreeable to the will of God.

In the second place, as for the requisites that concern the manner of our prayers, or the qualifications with which we are to put them up, I distributed them into these two heads:

First, Those that are necessary for the preparing or disposing us to pray as we should do. Secondly, Those that must accompany our prayers, if we would have them effectual. The first sort of things I call preparatives to prayer, and those I likewise treated of in the former sermon, and therefore I shall now only name them. In order to a due preparation for prayer, or the getting ourselves into a devout praying temper, there are these five things required: First, That we purge our hearts of all actual affections to sin, that we come not to God with any of our wickednesses about us, but that we do, at least in purpose and design, put them away from us.

Secondly, That we endeavour to get our hearts deeply affected with a sense of our manifold wants and necessities.

Thirdly, That we get our hearts affected with a lively sense of our own vileness and unworthiness, upon account of our manifold sins and transgressions.

Fourthly, That we be duly sensible of the infinite greatness and majesty of that God, to whom we do approach in our prayers, that so we may make our applications with that decency, and seriousness, and attention, and fear, and reverence, that become such poor creatures to so glorious a Majesty.

Fifthly,

Fifthly, That we endeavour to possess our minds with a firm belief, and feeling apprehension of God's infinite goodness, really looking upon him to be, what he is, a most kind, indulgent, compassionate father to all his creatures, that he is as ready to give us whatever we want, as we can possibly be to ask it.

And thus much of preparation for prayer: I come now, in the second place, to treat of those other things that must accompany our prayers, and which it will concern us to observe, if we would have our prayers acceptable, and they are likewise five:

First, That our prayers be fervent and constant.

Secondly, That we pray in faith.

Thirdly, That we pray in charity.

Fourthly, That we put up our prayers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifthly, That to our prayers for any thing, we add our own endeavours; and these I design for the heads of the following discourse.

The first condition that must accompany our prayers for the rendering them effectual, is, great fervour and constancy; that is, that we do in the most hearty, serious, and affectionate manner, put up our requests to God; and likewise, that we persevere in so doing. Both these things are necessary; for whatsoever prayers we put up with coldness and indifferency, in such a careless languid way, as if we mattered not whether we were heard or no, we can never expect they should be effectual, though we approach to the throne of grace never so often. And on the other side, be we never so earnest, yet if it be but for once or twice, or by fits and starts, as we are in an humour; if we let our suit fall, if we do not continue and persevere in it, there is little likelihood we shall attain what we pray for. We  
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must join both together, great fervency and intenseness of mind, and great constancy and perseverance: And this is the full importance of our Saviour's command in the xviiith of Rom. *That men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* This is that which is meant by seeking and knocking in my text; we must not only ask, but we must seek, we must knock; in each of which expressions the latter still imports some further degree of earnestness and application of mind, than was implied in the former. Surely this is that which the apostle speaks of in that advice of his, *of continuing instant in prayer,* Rom. xii. 12. *Of praying always, with all prayer and supplication, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.* Eph. vi. 18.

But of all other passages of scripture, the necessity and efficacy of this importunity in prayer that we speak of, is most lively set forth to us by our blessed Saviour, in that remarkable parable of his in the eleventh of St. Luke's gospel, *Which of you (saith he) shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and shall say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come unto me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within, shall answer and say, Trouble me not, for the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth.* And then follows the application of the parable, in the same words as are in my text; *Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

It is true, we cannot from this parable draw this conclusion, that God is like the man here spoken of, that

that he wants kindness to his friends, and that if he doth grant their requests, it is not so much out of love, as that he may be freed from the trouble of their importunities; this is decent enough to be said of a man, and therefore our Saviour so puts the parable: but it cannot be applied to an infinitely wise and good God, who never can be disturbed by others, nor is he put to any disturbance or trouble, in order to the conferring his benefits. But thus much certainly the very frame of the parable leads us to conclude; that many things that God will not give us without our prayers, he will give us, if we pray to him for them. And those things that God will not grant upon our slight and lazy prayers, he will grant, if we be earnest and importunate, and constant in them: so that it concerns every person, if he would obtain what he prays for, to take this course, both to pray fervently, and to continue in so doing. For instance, do you find that you do not make such advances in virtue and goodness, as you desire; but, notwithstanding your good resolutions, you are under the power of many corruptions, which your nature, or your former customs, do strongly incline you to? You think now that prayer to God for his grace to assist and strengthen you, is a good remedy in this case; and so certainly it is; but you are mistaken, if you think that praying once or twice, tho' it be very heartily, will do the business. Nor are you to conclude, that because you do not on a sudden find that strength and assistance, which you expected when you prayed for it, that therefore God hath no kindness for you, or that he will not answer your prayers: Much less are you to reason thus with yourself; God knows that I want the assistance of his Spirit to overcome my vicious affections, and he knows that I heartily desire

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it, and he knows that I have more than once prayed for it; and therefore to what purpose should I be farther troublesome to him with my prayers? No, this is never the way to obtain what we desire; let us rather redouble our devotions; let us rather continue to knock more earnestly, and more importunately, at the gate of mercy for the supply of our wants. If we use this method, if we thus with zeal and diligence and patience keep waiting upon God, there is no manner of doubt, but that he will at last fulfil the desires of our souls, and give us such a measure of his grace and Spirit, as shall enable us to conquer all difficulties, to overcome all temptations, and to vanquish every lust, every corruption that can make head against us.

Some, perhaps, may be apt to wonder why God should require this importunity we speak of as a condition of his answering our prayers; why he should not as well grant our requests, at the first time of our putting them up, if we put them up seriously and heartily, as after many repetitions of them. But the answer is easy: For the same reason that God requires us to pray at all, in order to the obtaining his benefits, for the same reason it is necessary we should pray with fervency and constancy; his goodness is such, that he would supply us with every thing we stand in need of without praying, were it not that praying is good for us; that he sees we receive many advantages thereby, besides the obtaining the direct blessing we pray for; and therefore it is, that he hath so indispensably ordered it. We do not pray to inform God of our wants, or to persuade him by our arguments to supply them: But God hath therefore obliged us to pray, because it is eternally reasonable, and makes much to the improving in us all those qualities, in which the perfection of our natures  
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doth consist, that we should continually depend upon him for every good thing we need ; of which dependence, prayer is the proper expression.

Indeed, if we considered well, we should find the benefits that come to us by prayer (without taking the granting or answering of our prayers into the consideration) are inestimable. Prayer raiseth up our souls above this world, and makes them capable of the communications and impressions of the divine nature. It is the most natural means in the world to allay all troublesome passions, to revive and strengthen all good purposes and resolutions, to fill the mind with joy, and peace, and consolation, in all circumstances and conditions of life. Lastly, it is the best exercise of all those virtues and graces that we have, as well as it is the proper means and instrument for the getting those we have not.

Since now all these good ends are served by prayer, all these benefits are attained by it, it cannot be thought unreasonable that God should require that this prayer should be fervent and constant. Nay, if God had not required it, reason must tell us, that it ought to be so, since all the aforesaid ends will thereby be the better served ; all the aforesaid benefits will be thereby obtained in a greater degree and proportion.

But I proceed to the second condition which God requires in our prayers, in order to their being effectual, and that is, that we ask in faith.

This is a condition ordered by our Saviour to his apostles, in St. Matthew xxi. 22. *All things* (saith he) *whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.* And thus also St. James speaks to all Christians, in the first chapter of his epistle, and the 5th and 6th verses : *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that*

*that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed; for let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*

The question here is, what it is to ask believing, or to ask in faith? Is it to ask with a full persuasion and assurance, that that which I pray for shall certainly be granted me? No, certainly, a great many may ask in faith, that have not this full assurance or persuasion. I must own, indeed, that to pray in faith doth sometimes, in the New-testament, signify to pray with a confidence that what is prayed for will be granted; and I cannot deny, but that the words of our Saviour I now quoted, in their primary sense, and as they were spoken to the apostles, had a respect to such a faith as this; for he spoke them upon occasion of the sudden withering away of the fig-tree, which he had cursed the day before: at which when the apostles much marvelled, our Saviour saith to them, *If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done; and all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.* No doubt our Saviour here speaks of praying with such a faith as implied a full persuasion and assurance, that they could do any extraordinary thing, work any miracle for the confirmation of the truth of the gospel: and such a faith God did in those times inspire the apostles with, and others the first planters of the gospel: and it is of such a faith that St. Paul speaks, when he says, *If I had all faith, so that I could remove mountains.* But then we are to remember, that this sort of faith was one of the miraculous gifts which were conferred upon the apostles, and



was peculiar to their times, and was altogether as extraordinary as the gift of tongues was; so that we of this age have nothing to do with it. Praying in faith, as it concerns us, is quite another thing, and can imply no more than one of these two things :

First, The praying with a hearty belief, both that God is able to grant the request I put up to him, and that, for the sake of Jesus Christ, he will do it, supposing that it will be for his glory, and my good; and supposing that I perform all the conditions that are required on my part towards the obtaining of it. This is praying with faith; and thus every one that prays ought to be affected, otherwise he doth great injury to God, or is guilty of unbelief in the promises of Jesus Christ. But then this is quite a different thing from praying with a persuasion or assurance that the thing we pray for shall be granted us, for that supposeth both that we are certain, that that we pray for is for God's glory, and for our good; and likewise that we are certain, that we have promised all the conditions that are required on our part for the obtaining it: but I doubt very few can satisfy themselves as to both these things.

But, secondly, There is another notion of praying in faith besides this, and which I believe is chiefly intended by St. James in that passage of his I before quoted; namely, taking faith in the ordinary signification of it, that is to say, for a firm adherence to the doctrine of Christ, a constancy in the profession and practice of the christian religion; so that to pray in faith is to pray to God with a full purpose of heart (let what will come) to believe and to live like a christian, not to use any indirect means, or to depart from the sincerity of my christian profession for the gaining any ends whatsoever. This, I say, seems to be the sense

of the apostle in this place. His design in this chapter is to comfort the christians under their persecutions: *Count it all joy, saith he, when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and intire, wanting nothing.* But now, lest it should be objected that a man may want wisdom and discretion to manage himself under these trials and temptations, and so, for want of that, miscarry; to obviate that he tells them, in the next verse, how they may furnish themselves with that wisdom and discretion that is necessary for them, namely, by asking it of God: but then (saith he) *it will be fit that they ask it in faith, not wavering*; that is to say, they must keep close to God, having no inconstancy or uncertainty in their minds as to that point. They must not be like some of the Jewish christians at that time, who, for fear of persecution, were at any time ready to forsake Christ. No; if they were of this humour, they were no better than waves of the sea, driven and tossed by every wind; and such men must never think they shall receive any thing of the Lord: being double-minded and unstable in all their ways. If they will obtain wisdom, let them behave themselves in persecution as they ought: Let them stick fast to their profession, and let them never waver in that, and then they shall be sure to be assisted of God.

Taking now this for a true account of this passage, it appears, that for us to pray in faith, doth not so much consist in a confidence that our prayers shall be heard (which is the common opinion), but in putting up our prayers in a firm belief of christianity, and hearty resolution to adhere to it, in a constant practice of what it requires, fixing it firmly in our hearts that we will  
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not depart from any point of our duty, nor use any unwarrantable means, nor do the least thing that is inconsistent with the religion we profess, though it were for the gaining the greatest worldly good or advantage; and certainly, whoever comes to God thus qualified, his prayers will never fail of acceptance.

Thirdly, Another condition that God requires in our prayers, in order to their being effectual, is, that we pray in charity. This is a thing which our Saviour hath laid great stress upon, for he hath expressly and particularly mentioned it in that form of prayer which he taught his disciples, and which all christians ever since have constantly used to put up to God among their daily devotions. Nay, he hath so mentioned it, that every one that saith that prayer, must be intolerably impudent in saying it, if he be not in charity with all the world. For, if you mind it, we cannot use the Lord's prayer without making a solemn profession before God, that we desire the forgiveness of our sins upon no other terms, than our forgiving those that have offended us. *Forgive us our trespasses* (say we) *as we forgive them that trespass against us.* And, which is farther observable, when our Saviour had delivered this prayer to his disciples to be for ever used by them, he makes no reflection, no observation upon any other of the petitions but only this (which seems to be a farther enforcing of this business of charity, a putting an emphasis upon it in an extraordinary manner). *If* (saith he, just after he had concluded the prayer) *ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses,* Matthew vi. 14. Nay, so indispensable a qualification he hath made this, of being in charity

rity with all men, in order to the putting up our prayers to God, that he tells us plainly, that though we are just a-going to say our prayers, tho' we have brought our sacrifice to the altar, in order to the offering it up to God, *yet if we even then remember that our brother hath aught against us*, if we then call to mind that we are at difference with any man, that we have done any injury that we have not made satisfaction for, that there is any breach between us and our neighbour, which through our fault, is not made up; in that case we are to leave our sacrifice, unoffered as it is, before the altar; *and go our ways, and first to be reconciled to our brother, and then afterwards to come and offer our gift*, Matt. v. 23, 24. I heartily wish this point was seriously considered by all those that pretend to be the disciples of Jesus Christ; if it was, there either would be more charity, or less pretence of religion and devotion; men would either live peaceably, and maintain perfect love, and friendship, and society one with another, or they could not say their daily prayers, without their flying back in their faces: They would blush to think of the impudence with which they approached the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, Another condition that is required of us in our prayers, in order to the having them accepted, is, that we put them all up in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Three or four times doth our Saviour mention this condition to his disciples; *Whatsoever* (saith he) *ye shall ask in my name, that will I do*, John xiv. 13. And again in the next verse, *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it*. And again in the next chapter, and the 16th verse, *That whatsoever ye shall ask of the father*

*in my name, he may give it you.*: And so again in the xvith chapter, and the 23d verse, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name, ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* This is a piece of duty and honour, that all we christians to the world's end do owe to our master Jesus Christ; and indeed without the payment of it we have no warrant to expect that our prayers will find acceptance. Certain it is, that it is upon the account, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, and the merits of that sacrifice which he once offered upon the cross, and which he now, as our High Priest, continually exhibits and presents to God our Father in the highest heavens: It is, I say, for the sake and in the consideration of this, that God hath made any promise to mankind, that he will be merciful or gracious to them, or that he will accept any sacrifice of prayer or praise that they offer to him. It is to this that we owe the pardon of our sins, and the grace and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and the favour of God, and the peace of our conscience; and, in a word, all the benefits both spiritual, or temporal, or eternal, that we hope for from our prayers. And therefore infinite reason is there that we should make acknowledgments of this to God, whenever we make approaches to him. Christ is the standing perpetual Mediator between God and man; and through him only we can have access to the Father: And therefore to present our petitions, either in our own name, or in any other name but his, is to forsake that method which God hath put us into for the obtaining benefits from him. Indeed, one of the two great offices that our Saviour now executes in heaven, and which he will execute to the end of the

world, is, to present the prayers of all his servants unto God, and with them to present the merits of his own sacrifice, that in the consideration thereof he may be accepted; and in this chiefly consists the exercise of Christ's everlasting priesthood. Our prayers, without his presenting them, would not be effectual. It is his intercession that procures the answer and return of them. And therefore certainly in us, that know this method of God's hearing and granting of prayer, it would be intolerable to put up any prayers without mention of, or respect to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let others therefore, who are not so well instructed in the christian dispensation, address to whom they please, and by what mediators they please, *Whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many, and lords many, so called: But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him, as the apostle hath told us.*

But fifthly and lastly, Another condition required of us, if we would receive benefits by our prayers, is, that to our prayers we join our own endeavours for the obtaining what we pray for. We are then to expect the answer of God to our petitions, when we do vigorously put out all that strength he hath given us, and make use of all those means he hath prescribed us for the effecting our desires. To think that God will do our work alone, without any concurrence of ours, save only our saying, *Lord, have mercy upon me,* is most foolish and ridiculous: It is just the madness of those men that the orator laughs at, who, when a storm of great hail-stones fell upon their heads, cried mightily to God to deliver them from the danger, but

never stirred a step to seek for shelter. If God had made us mere engines and machines, I grant it were reasonable to expect he should carry us on to the end he made us for, without any help of ours: But since God hath given us reason to direct us, and eyes to see with, and hands to act with, and feet to go with, and hath so contrived our natures, that happiness is to be the reward of our own choice, and not the effect of irresistible power, it is the extremity of folly to think, that our prayers, without our endeavours, will do us any good; nay, indeed it is impudence to wish it: He that desires to obtain any blessing, either spiritual or temporal, without his doing all he can towards it, his prayer is just of the same strain of modesty, as if he should say in these terms; Lord, give me this or the other blessing which thou see'st I want, but at the same time be pleased to forget, that thou hast made me a rational creature; deal with me as if I were a stock or a stone, and could do nothing towards the helping myself. I want this blessing, O let me have it, though it be against all the reason in the world that I should have it; and thou thyself canst not grant it me, but thou must depart from all those wise and good rules and methods, which thou hast set down to thyself in the government of the world.

Doth not such a prayer as this deserve to be answered? Yes, certainly, but with indignation and scorn; and yet such prayers as these do we all make to God, when we pray without endeavouring: As for instance, when we pray to God to forgive us our sins, and yet take no care to amend our lives; when we pray to God to strengthen our good purposes and resolutions, and yet take no care to think, and to consider, and to renew them frequently; when we pray to be

delivered from this or the other particular sin that we are too apt to fall into, and yet do not guard ourselves against it; take no care to avoid those temptations that usually betray us into it, nor make use of those remedies which prudence and religion do furnish us with for the avoiding it. Above all things, therefore, it concerns us, that at the same time we pray to be good, we sincerely, in all our actions, do endeavour to be so; that at the same time we pray for God's grace, and Holy Spirit, we do what we can to allure and draw him down into our hearts, by purifying ourselves from all worldly and carnal lusts, and by cherishing and encouraging all the good motions we feel in our souls. Nay, a great many have found, to their cost, the vanity of such an imagination: They have prayed most heartily and feelingly against such particular sins, as they are most inclined to, and for the attainment of such particular virtues as they most needed; and yet it has often happened, that on the very same day when they have made these devout prayers, they have been overtaken by that sin they prayed against, and rather gone backwards than forwards, as to the virtue they aspired after. How now comes this to pass? Did not God hear their prayers? They indeed are apt to think so, and to charge him with unkindness for it, but they are much to blame for so doing: There is no doubt but that God did thus far hear and grant their petitions, that he did all that was needful on his part for the preventing those sins, and increasing those virtues, which were the subject of their prayers. He gave grace and strength sufficient to the men for the producing those effects they did desire; but the men did not do their part; they did not make use of that strength, they did not



not watch over themselves as they should have done: They did not endeavour to avoid those temptations which used to betray them into that sin, nor take those opportunities which God put into their hands, for the improving of their virtue; and here the fault of the miscarriage is to be laid. God is always ready and willing to send down his influences and communications, upon every soul that is prepared and disposed to receive them: And that grace which he affords shall always have that effect we desire, if we do but cooperate with it, if we by our sloth and negligence do not betray the cause of God to the common enemy.

Christians, therefore, all of you that hear me this day, if ever you mean to be good, if ever you mean to be happy, if ever you expect God's favour and acceptance in this world and in the other, let me desire you to consider and remember this: As the great business of your life, in order to the attaining these ends, must be to pray to God most earnestly and constantly for his direction, and assistance, and influence, and blessing, in all that you go about; and as you must put up your prayers in faith and charity, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, our great Mediator; so it will also concern you particularly, if you would have these prayers effectual, to contribute yourselves to the efficacy of them, by using your earnest endeavours to work in and for yourselves, all that you desire God to work in you and for you. You are, on the one hand, so to pray as if God was to do all, and you could do nothing (as it is certainly true); and yet, on the other hand, you are so to labour and endeavour, as if the whole success of the business did depend upon yourselves (and this is true also): If you fail in either of these things, you will be disappointed in your aims;

but if you join both together, you may depend upon it, that God will give you every thing that is needful for you ; and however things go, you shall at least be tolerably for ever happy in the next.

Which that we may all be, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.





# SERMON V.

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Concerning extemporary Prayer.

I COR. XIV. 15.

*What is it then? I will pray with the Spirit,  
I will pray with the understanding also.*



HIS text, at the first view, seems a little remote from the business of this day, which is to commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, and the manifold and wonderful gifts which he then conferred upon them; but, when it comes to be explained, you will see it perfectly falls in with that argument; the subject-matter of this text, as you will find, being one of those spiritual extraordinary powers of the Holy Ghost then given to them, which are the proper objects of our meditation on this day.

There is none of us so ignorant as not to have heard of this term, of praying by the Spirit, or so little acquainted

quainted with the state of religion in this nation, as not to be sensible what a bone of contention it has been, and still is, amongst us. All parties do agree, that we ought to pray by the Spirit as much as we can, that is, that we ought by all means to endeavour after the assistance of the Holy Spirit in our prayers, and that then we pray most effectually to God, when we are most assisted by him. Thus far, I say, we are all agreed; but then, here we come to be divided, some of us think (namely, those that are of the communion of the church), that, as the measure of the Spirit's assistance is now afforded in the world, all the influence we are to expect from the Spirit in our prayers, is exciting in us pious desires, and devout affections, and faith in God, and resignation of ourselves to him, and those other qualities and dispositions of mind, that tend to make our prayers acceptable to our heavenly Father.

But, as to the form of our prayers, whether they be long or short, whether they be put into words, or sent up in thoughts and wishes, or, if put into words, whether they be conceived on a sudden, or premeditated, or whether they be in a set form of our composing, or in a form of words appointed us by others, we think these things no way concern our praying by the Spirit; we think we may as much pray by the Spirit in one way as in the other.

If we make any difference, it is this, that at all times we think it more decent, and more suitable to the reverence and dread we ought to have of the Divine Majesty, to offer up to him such prayers as we have well studied and thought on, than the sudden eruptions of our minds, especially in our more solemn addresses to the throne of grace; but then, when we come to wor-  
ship

ship God in public, we think it not only a matter of decency, but of duty too, if any set form be enjoined us by authority, to let alone our private conceived prayers, and to make use of that form.

On the contrary, there are others among us, that think we may expect the same assistance of the Spirit in our prayers, that the apostles and other first christians in the miraculous times did; and that God doth inspire his servants, especially his ministers, both with the matter of their prayers, and with the form too; putting not only the things that they should pray for into their hearts, but the very words and phrases into their mouths; and they account that this is the only praying by the Spirit; from whence they conclude, that no set forms of prayer are to be allowed, especially in the public service of God, because they are human inventions, of man's making, and not dictated or inspired by the Holy Ghost: The result of which sort of notions and principles is this, that upon occasion hereof not only a great disgust is taken at our worship, but men think themselves obliged in conscience to separate from our communion, because our church is so far from enjoining, that she discourages those spiritual prayers, tying us up to a set form of service. How, say they, can we join with your church, when your service is only will-worship? You have no praying by the Spirit among you, but every one reads his prayers out of a book: Can that be a pure apostolical church of Christ that thus suppresses and thus stifles the gifts of the Spirit, expressly contrary to the apostle's command, who bids us not to quench the Spirit?

This, as I take it, is the state of the difference amongst us, as to the point of praying by the Spirit: Not that I would insinuate, that all the dissenters carry

the matter so far as I have now represented ; for a great many of them do allow of forms of prayer, nay, and zealously contend for them ; but others are as much against them, and that upon the grounds I have now mentioned.

Having so fair an occasion now given me (the argument of the day being the gifts of the Spirit) I mean, with all plainness and brevity, to discuss this matter ; and I hope I shall put it in so fair a light, that there can no doubt remain with any one on what side of the question the truth lies : And I will do my endeavour likewise to manage this dispute with such temper, that even they that are of a different opinion shall have no reason to be offended ; for I often think of a saying of Mr. Chillingworth's, I would in the pulpit use none as enemies but the devil and sin.

The method I shall take in the discussing this point, shall be to make out these four following propositions ; which if they can be made out, all the difficulty that seems to be in this argument does perfectly vanish :

First of all therefore, I shall shew, that praying by the Spirit, in the sense that the apostle meant, is so far from being a perpetual duty required of all christians, that, as far as we know, no christian now living can with reason pretend to that gift.

Secondly, I shall shew, that that which is now called praying by the Spirit, that is, the conceiving of prayers on a sudden without study and premeditation, and expressing our conceptions with great fluency and movingness of words and gestures, is so far from being the immediate effect of the Spirit of God, that, generally speaking, it is the effect of art or industry, or a present heat of temper.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, I shall shew, that if there be any other notion of praying by the Spirit in scripture, such as is to be extended to all times and ages of christianity, and is not peculiar to the apostolical age, that notion will every jot as well fit and suit with set forms of prayer, as with those prayers that we call extemporary.

Fourthly, I shall shew, that though we should suppose that God, even in these days, doth assist men, both as to the matter, and even the words of their prayers, yet we have more reason to believe, that the public prayers of the church were indited and contrived by that Spirit of God, than we have to believe that any private man's prayers are; and, consequently, that, when we use them, we pray as much by the Spirit, as when we use sudden conceived prayers.

I begin with the first of these propositions, which is this; That praying by the Spirit in the sense of the text I am now upon, (which indeed is the chief text that gave rise to this expression, and accordingly the meaning of the expression ought to be governed by the meaning of the text; I say, praying by the Spirit, as the apostle here speaks of it) is so far from being a perpetual duty required of all christians, that it is much to be doubted whether any christian now living can with any reason pretend to that gift.

And the reason is evident, because this was one of the extraordinary miraculous gifts, which God, for the gaining credit to christianity, and supplying the necessities of the then infant church, was pleased to confer upon the apostles, and other christians of that age; which gifts, as christianity got footing in the world, did, by degrees, wear out, and at last, perfectly ceased.

Now

Now that praying by the Spirit was one of those extraordinary graces, it is plain enough from the whole discourse of the apostle in this chapter; for, according to him, praying with the Spirit, and singing with the Spirit, and blessing with the Spirit, are but so many several exercises of the gift of languages, or that power which the christians were then endowed with of speaking in unknown tongues, which they had never learned.

I shall make the matter very plain to you: The church of Corinth, to whom St. Paul writes this epistle, was at that time favoured with many eminent gifts of the Spirit; but it seems several of those that had these gifts did not make that use of them which they were given for: For, whereas the gift of tongues was chiefly bestowed for the conversion of infidels, to be a sign (as the apostle speaks in verse 22. of this chapter) *not to them that believe, but to them that believe not*, those men took a pride in exercising this gift in the christian congregation, making prayers, and hymns, and thanksgivings, at their public meetings, in a language that the people understood not, and, consequently, from which they could receive no benefit. This abuse now, it is the design of the apostle in this chapter to reform, and, at the same time, to regulate the exercise of their other several gifts; and the great rule which he lays down in this matter, is, that all things in the church ought to be done with decency and order, and to the edification of the congregation, and that no spiritual gift is any farther valuable, than as it is employed to the benefit of others; and, consequently, either let them not at all make use of their gift of languages in the church, or, if they will make use of it, let them either themselves, or some other for them, interpret to the



the people what they mean, so that the whole congregation may understand and be edified. If we now take this key, we shall have an easy entrance into the sense of this whole chapter.

At this time I shall concern myself with no more of it, than what is needful for the giving light to my text; let it be observed therefore, that two verses before my text the apostle gives this advice, namely, in the 13th verse: *Wherefore* (saith he) *let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue* (he means of speaking in the christian assemblies) *pray that he may interpret.* This advice he backs with this reason, in the verse before my text, *For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.* As if he had said, the necessity of speaking in a known tongue, or at least of interpreting what is spoken in an unknown tongue, doth appear from hence; that if any of us do, in the congregation, pray, for instance, in an unknown tongue, it it is true, the Spirit within him prayeth, or he doth indeed pray by the Spirit, but nevertheless, if he make none but such prayers, or do not interpret such when he makes them, his mind, his meaning, is unfruitful, yields no profit to the hearer, others receive no benefit, no edification, by what he prayeth; that is plainly the sense of this verse; and then it follows in the words of my text, *What is it then? I will pray with the Spirit, I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the Spirit, I will sing with the understanding also;* that is, if I do sometimes make use of my gift of tongues, that the Spirit hath bestowed upon me, either in praying, or singing of psalms, yet I will also take care so to pray and sing as to be understood; I will not be so wholly taken up in praying and singing by the Spirit, but I will pray

pray and sing also as others do, that have not that gift of the Spirit; that is, in a language that the congregation understands, as well as myself; or if I do pray by the Spirit, I will at least take care to interpret.

That this is the true and the only sense here of praying by the Spirit, and praying with the understanding, is undeniably plain from what follows in the four next ensuing verses; for thus the apostle goes on in verses 16, 17, 18, 19. *Otherwise, when thou shalt bless with the Spirit (that is, praise God) how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified: I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet, in the church, I would rather speak five words with understanding, that by my voice I might teach others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.*

You see here all along, that speaking by the Spirit is speaking in a unknown language; and speaking with the understanding is speaking words that others may understand.

Taking this now to be a true account of the text (as without doubt it is) we have got these four things by it:

First of all, in general, that the gift of praying by the Spirit, was in the number of those miraculous extraordinary gifts that were in a plentiful manner showered down by the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on this day of Pentecost, and, by laying on their hands, communicated to others afterwards, during that age.

Secondly, For the more particular account of this gift, it was a branch of the gift of tongues, or rather,

to speak properly, it was one of the instances by which the gift of languages was expressed.

Thirdly, That this faculty of praying by the Spirit was so far from being the most useful or edifying, or the most desirable gift in the church, that St. Paul prefers prophesying (the gift of preaching or interpreting scripture) far before it, as you may see in the four first verses of this chapter: Nay, he prefers praying in the ordinary way, before praying by the Spirit, telling us, that he had rather speak five words in the church to be understood, than a thousand in an unknown language, though yet that language was inspired by the Spirit.

Fourthly, From all that has been said it appears, that no man now living can with any greater reason pretend to this gift of praying by the Spirit, in the sense the apostle speaks of it, than he can to the power of speaking strange languages without ever having learnt them, or than he can to the power of discovering thoughts, or curing all diseases, or foretelling things to come, or any other of the spiritual gifts that the apostle here treats of.

But it may be asked, Is there no other notion of praying by the Spirit than that we have now mentioned? Did not the Holy Spirit of God furnish his servants with matter to pray for, in those days, as well as languages to pray in? and did he not inspire them to pray in a known language, as well as in an unknown? and this immediately; so that when they prayed, they might be truly said to be filled with the Holy Ghost?

I answer, perhaps it might, nay, for my part, I think it probable it was so; we have many reasons to incline us to believe, that, in the first age of christianity, when the church was propagated and governed in an extraordinary way, and there were many sudden

sudden emergent necessities to be supplied, which could not at that time be provided for in the regular way, that God hath since taken care they shall be ; I say, it is very probable, that as God did inspire some with a miraculous gift of interpreting scripture, and applying types and prophecies, and others with a gift of composing psalms and hymns for the benefit of the church, and others with the gift of foretelling things to come, he did others also with the gift of prayer, prompting and enabling them, in an extraordinary manner, to put up such petitions as their own spirits could never have suggested to them, but which were suitable to the present exigency and necessities of the church : And of those persons it may be truly said, that they prayed by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost : And I must confess, of this way of praying by the Spirit I would interpret that famous and difficult passage of St. Paul, in the eighth of the Romans, 26 and 27 verses, where he hath these words ; *Likewise (saith he) the Spirit helpeth our infirmities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered ; and he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

It is plain that he is here speaking of those that had the first-fruits of the Spirit, that is, were endowed with extraordinary gifts, such as we have been all this while speaking of. This appears from the 23d verse, and therefore it is most likely that the Spirit's helping their infirmities, and making intercession for them, was his extraordinary exciting and directing some particular persons to put up prayers for the congregation, and inspiring them with strong desires and earnest groans  
after

after such and such things ; which though they could not fully comprehend the meaning of, yet God who knew the mind of the Spirit, saw that they were for the good of the church.

Thus I am sure St. Chrysoſtom (the beſt interpreter of ſcripture of all the antients) expounds the place, whoſe words, becauſe they are remarkable, and give a clear account of the text, I ſhall tranſlate to you.

Having named this text, he tells us, “ That it was  
“ a very obſcure paſſage, becauſe many of thoſe mira-  
“ cles which were done in the time when St. Paul  
“ wrote that epiſtle, were now ceaſed in the world.  
“ Therefore (ſaith he) in order to the opening the  
“ ſenſe of this place, it will be neceſſary to acquaint  
“ you with the ſtate of things at that time. Now what  
“ was that ? Why God beſtowed ſeveral gifts on all  
“ thoſe that undertook the profeſſion of chriſtianity ;  
“ which gifts were alſo called by the name of the Spi-  
“ rit. One, for inſtance, obtained the gift of pro-  
“ pheſy, and did foretel future events ; another had  
“ the gift of wiſdom, and inſtructed the people ; ano-  
“ ther had the gift of healing, and he cured the ſick ;  
“ another had the gift of power, and he raiſed the  
“ dead ; another had the gift of tongues, and he ſpake  
“ in ſeveral languages. Moreover, with all theſe  
“ there was a gift of prayer, which is alſo called by  
“ the name of the Spirit ; and he that had this prayed  
“ for all the multitude. For, becauſe, not knowing  
“ many of thoſe things which are good for us, we de-  
“ fire thoſe that are not (as it is ſaid here, we know  
“ not what to pray for as we ought), the gift of  
“ prayer came upon ſome man ; and he ſtood up in  
“ the name of all, to deſire that which was good for  
“ the

“ the church in common, and taught others to do it.  
 “ And he that was thought worthy of this gift, stood  
 “ with much compunction, and many groans (such  
 “ as prostrate a man’s mind before God) and asked  
 “ those things that were for the public benefit; cor-  
 “ respondent whereunto, in our time, is the minister  
 “ of the congregation, when he offers to God the  
 “ prayers for the people.” Thus far St. Chrysoftom.

But now taking all this for granted, that men in those days, especially the public ministers of the church, were thus immediately inspired by the Holy Ghost in their prayers for the congregation; yet it doth not from hence follow, that any christian now, either is so inspired, or ought to expect it. For this you see was one of the *charismata*, one of the spiritual gifts peculiar to that age; and there is not the same reason that it should be vouchsafed now: And if any one would make us believe he is endowed with such a gift, he ought, in reason, to give us evidence of his having some of the other gifts that were then common in the church: If he can infallibly expound all difficult passages of scripture, or read the Hebrew bible in his mother-tongue, having yet never learned that language; then we may be inclined to believe that he can pray by the Spirit, as those apostolical persons did.

But what then is the sense of St. Paul, when he bids you not to quench the Spirit? 1 Theff. v. 19. Is not this a command that concerns all christians? And is not the meaning of it that they should not stifle the inspiration of the Spirit, when they are at prayers, by any set form, but freely speak as the Spirit gives them utterance.

I answer, that this text also refers to those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit we have been all this while speaking

speaking of; as appears by the precept which follows after, *Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesyings.* And therefore it doth no way concern us, otherwise than by way of accommodation; and the plain sense of it is no more than this, that those christians, whom God had blessed with those miraculous powers, whether they were the gifts of healing, or of tongues, or any of the rest, they should be very careful that they did not, either by their careless life, or their neglect to make use of them to good purposes, occasion God's withdrawing of them: for if they made an ill use, or no use of them, he that gave them would take them away; that heavenly fire of the Spirit would, by these means, be extinguished in their hearts.

And thus much let it suffice to have spoken on the first point, which I have been the longer upon, for the sake of explaining those texts of scripture which have moved so many scruples in mens minds.

Secondly, I now come to the second point, which is this; that that which we now-a-days are used to call praying by the Spirit, that is, the conceiving prayers on a sudden, without study or premeditation, and expressing our conceptions with great fluency, and movingness of speech and action, is not often, as we are apt to take it, the immediate effect of the Spirit of God, and inspiration; but, generally speaking, the work of art or industry, or the present heat of a man's head.

Far am I here from disparaging the gift of voluntary and extemporary prayer, or crying down the use of it: It is certainly, as all other accomplishments that a man has, the very gift of God, and great benefit may redound both to a man's self and others, by a prudent and discreet use of it. And much farther am I from denying

denying the necessity of the Holy Spirit's concurrence or assistance in our prayers; on the contrary, I believe that whosoever is not assisted by the Spirit when he prays, cannot pray as he ought to do, and I doubt not but both those that pray in a form, and without one, if they be pious good persons, are assisted by the Spirit when they pray. But this I say, the faculty of praying plausibly, fluently, and movingly, in an extemporary way, if we consider it in itself, is not, in these days, an inspired gift, but rather a gift of nature, or an acquisition of art; or rather, to speak properly, a gift acquired by art in a person that has a nature and genius fitted for it. My reasons for this are very briefly these:

First of all, there are as certain rules and methods for the attaining this faculty of voluntary extemporary prayer, as there are for the attaining any other art and science. The truth of this appears both from the books that have been written to teach men the gift of praying, and the experience of many that have been eminent in this gift, who, if they be asked, cannot deny but that they came by it in the same way, that they come by other acquired gifts; that is to say, by reading the word of God, and other divine books, by study and meditation, by well digesting in their minds the several heads of matter that are either to be confessed, or prayed for, or thanks returned for them; by treasuring up in their memories, out of the scripture, and other good books, apt and fit phrases for the expressing these matters; and lastly, and principally, by much use and exercise: And there is no doubt, but whoever useth this method, shall, in a little time, attain to a competent skill and readiness in this gift of extemporary prayer; supposing he hath but a sufficient  
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stock of natural parts, and a genius that lies that way. I add these two last things, because every art requires a peculiar capacity and fitness of temper in him that is to learn it; so that though it have in it certain and fixed maxims and precepts, and so is teachable, yet it is not teachable to every person, because every person is not qualified with natural abilities for the learning of it. There are several that may prove very good mathematicians, that yet would make but very bad orators, because their parts are suited very well for one science, but not so well for the other; and this rule holds in this very gift we are speaking of, as well as others. Those that have a competent memory, and a good assurance, and a ready presence of mind to recollect things on a sudden, and a dexterity in putting them handsomely together, and expressing their conceptions easily and naturally; these are much better contrived in their natures for the gift of prayer, and shall much sooner obtain it, than those whose natural talents lie another way; yet for all this, the whole thing is an art notwithstanding.

And that it is so, is in the second place very easily discoverable to any diligent observer, even from the way of the management and performance of it. For, if ever we have given ourselves to observe the prayers of this kind, we shall find that though the speaker doth not confine himself to any particular set form, but varies his prayers every time; yet, in the compass of a few prayers, both the same heads of matter will return, and the very same set of phrases and expressions likewise; though perhaps not marshalled just in the same method or order: So that any one that has been long used to a particular person, may, upon the reading of a prayer copied from his mouth, be able to say, without

out a mistake. This prayer is of the composure of such a man. If now this be true, doth it not shew that the gift of praying on a sudden, is rather the effect of art and use, than of the immediate inspiration of the Spirit? Nay, Is it not an evidence that these sort of prayers are not so sudden and extemporary as we take them for? but are really owing to a set form or scheme, both of matter and phrases, which the person that useth them hath fixed in his mind, though we discover it not?

But, thirdly, There is this farther evidence, that the faculty of extemporary prayer is not from the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, but from something else; because those that are happiest at this kind of way, cannot always pray alike; but at several times find a great difference in their performances: Sometimes they can with great freedom pour out their souls unto God, as the word is, at other times they are much streightened in spirit; sometimes a great plenty of matter offers itself to them, and they can utter it with great volubility of tongue, and aptness of expression, and excite strange passions and affections in the hearers; at other times they are barren and dry, and their words come with difficulty; and whilst their inventions are at work in searching for new matter, they are forced to fill up the intermediate spaces with such words and phrases as come first to hand, or are most at their tongue's end, or else with the repetition of the same thing over again. It is no disparagement to any man's parts, sometimes to be reduced to these inconveniencies; for the eloquentest man in the world, if he speak without premeditation, and thinks himself obliged to speak a considerable time, cannot avoid them. But, in the mean time, this is a shrewd argument, that these kind of prayers are not dictated or in-

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dited by the Holy Ghost; for he cannot be supposed to be ever at a loss for furnishing those tongues that he makes his instruments, with what is next to be spoken.

But, fourthly, if what has been said be not true; if the faculty of praying eloquently and devoutly on a sudden, be not a natural gift or acquired art, but the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, as some of us have thought, it will be a hard matter to rid ourselves of several consequences, which we should be loth to own.

I only name these two: First, it will follow from hence, that all those prayers that are made in this way, have in them as much divinity, as much infallible truth, and are of as great authority, as the word of God; and that, if they be put into writing, they ought to be as much revered by us, and by all christians, as the holy scripture; for according to this doctrine, the Holy Ghost is as much the author of these, as he is of the inspired books.

And, secondly, another consequence of this doctrine is this, That upon supposition hereof we must be forced to father upon the Holy Ghost not only all the indecencies, all the indiscretions, all the vain repetitions or impertinencies, that any extemporary prayers that have been put up in the church have had in them: But, if there have been any thing worse than these; if ever any rude language hath been given to God Almighty; if ever any false representations have been made of his attributes; if ever any unsound doctrines have been couched in prayer, tending to faction or rebellion, or the like; all these things must have the patronage of the Spirit, who must be supposed to be the author or inspirer of them.

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But I take no pleasure in mentioning these things, and therefore I will not insist upon them; but pass on to the third general proposition I am to make out, and that is this: If there be any other notion of praying by the Spirit in scripture, such as is to be extended to all times and ages of christianity, and is not peculiar to the first; that notion will every whit as well suit with forms of prayer, as with these that are conceived upon the sudden and present occasion.

There is a spirit of prayer spoken of in Scripture, which I doubt not but God hath endued, and doth and will endue his people with to the end of the world; and perhaps this phrase of praying in the Spirit, or by the Spirit, may, in one or two texts, be used in the same signification. So that to pray by the Spirit shall mean the same thing as to have the spirit of prayer. And in this sense nobody will question that praying by the Spirit is a perpetual duty, is of perpetual use, and denotes a perpetual assistance of the Holy Spirit of God.

But now, what is the spirit of prayer? Why, nobody that reads the scripture, and considers how that term is there used, but will be satisfied, that it imports neither more nor less than the grace of praying as we ought to do: Just as the spirit of wisdom, or the spirit of knowledge, or the spirit of truth, or the spirit of meekness, are those several graces and virtues of wisdom, knowledge, truth, and meekness, that are wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. So that whoever reverently and humbly addresseth himself to God Almighty, seriously acknowledging on one hand his own vileness and unworthiness, and manifold necessities; and on the other hand God's infinite power, and wisdom, and goodness; professing to depend upon him entirely; dreading his displeasure; earnestly seeking  
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his grace and favour; and devoutly rendering thanks to him for all his mercies, such a man hath the spirit of prayer. When he prays with this mind, with these dispositions, with these devout affections, he truly prays by the Spirit; because these qualities are wrought in him by the Spirit of God; he had not had them but through the influence and assistance of the Holy Ghost. But now, I beseech you, what is all this, either to praying by a form; or praying in an extemporary way? Why may not I be thought to have these qualifications, these devout affections, this ardency and fervency of mind towards God, when I pray in words ready made to my hands, as well as when I pray in words that I thought not on before? And, consequently, why must I be said to pray by the Spirit in one way, and not in the other? Add to this, in the last place, which is the fourth proposition I am to speak to, that though we should suppose that God, even in these days, doth assist men, both as to the matter and even the words of their prayers; yet we have as much reason to believe that the public prayers of the church were indited and contrived by that Spirit of God, as we have to believe that any private man's prayers are, and consequently, that when we use them we pray as much by the Spirit, as when we use extemporary prayer.

This proposition is so evident, that I need speak very few words towards the clearing of it. The thing lies here, whether is it not, at least, as likely, that when a company of learned, religious, devout men are met together, by the command of authority, to consider of a public standing liturgy to be used in the church, and spare no care, nor pains, nor study, to form one as exactly as may be, according to the will of God declared in holy scripture; and not only so, but earnestly de-

fire of God the assistance and direction of his Spirit to go along with them in that work; I say, whether it is not at least as probable that such men as these, taking this method, shall be extraordinarily assisted by the Spirit, in the carrying on this undertaking? nay (and if the Spirit now-a-days does vouchsafe such inspirations), shall be immediately inspired, both as to the matter and the words that they agree upon, as it is probable that a particular person that comes up in a congregation shall, without any premeditation or care of his, be thus inspired? Can we reasonably imagine that God's Spirit will indite a prayer for this latter man, will dictate to him what he is to say, and will take no care of the former, give them no assistance in the forming of their prayers? Sure the thing is inconceivable! And yet this is directly the case of our common-prayer on one hand, and extemporary public prayer on the other; so that if we will not be partial in our giving judgment, we ought to think that when we pray by the public liturgy, we pray at least as much (if not more) the prayers of the Spirit, as when we go along with a man that uses his extemporary faculty.

And thus have I gone through the four points I proposed; and, I hope, by this time, you are convinced what little force there is in all that noise that has been made about praying by the Spirit, to make us quit our public liturgy for extemporary prayer.

I might add abundance of things more (if I would enter into a common place) both about the needfulness and expediency of a set form of service in the worship of God; but my business was only to explain a text: Only one thing farther I cannot but take notice of, because my text leads me to it. You may observe here, that St. Paul joins those two things together, praying  
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with the Spirit, and singing with the Spirit. What is it then? (saith he) *I will pray with the Spirit, I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, I will sing with the understanding also.* Praying and singing of psalms, as they do now, so they did in those times, always go together in the public worship of God.

Well now, What do we infer from hence? Why, you shall see: If praying by the Spirit be extemporary praying in opposition to a form, then certainly singing by the Spirit must be extemporary singing in opposition to the reading of psalms out of a book; if we be for the one, we ought not certainly to be against the other; and yet there is none of us, that I know of (except the Quakers, perhaps), but are so far from being against it, that they are zealous for the singing psalms that are in the end of the bible. Here we can dispense with a form, and a constant form, in the worship of God, and think too that this form will well enough consist with singing by the Spirit; and is it not then unreasonable that we should scruple at a form of prayers (a form too that hath much fewer exceptions to be made against it, than those psalms have) only upon this account or pretence, that we cannot pray by the Spirit in the use of it? If we think that we sing by the Spirit in a set form of words, in God's name why should we not as well think that we may pray by the Spirit in a set form of words also? For I am sure there is no difference in the world.

But I will hold you no longer, I come to a conclusion, and that is this, that all we who are of the communion of the church of England, ought not only to be contented and satisfied that we have, ever since the reformation, had a liturgy, and so good a one, but also,

also, most heartily to thank God for the continuance of it to us, and for the affording us such peaceable times that we may, without fear or danger, every day in the year, if we please, serve God in it; this is a blessing that the primitive christians would have purchased with the dearest things they had in the world, though too many of us do make slight of it: But whatever prejudice some persons may lie under, as to our service or way of worship, I dare affirm, with the greatest assurance in the world, that it is a certain and safe way to salvation, to all those that make use of it, provided they add the other qualifications of sincere piety, and soberness, and righteousness, in all their conversation, which the gospel of Christ requires of all its professors, and without which no man living, in any communion whatsoever, shall ever see the face of God.

Our worship is right, and sound, and agreeable both to the word of God, and the platform of primitive practice: And if our lives and conversations be but as unblameable as it is, I am as sure, as I am that Christ's religion is true, that no man that useth it shall fail of being saved.

Let us therefore go on in the way we are in; let us take all opportunities of resorting to God's house, and there offering up our solemn sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving in those methods that the law hath appointed us: But above all, let us come with humble, penitent, and contrite hearts, sensible of our sins, and solicitous for God's favour and mercy, and thankful for his mercies, and full of resolution to obey him, to love him, and to serve him all the days of our lives; and if we come thus qualified, assuredly we pray by the Spirit, we bless and thank God with the Spirit,



we sing with the Spirit, as much as in these days it is given to any one to do: And God will hear our prayers, and accept our thanksgivings, and reward our service with all the happiness and conveniencies of this life, that he sees fit and proper for us; but, to be sure, with everlasting glory and felicities in the life to come: To which God bring us all for the sake, &c.





# S E R M O N VI.

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About the profitableness of Prayer.

JOB. XXI. 15. *The latter part of the verse.*

—*What profit should we have if we pray unto him.*



THE whole verse is this—

*What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?*

So said the atheists in the days of Job, and so we may hear some among us say now: For it is no strange thing, in this age, to hear men talk against the duties of religion, as well as the doctrines of it, and against no duty more than that of praying to God, of which Job here speaks. This, though one would think it should be the most natural, the most reasonable duty in the world, considering that we are all the creatures of

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of God, and do and must depend upon him continually for all the good we hope for, either here or hereafter, yet it is accounted by some among us, a very unphilosophical absurd thing: If we would place religion in acts of justice and beneficence, and such other moral virtues, they could be content so far to own it: Nay, they would not be against the exercising our devotions to God by way of hymns and praises for his excellencies and wonderful works, though yet he stands in need of none of our service; but as for this business of praying to him, and tiring him every day with our petitions, and supplications, and intercessions, in which the godly people spend most of their time, there is no sense, no reason in it; nay, they have unanswerable reasons to prove that all this is labour lost, and time spent very unprofitably.

It is my design at this time, to vindicate this part of religion from the cavils and exceptions of this sort of men, and to give an answer to them that are apt to ask, with those that are here represented in my text, *What profit shall we have if we pray unto God?*

Now, methinks, to those that put such such a question as this, it should in reason be a sufficient answer to represent these following things:

First of all; That all good men who have seriously applied themselves to God by prayer, have always had, and still have, many and great instances and experience of God's answering their prayers: And there is no devout man (and such kind of men only are capable judges of this matter), but is ready to attest the truth of this; so that here is constant experience on the side of prayer, against their philosophical doubt.

Secondly, It has been the general belief of all nations, in all ages, that God hears the prayers of good men,

and answers them; and accordingly all nations have always made use of this way for the obtaining those benefits they stood in need of, and for the removing those evils they were pressed with; so that as there is experience on the side of praying to God, so there is likewise the universal consent and practice of all the world.

Thirdly, If we may believe God's revelations, which he hath made in the holy scriptures, we are certain that there is great profit and advantage to be found in praying to God; for God hath, in those scriptures, made the most solemn promises that he will hear and grant all the prayers of his servants, if they be put up to him as they ought to be; and a great many instances we find in these scriptures wherein God hath remarkably made these promises good.

Fourthly, and lastly, God hath, in these scriptures, laid so great a stress upon this duty of prayer, and declared it to be so necessary in order to the obtaining the good things we stand in need of, that he hath told us, without our prayers we shall not have them; so that surely, all these things considered, it is not in vain that we should serve God, neither is it without profit that we should pray unto him.

Well, but all this doth not satisfy that sort of people which we have to deal with: What do we talk to them of experience, and revelations, so long as the thing itself is against reason, so long as, in the nature of the thing, it is absurd to think that our prayers should help us in any distress?

Now, for the proof of this, they argue four several ways: Some argue from the immutability of God's nature, others from his essential goodness, others from his eternal decrees, and lastly, others from the frame

of the world, and the established course of nature. From all these topics they draw arguments, and, they think, very strong ones, to prove that our prayers signify nothing as to any real benefit we receive from them.

Well! let us, at this time, examine these their arguments one by one, and see what force there is in them for the inferring this conclusion; I am confident you will be satisfied that there is none at all, though yet I shall give them all the weight they are capable of.

The first argument, against the needfulness or efficacy of prayer, is drawn from the immutability of the nature of God, and it runs thus: To suppose that our prayers are at any time effectual, or, which is all one, that God doth at any time grant the requests that are put up to him, is to suppose that he doth, upon our prayers, bestow something upon us, which without our prayers he would not have done; which is in effect to say, that our prayers can produce a change, an alteration in the mind of God; for before our prayers, he was not inclined or disposed to give us such and such blessings, but after our prayers he is: So that, according to this doctrine, God is so far from being immutable by his nature, that it is in the power of the most contemptible man in the world to make him alter his purpose, which is very impious to affirm, and directly contrary even to our own scripture propositions, which declare, *That with God there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*, James i. 17. *And that the strength of Israel, as he cannot lye, so neither can he repent; for he is not a man that he should repent*, 1 Sam. xv. 29.

This is the argument; but in truth, if it be examined, it is a mere fallacy. God's hearkening to, or being moved by the prayers we put up to him, doth not

in the least clash with his attribute of immutability. It is true, when upon our prayers God is pleased to give us those things we pray for, which without our prayers he would not have done, it cannot be denied but that there is a change somewhere; but if the matter be examined, it will be found to be in us, and not in God. God's mind was always the same towards us; that is, he resolved that if we humbly and heartily begged such or such things at his hands, we should have them; but if not, we should go without them. When therefore upon our prayers we obtain that grace or that blessing which we had not before, it is not He that is changed, but we. We, by performing the conditions he required of us, do look with another aspect to him, do intitle ourselves to another kind of dealing from him, than we could claim before. We have made ourselves capable of receiving those benefits, which before we were not.

To put this yet into a clearer light, if it be possible. Suppose a father had a son that had carried himself very unworthily and disobediently to him, whereupon he is so displeased, that he casts him off, and resolves never to receive him again, unless he comes and humbles himself, acknowledges his fault, and begs pardon (which is the same thing with the prayer we are now speaking of); but if he will do thus, he will be reconciled to him. We will suppose now that the son by extremity of want, or other streights that he is reduced to, doth at last become sensible of his folly, and that sense puts him upon returning to his father, and closing with those conditions of pardon he is pleased to offer him; and accordingly with the prodigal in the gospel he comes home, and falling down before his father he saith, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee,*

*thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son*: He confesseth his faults, and implores his father's forgiveness. Upon this, as it followeth in the parable, the father receiveth him, takes him home to him, cloathes him anew, grants all the requests he puts up to him, and makes a feast for his return. Here now is a most visible alteration. The son that was before in a most deplorable condition, as can be, is now put into happy circumstances. The father that had before abandoned him, now receives him, and rejoiceth in him. But is this alteration produced in the father or in the son? Not in the father certainly, for he acts punctually according to his first resolutions or determinations, that he had set down with himself, which indeed were infinitely just and reasonable. But the alteration is in the son, who by performing the conditions which his father required of him, hath rendered himself a different object from what he was before; he was before an object of his father's wrath and displeasure; he is now an object of his pity and kindness: And accordingly as he felt before the effects of the former, so now he feels the effects of the latter. But these different effects do no more argue any change or inconstancy in the father, than it doth imply a change and inconstancy in any person, that he is differently affected towards persons that have contrary qualities. The application of this is so easy to the case we are upon, that every body may make it.

And thus much for the first objection against prayer drawn from God's immutability. The second is drawn from another attribute, and that is God's infinite and essential goodness; and thus it proceeds: If God in his nature is the most perfect love and goodness, that is conceivable; then it is certain he manages the affairs  
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of the world in the best way that is possible ; as he most truly knows what is most convenient for his creatures, and as his power can easily effect what he knows to be so ; so, if his goodness be equal either to his knowledge or his power, it shall certainly and eternally take effect, let all the world do what they can to the contrary : To suppose otherwise, is to suppose that it is possible for God to order and manage things better than he doth ; which is as much as to say, that God is not so good as he may be conceived to be. If this now be admitted, what need is there that any of us should spend our breath in prayers for any thing ? If it be fit, that the things we desire should be given us, God's goodness is such that he will give it us whether we ask it or no. As he hath no need to be told of our wants, so needs he not be importuned for a supply of them. On the other side, if what we pray for be not fitting or convenient for us, then all our praying, be it never so importunately, will be to no purpose ; for God will do nothing but what is for the best.

This is the objection : But to one that considers well, it will appear to have no manner of force in it. It is granted that the goodness of God is infinite, and that he governs the world in the best way that is possible, and consequently he always will do that which is best, let us behave ourselves how we please. All this is granted : But doth it from hence follow, that we shall have all such things as we stand in need of, whether we pray for them or no ? Not in the least. The plain state of the matter is this : The same God that will do always what is absolutely best for his creatures, knows that it is best for them, that in order to the partaking of his benefits, they should pray for them ; if they do not, why then he knows it is best that they should



should be denied them. So that the necessity of God's acting for the best, doth not in the least destroy the necessity of prayer, in order to our obtaining what we stand in need of: God will do always that which is best, but we are mistaken if we think it is for the best that we should have our necessities supplied without the use of prayer. God will always take care of that which is most fit and convenient for his creatures, but he sees likewise; that it is then only fit and convenient that they should have this or the other mercy or blessing conferred upon them, when they heartily and earnestly pray for it.

This is the plain state of the case, from whence appears what little force there is in the objection. The truth is, this objection, if there was any weight in it, would as much strike at the use of all other means for the obtaining of what we want, as it does at prayer: For thus we may argue, for instance; If God sees it fit for me, and for the world, that I should recover of this sickness that I now lie under, or that I should live seven years longer, he will certainly take care that it shall be so, since his goodness is as infinite as his power; and whatever he can do, he will do, if it be for the best to be done. And therefore, what need is there that I shall apply to a physician, or use any means for the recovery of my health, or to what purpose should I take pains for a livelihood, or so much as be at the trouble of putting meat to my mouth for the prolongation of my life?

This is just the very same argument that is used in the objection: But now, if any will be so easy as to be convinced hereby that there is no need of taking physic in the ease of sickness, or of eating and drinking for the preserving their lives, I will allow they have reason

son to be convinced that there is no need of praying for the obtaining good things at the hand of God ; but otherwise not.

But, thirdly, other people argue against prayer upon another topic : Their objection is drawn from the eternal decrees of God : They suppose that all things that come to pass in the world (even the least) were fore-ordained by God, from all eternity, that they should so come to pass, that it is impossible they should happen otherwise ; there is no event, no action so small and inconsiderable, but it is an object of God's predestination, and therefore must as certainly take place in its succession, as it is certain God's counsels are more steadfast than man's. Now, upon this supposition, what can our prayers signify ? Whatever shall befall us is already decreed, be it good, or bad : And can we by our prayers hope to reverse the decrees of heaven, or make void the counsels of God ? If it be good, it will come upon us without our prayers ; if it be bad, our prayers cannot prevent it.

This is the objection : But in answer thereto, I desire to represent these four things :

First, This objection proves too much to prove any thing ; for it concludes as much against the use of any human means or endeavours for the attaining of any thing, as it doth against prayer : which was a fault I took notice of in the last objection. May not every lazy, careless person use the same pretence of eternal decrees, whenever he is called upon to mind his business, or to take care of his health, or to look after the salvation of his soul ? May he not say, as to the first of these, It is certain that God, long before I was born, determined the circumstances I should be in, as to riches and poverty, and such kind of things ? If he hath predetermined

mined me to be rich, I shall certainly be so without any care of mine : if to be poor, all my endeavours and diligence in my business will be to no purpose.

Thus again as to the other case, I can live no longer, and shall die no sooner than my appointed time, and therefore what matters it, what dangers I run into, or what riots and debauches I am guilty of? Thus again, as to the business of our salvation, I am from all eternity either elected or reprobated : If I be one of the elect, then I shall certainly at last come to heaven, let my life be what it will ; and therefore what need I think of repentance and holiness, and those other conditions they so much talk of? If these things be necessary, God will work them in me ; he that hath designed the end, will certainly take care of the means : On the other side, if I be in the number of the reprobate, to what purpose should I, by a solicitous and serious life, torment myself before the time? All my care and endeavour about my salvation cannot but be in vain, since the decrees of God are irreversible.

Thus you see the objection is as much levelled against all endeavours, and indeed against all human actions, as against prayer. I must confess I cannot answer the argument if we admit the doctrine of God's decrees to be so as is represented in the objection. But yet for all that, there are none of us do believe this argument to be conclusive, or if we do, it is certain we practise as if we did not ; for whatever we pretend to believe about God's having predetermined and fore-appointed all events that happen, yet this doth not hinder us from proposing several projects and designs to ourselves, and pursuing them eagerly, and taking a great deal of pains for the bringing them about ; so that at least both we and all mankind do practise as if we  
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thought our endeavours might be available for the obtaining our ends, and that God's decrees were not all in all.

But, secondly, Supposing God hath predetermined every event that comes to pass in the world, this doth not take away the necessity of prayer: I grant it gives it another kind of necessity than that we plead for; but still prayer there must be in order to the obtaining benefits. For he that predestinated to the end, must be supposed to have predestinated to the means too; and consequently if God hath decreed, that we shall have this or the other thing that we want, he must have decreed likewise, that we shall pray for it (supposing that prayer be a means to obtain benefits, as we are assured it is); and we shall by the virtue of his decrees as necessarily do the one (that is to say, pray), as to obtain the other (that is, his benefits). It is true, prayer, upon this supposition, is no virtue; nor indeed is any action we do: But, however, it is necessary; and so the force of the objection is overthrown.

But, thirdly, which I desire may be well considered, the very ground of the objection is not so evident, but it may be very justly called in question. It may very justly be doubted, whether God's predestination doth extend to all things and events; that is, whether God, from eternity, decreed every particular that is done or comes to pass, so that it could not be done or come to pass otherwise than it doth: It is a great deal more probable that he did not; but that having created a sort of beings with thinking rational souls, capable of acting freely, doing well, or doing ill (of which kind we find ourselves to be), he resolved to manage these beings in a way suitable to their own nature; that is to say, not necessarily to determine or tye up their choice,

or their actions, but to leave them to the use of their liberty, so that they might choose or refuse to act this way or the other, or not act at all; and accordingly as they used this liberty well or ill, so to reward or punish them. It is true he foresaw whatever would come to pass, and therefore hath made such provision, that, let what will come, all shall at last be to the glory of his goodness, and the benefit of the world; but he did not order or decree whatsoever was to come to pass. That which he decreed was, that, if men did well improve those talents he gave them, and used those means he afforded them for being happy, (of which means prayer is one, and a chief one), they should attain their end: If they did not, they should go without his blessing, and reap the fruits of their carelessness and folly, in misery both here and hereafter. Taking now this to be the true state of the matter, all the difficulty, concerning the needfulness or efficacy of prayer, or any other means, doth perfectly vanish; for we see from hence, that it is absolutely necessary, that we should pray, and use such other means as God hath appointed; and, if we do use them, they will be available; if we do not, we shall suffer the consequences of our neglect.

But, in the fourth and last place, some would say farther, That it is not so doubtful a matter, whether that doctrine of God's decrees, as the objection represents it, be true or no; for it is certain, that it is not true: For (say they) how can that be true, which is attended with such a train of absurdities and blasphemy, as no man of sense or religion can possibly own? If it be admitted, that God did from eternity decree every event and every action that ever came to pass, or was done in the world, and that they could not come to pass,  
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or be done, otherwise than they were, what will be the consequences thereof, but such as these? That the holy blessed God is the direct cause, and the author, of all the sins, and wickednesses, and villanies, that ever were committed, and of all the miseries and calamities that ever were suffered in the world; that no man is to be commended or praised, or to be reprov'd and found fault with, for any thing that he doth; that there never are, nor can be, any such things as virtue and vice, any such things as rewards or punishments, among men; which are positions so blasphemous, so destructive of all religion, nay, of all human society, that none can think of them without horror.

But I proceed to the fourth and last objection that is brought against the efficacy of prayer; and it is urged by another sort of men, and goes upon another hypothesis. It is of those that hold the necessity of all events upon mechanical principles. They believe the world to be a great machine, and whatsoever comes to pass therein is the effect of those fixed and unalterable laws of motion which are established in it; so that whatsoever happens among mankind hath a natural and a necessary cause to produce it: And therefore however in common speech we call those things that are grateful to us, the blessings of God; or, if they be grievous to us, we call them the punishments of God for our sins; yet they do and must happen promiscuously and indifferently to the good and to the bad: and therefore to what purpose is it to pray for the obtaining good things, or removing evil things from us, unless we can suppose, that, by our prayers, we can stop the course of nature, or prevail with God to stop it for our sakes?

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This is the objection, and two things I have to say in answer to it.

First, Though it should be granted, that all outward events owe their production immediately to outward and necessary causes, and that God doth not interpose in the hindering or furthering of them, but leaves second causes to work according to their nature; yet there is one whole kind of things, and those too, that either are, or ought to be, the great matter of our prayers, that the objection doth not at all reach to; that is to say, those that we call spiritual things; such are not only the pardon of our sins, and the favour of God, but all the perfections and accomplishments of our minds, wisdom, and virtue, and holiness, and the consequence thereof, eternal life. These, I hope, cannot be called the results of necessary outward things, but are the effects of God's grace, and our own endeavours. These therefore, I hope, it will be allowed, we may reasonably, and with assurance of success, pray for, notwithstanding any thing said in the objection to the contrary; because, for the attainment of these things, we must be immediately obliged to the divine assistance, which cannot be had without prayer; prayer being the same thing for the attaining this assistance and influence, that opening our eyes is for the receiving the light of the sun. Spiritual things, then, we may and must pray for; that is the first thing.

But, secondly, even for the outward events that come to us in this world, such as health or sickness, poverty or riches, peace or war, good or bad weather, plenty or scarcity, and all the other good or evil circumstances of life, though it be acknowledged, that all these have natural causes, yet they have not such natural causes as are necessary ones: They come to us  
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in a natural way, but they do not come to us in such a necessary unavoidable way, as the objection supposeth. For here is the thing: Granting, that God Almighty, in his government of the world, doth not usually step out into extraordinary actions beyond or above the course of nature, yet he hath so contrived the course of nature, that such events as we speak of may be hindered, or may be forwarded, may come to pass, or may not come to pass, may happen this way, or may happen another way, as men behave themselves towards God, and as he sees best for them; and this without any violence done to nature, or without transgressing the laws of it: So that there is room enough, abundantly enough, left both for our endeavours, and our prayers; and, accordingly as we use them, or not use them, so shall the success and the event prove. It is a great mistake to think, that the affairs of this outward world are managed wholly by mechanical powers, or, which is the same thing, by necessary causes; nay, the wills and the actions of mankind have a mighty influence upon them, as is visible in most of these things I mentioned, such as health and sickness, riches and poverty, peace and war, victories and overthrows, and other such like; and nobody, I hope, will say, that the actions of men are necessary. But, besides, the angels and separate spirits, who are in great numbers every-where, and are the invisible ministers of God's providence; they likewise have a mighty efficacy in producing the events that come to pass in the world; for they have not only an influence over the actions of mankind, by suggesting to their minds, upon such and such occasions, a thousand things, that perhaps they would otherwise never have thought on; but they have also a mighty influence over those powers of nature, that

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seem to act most necessarily, I mean the elements, as we call them, from whose various combinations arise storms and tempests, fruitful or barren seasons, sickly or healthful years. Both these causes, I say (the free as well as the necessary agents of this world) these invisible ministers of God so dispose, and direct, and order, as that they shall produce such events as God sees fittest for mankind, whether it be by way of judgment, as a punishment for their sins, or by way of mercy, as a testimony of God's acceptance of them; and all this, too, comes to pass in a natural way, that is, in the common and usual method of God's providence, in the government of the world: But then I add further, Whenever there happens a just occasion for God to exert his extraordinary power above or against the course of nature, he will not fail to do that likewise; and abundance of instances of that in his government of the world he hath given us, and, for any thing I know, doth yet give us.

These things considered, we have no reason to imagine, that, because things are commonly dispensed to us by the ministry of second causes, of which we can give some natural account, that therefore God had no hand in bringing such things to pass in the world, but that they come fortuitously or necessarily, and cannot be hindered or forwarded by the prayers and endeavours of mankind. No, certainly; though the effect, whatsoever it was, was produced immediately by second causes, yet it was God, that, by the ministry of his providence, laid the train of these causes, and so ordered and managed them, as that righteous and good ends should be served by the effects that they produced; so that, as our blessed Saviour hath told us, not so much as a sparrow doth fall to the ground, but that it may be truly said,  
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it is by the will of our heavenly Father. Every event that comes upon us is from him ; and, if it be beneficial to us, it is, and ought to be accounted, a blessing of his, let it come what way it will, whether by seeming chance, or our own industry, or the help of friends.

On the other side, whatever comes cross to us, his hand is even in that also ; that is, so far as to suffer it to fall upon us as a punishment for our sins, and a means to awaken us to our duty. From whence it follows, that it is so far from being needless and impertinent to pray unto God for the things of this present life, as the objection would conclude, that, on the contrary, it is absolutely necessary, in order to our well-being ; for, God being the sole governor of the world, and the absolute disposer of all events, however they be administered by second causes, it would be absurd not to depend upon him, and to pray to him continually for every good thing we want or desire, or for the removal of every evil thing that lies upon us.

Thus have I gone through all the objections that are made against prayer, and, I hope, I have given such full answers to them, that all of you will join with me in this conclusion ; namely, That, notwithstanding any thing that is urged in any of them, we not only may, but we ought to adhere to these rules and precepts, which are so often pressed upon us by Christ and his apostles ; that is to say, that we should always pray, and not faint, that we should ask that we may receive, that we should seek that we may find, that we should knock that it may be opened unto us, that we should pray without ceasing, pray continually, that we should every-where lift up holy hands, and watch unto prayer with all perseverance ; and lastly, that we

should be careful for nothing ; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, still make our requests known unto God. Sure I am, all those that have ever seriously and heartily, for any competent time, applied themselves to this practice, will bear testimony, that these things are not in vain, but that they produce real effects ; that, besides the comfort and satisfaction that is reaped by these exercises, and which is inexpressibly greater than any enjoyment of this world can afford us, there is a real blessing that does attend them, and that all good mens prayers are answered effectually, if not always in the particular manner they pray for, yet in mercies, and blessings, and benefits, that are much more useful for them, and more befitting their circumstances. Nay, I doubt not to affirm, that it is as much by our prayers, as by any other endeavour, that not only particular persons and families, but also cities, and states, and kingdoms, are preserved and supported.

And so much for this argument. Consider what you have heard, and the Lord give you understanding in all things !





# SERMON VII.

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The duty and obligation of having and frequenting public Prayers, &c.

I TIM. II. 1, 2.

*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority.*



HE design of this epistle is, to give instructions to Timothy, how he ought to execute the episcopal office, which was committed to him in the church of Ephesus: And the first injunction that is given him about that matter, is, that he should order public supplications, and prayers, and intercessions, and thanksgivings, to be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority: I say, that he should order these things publickly to be done; for that these words are to be expounded of the public devotions of the church, was  
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never doubted, that I know of; and may be fully made good from what follows after in this chapter.

But how comes the apostle here to make a difference between prayers and supplications, and those other things? Why, certainly, his design was, to make a just enumeration of all those offices or parts, of which the public worship or service of the church is to consist.

And those are four.

First of all, *Δηήσεις*, which we here render supplications, but may more properly be rendered deprecations, that is to say, such prayers as we put up to God for the pardon of our sins, and the averting from us all those evils that we deserve upon account of them.

Secondly, *Προσευχαι*, or petitions, by which are meant those prayers we put up for all the spiritual and temporal blessings we stand in need of.

Thirdly, *Ευτεύξεις*, or intercessions, by which are meant those prayers that we are to put up for other men.

And, lastly, *Ευχαριστια*, or giving of thanks, which every-body knows to be meant of that tribute of praise and thanksgiving we owe to God Almighty for all his mercies and benefits, both to ourselves and others.

Of these four things, according to St. Paul, ought the public liturgy of the church to be made up: And that service, where any one of them is wanting, must consequently be defective.

But this is not the point I mean now to dwell upon: That which lies uppermost in my text, and most obvious to be observed from it, are these three things; which I shall therefore make the heads of my following discourse:

First of all, in general, The obligation that is upon us to have public prayers, and to resort to them. *I exhort, first, that supplications and prayers be made.*

Secondly, more particularly, The obligation that is upon us, in our addressees to God, to pray for others. *I exhort, that supplications, and prayers, and intercessions, be made for all men.*

Thirdly (which more immediately concerns us on this day), The obligation that is upon us to pray and give thanks for kings especially; and that follows in the next verse: *For kings, and all that are in authority; that under them we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty.*

First, I begin with the duty of having, and frequenting, public prayers, which is here recommended to us.

It is the fault of a great many among us, and even of some that have otherwise an hearty sense of religion, that we do not set that esteem and value upon the public worship of God, that, in the nature of the thing, and by the laws of Christ, it doth call for. If we do but say our prayers devoutly in our closets (and I would to God that all of us did but that!), we think we have done enough: We have done all that is needful for the discharge of that part of our duty which concerns the worship of God: The church-prayers we may spare well enough, and so likewise prayers in our family. And, though we do perhaps now-and-then attend the public worship, yet it is not so much for the sake of the prayers, as for the curiosity of hearing a sermon, or it may be, for the avoiding the scandal that our absence at such times would bring upon us. But certainly this is not a right notion of the worship of God; so far from it, that, I must needs say, it is a very absurd one. We do readily own, that to serve God in private is a necessary duty; nay, so necessary, that there is no living an holy christian life without it: We acknowledge like-

likewise, that, as the thing is infinitely reasonable in itself, so it is attended with manifold advantages of several sorts: But then we say, that public prayer, joining with our brethren in the service of God, whether it be at church, or in our families, must needs have the pre-eminence in abundance of respects. Give me leave to name a few of the many: Would we take the readiest course to have our prayers effectual, to obtain from God what we pray for? Why, certainly, then we must pray with other devout people, that come together to obtain the very same thing that we desire. In common reason one would think, that the united force of a number joining together, to make a request, should have more power than a petition from a single man, whoever the person be that is addressed to. But we have more cause to think so with reference to those prayers we make to God; Christ Jesus having given us his promise, that, *wherever two or three of us are gathered together in his name, there he will be in the midst of us.* Not but that he will be present to every devout soul, that prays as he should do; but the promise is more express to those that join their prayers together. Nay, our Saviour, even when the occasion led him to discourse of private prayer, such as ought to be performed in the closet, yet, being to give a form of prayer, he delivers it in such words as are most proper to be used in a congregation, speaking in the plural number; *Our Father, which art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses,* and so on: Intimating hereby, that it was his design, that all his disciples should join their prayers together. But this is not all: Do we think it our duty to pay honour to God in our devotions, to give him the glory that is due unto his name? Why, certainly, this is never so

properly done, as when we assemble together with our fellow-christians, to express our dependance upon Him, and to set forth his praise. In true speaking, to give honour and glory to God, is, to publish to others the sense we have of his adorable perfections, of his infinite kindness and benefits, and of the continual need we stand in of his bounty and influences; but this can no-way be done so effectually, as by joining in the expression of those things, with the religious assemblies of our brethren. Nor indeed can we be more properly said to serve God, by our devotions in private, than we can be said to honour him. And yet all of us think there is some service due from us to God; and we think likewise, that we serve him by our prayers. This is so common and obvious a notion, that, if a man do but hear the service of God mentioned, he is naturally apt to apply that word to praying to him, and worshipping of him, as looking upon that as the principal part of that service we owe to God. Why, this is true; but praying to God in private is doing him no service, in the proper sense of the word; there we rather serve ourselves than God Almighty. To serve one, is properly to promote the interest of that person whom we pretend to serve; to do his business with all those among whom we are employed. This now is truly and properly done with respect to God, when we resort to the public assemblies, to pay our devotions and acknowledgements to him; for by that means we really do our parts, that all the world should honour, and fear, and worship God, as well as ourselves; nay, and contribute a great deal to the keeping up a sense of religion among men, which is the truest service we can pay to God: For, were it not for the public stated meetings for the worship of God, and the instructing

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men in the true religion out of the holy scriptures, not only the spirit of christianity, but the very face of it, would be in danger to be lost in the world. But further, that I may yet more recommend to you the use of public prayer, let me desire you to consider this: Is it reasonable to worship God in a way suitable to our nature? If so, then we must certainly think ourselves obliged to assemble together for the celebrating his praises, and the putting up our joint petitions to him, for the things we stand in need of. Man, by his own nature, is a sociable creature, and is so contrived, that, in order to the serving his necessities, he must join in society with others of his own kind: And can it be thought reasonable to have society with one another, in all other things pertaining to life, and yet to have no society with one another in matters of religion, which is certainly of higher concernment than any worldly affairs whatsoever? Is it necessary to our happiness, that we should every day communicate together in our businesses, and in our enjoyments, and must we never communicate together in owning the author of our society, the head of our community, and paying our acknowledgments for the daily benefits we receive from him? For what did God Almighty give us speech? Was it only for the transacting our temporal concerns one with another? and not rather for the setting forth the praises of our maker, which is certainly the noblest use it can be put to? And yet, that end of our speech would be wholly lost, if it were supposed, that we were only to perform our devotions in private; for private devotions are as well performed with the mind as with the tongue. Add to this, that the most and the greatest benefits and blessings which we every day and hour enjoy, and do every day and hour stand in need

of, are common benefits, in which we all have a share, as well as this or the other particular person: Such are the air we breathe in, the food we eat, the light we see by, the peace, and liberty, and safety we enjoy; above all, the advantages of the gospel, and the promises of eternal salvation. These are public and common blessings; and therefore is it not infinitely reasonable, that we should all join in public and common assemblies, to offer up our sacrifice of praise to God for these blessings, and to implore the continuance of them?

Once more, and I have done with this head. Have we ever seriously considered the nature of our religion, and the duties of our common christianity? If we have, we must needs look upon ourselves to be indispensably obliged to frequent the public assemblies that are appointed for the christian worship. It is a very false opinion that some people amongst us are apt to take up, that christianity is no more than a sort of more refined philosophy, and that christians are but a set of men, that have truer notions about divine matters, and that therefore ought to live better than the rest of the world. It is enough, according to this account, to intile any man to the name of a christian, that he doth believe the doctrines of Jesus Christ, and that he doth live a moral, virtuous life, though he exercises no acts that express his relation to that body or society which we call the church. But certainly, this is a great mistake: For when Christ came to plant his religion in the world, and by the means of that, to bring us to everlasting happiness; his design was not only to give us such a system of doctrines to be believed, and precepts to be practised separately by every person, without relation to one another, but to mould and form all his disciples into one common body or society,

or, as we ordinarily express it, into one church; and in order thereunto, he appointed that every one who would embrace his religion, should be entered into that church or society by baptism; and when they were so entered, they should continue to exercise all acts of membership and communion with that society. And that they might be the more effectually obliged to this, he appointed that the ordinary means, or conduits, or chanel in which he did convey his grace and Spirit to believers, should be this exercise of communion with his church; the joining in her public prayers and sacraments: So that if we would partake of the divine influences which Christ hath purchased, and without which we cannot expect to perform the terms required to our salvation, there is a necessity we should be members of his church. And if we be members of his church, there is a necessity likewise we should perform those acts, by which that membership is expressed, and the chiefest of those acts are to meet together for the profession of our faith in Christ, for the worshipping God by prayer and thanksgiving, and for the receiving the holy sacrament.

Nay, I may add farther, Christ hath so strictly combined all his disciples in a church or society, and so indispensably tied all that believe in him to join in the public duties of religion, as members of that society, that it is in virtue of the relation we have to that society, and our willingness to join in those duties, that God accepts even our private prayers and devotions; so that if we voluntarily cut off ourselves from communion with Christ's church, and refuse to join in the public service of God with other christians, we have no reasonable grounds to expect, that God will have any regard to the petitions we put up in our closets.

These things that I have now said, may be, I hope, of some force to convince us of the great reason, nay, of the great necessity that is upon us, not to make a slight business of the public service of the church, but to attend it both seriously and constantly, as we have opportunity. Surely, after what has been said, none of us will think it an indifferent matter, whether we be present at the public prayers, or whether we be absent. No, if we have any regard to the honour of God, if we have any regard to our own benefit, if we have any regard to the duties which either natural religion or christianity doth oblige us to, we shall think ourselves obliged to be very diligent and very constant in attending the public service of God. And if our circumstances be such, that either we have not opportunity of resorting to it, or if, having opportunities, our other necessary business and way of living will not allow us to attend it; yet in that case, these considerations will oblige us to take care, that the worship of God be daily performed in our families. If we can no more than one day in the week be present at the public assemblies; yet we should, every day in the week, join with the catholic church in our own families, in offering up the solemn sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving for ourselves, and all others. In this case every master of a family is allowed to be a priest, or he may depute that office to whom he pleaseth; but if no care be taken of the worship of God in families, especially where they are not allowed, or have not opportunity to resort to the public prayers, I must confess I think the master of that family has no great sense of God and religion, and has a severe account to make for the trust committed to him.

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But I leave this head of the public service in general, and come in the second place to that part of it upon which more particular stress is laid in the text, and that is intercession for others. *Let prayers, and supplications, and intercessions be made for all men.* This was the apostle's order, and accordingly it has been practised in the church ever since; a very considerable part of the public devotions of christians being always made up of intercessions for others, and thus it is likewise in our liturgy, which in this respect, as well as others, is conformable to the antient liturgies of the church.

I desire to insist a little on this point likewise, because I fear we are often apt to be too cold and unconcerned in this part of our daily prayers, not praying with the same fervour and attention in those offices that concern others, as we do in those that concern ourselves; whereas certainly it is both our duty and our interest so to do. For, let us consider: Most of those prayers we make for others, are such, wherein we ourselves have a great concernment; that is to say, it is to our benefit if they be granted, and we ourselves are likely to suffer if they be not; such are all the intercessions in our liturgy, that are made for public persons, kings, and governors, magistrates, ministers, and the like. In the happiness and prosperity of all these, and in God's blessing and directing them in their several offices, we have so great a share (whether we look upon ourselves as members of the nation, or of the church) that we are not kind to ourselves, if we do not, most earnestly and affectionately, join in the prayers that are put up to God for them; and then as for those other intercessions of our liturgy, which do not seem so immediately to affect us as those I have

been speaking of, namely, such prayers as are made for all sorts of private persons, and under any necessity, spiritual or temporal, even our enemies; I say, even as to these we have the greatest reason and the greatest obligation to bear a solemn and a serious part in them. For is it for nothing that God has joined us together in one common body? Is it not for this, that when any one of the members suffers, all the rest should be affected? Would not we ourselves desire, most heartily, that others should help and assist us all the ways they can, when we are in any extremity, and stand in need of their assistance? and is it not reasonable we should do the same for them? and can we assist them at an easier or cheaper rate, than to put up our prayers for them? And yet as easy and as cheap a way as this is, it is perhaps as truly beneficial to them, supposing we pray with fervour and devotion, as if our good-will was shewed in a more laborious or expensive instance.

It is the complaint of a great many, that they would do good, if they knew how, but that they are not in circumstances, or they want opportunities of serving the public, or doing acts of charity. But let no man pretend this, for every person may truly serve every other person; may do good, express his charity to all the world, and to every individual in it, by heartily joining with the church in her intercessions for them. This is an opportunity we all of us have; nor is there any in such poor circumstances, but may do as much good this way as the richest, the greatest, and the ablest man.

But it will be said, Do we by our prayers really benefit those we pray for? Do they receive any advantage from hence? I answer, We do certainly by our prayers both benefit others and ourselves too. Ourselves we do certainly benefit; for whether God thinks

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fit or no, to answer the prayers we put up to him for others, in the same way that we do desire (as sometimes we may pray for things that God judgeth not expedient to be granted, and sometimes those whom we pray for do not their parts towards the obtaining of the things we desire for them), yet certainly whatever we pray for of this kind is for our great benefit. We shall not lose the reward of our charity; that kindness, and love, and compassion we express for others shall not go unrewarded; but God will, with advantage, return into our bosoms the good wishes and prayers we make for them. But then as for the benefits that those we pray for receive from our intercession, I doubt not, but that they likewise are very great; I doubt not, but that both the public and every private man among us doth fare much better in all respects, for the prayers that the church puts up for them; I doubt not, but that kingdoms and states are preserved and supported as much by the prayers of the good, as by the counsel of the wise, or the valour of the mighty. And as for our private personal concerns, I should think that man made a sorry bargain, that would forego his title to, and his interest in, the prayers of the church, for any worldly good whatsoever. The truth of the matter is, God is, in his own nature, infinitely willing and ready to bestow upon us all things that are needful to us; but he hath made our prayers also to be a necessary condition for the obtaining those things; and having formed us into a church, and made us one body, of which our Lord Jesus is the head, he hath farther made our joint prayers, our supplicating and petitioning in a body, to be necessary for the obtaining the mercies and blessings which are needful, either to the church in general, or

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any member of it in particular. So that as God hath ordered the disposal and distribution of his favours, every one of us both stands in need of other peoples intercessions, for the obtaining the things we want, and is also indebted to these intercessions of others, when we receive the things we prayed for. So that there is both a necessity that other people should continually pray for us, and that we should also continually pray for them. Sure I am St. Paul is of this mind, for as he was a most zealous intercessor himself for others, and a most zealous recommender of that practice to all those that he wrote to, so he also sufficiently declares how much he himself stood in need of other peoples prayers; though he was an apostle, and an inspired man, nay, a particular favourite of heaven, and consequently might be presumed to have as much power with God upon his own single account, as any man whatsoever, yet he frequently begs of the church that they would be earnest in prayer to God for him. *I beseech you, brethren, (saith he to the Romans, ch. xv.) I beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.* And again, to the Corinthians, *You also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gifts bestowed upon us, by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.* Where he plainly declares, that the grace bestowed upon him was to be accounted the effect of the church prayers, and as such it ought to be a matter of their thanksgiving. Lastly (saith he), in the fourth of the Colossions, *Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgivings, withal praying for us also, &c.* You see how solicitous and concerned the apostle was to have the benefit of the church prayers. And if  
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such a man as he could be supposed to need them, or to desire them ; how much more must we be supposed to do both ? And consequently how much more are we concerned in the duty here recommended to us of making supplications and prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings, for all men ; for kings, and all that are in authority ?

And that leads me to my third and last head.

Prayer and intercession you see are to be made for all men. But then the apostle adds, *for kings, and all that are in authority.* Which is as much as if he had said, It is our duty to pray and give thanks for all men, but more particularly and especially for kings, and all that are in authority. And certainly, there is great reason for this, that above all other persons in the world, kings, and princes, and governors, should have daily prayers offered up to God for them ; not only because we owe most to them, as being obliged to them under God for the peace, and quietness, and security we enjoy in the possession of our just rights, and therefore we must be presumed in point of gratitude to think ourselves obliged to pray for them ; not only because they most need our prayers, as having of all other persons the most difficult and intricate post to manage, and being to combat with the greatest temptations of all sorts ; which if we do well consider, we should want common humanity, if we were not so far concerned for them, as most heartily to put up our prayers to God on their behalf, to assist and direct them ; but also in this other respect, which comes nearer to us, and which I touched on before, namely, the influence that their actions and successes have upon the whole body of men under their charge. The good or evil fortune that happens to princes is of an universal concernment :

cernment: We do all of us partake in the happiness or in the disasters of their government: They cannot do amiss, but it some way or other affects the community; and we private persons feel the consequences of their miscarriages. As, on the other side, their happiness and prosperity, their virtue and goodness, their attending to wise and sober counsels, their love of piety, and encouragement of the true religion, are public blessings. Every person among us has a share in the benefits of them: So that by praying most earnestly for them, for their wealth and happiness, for their advancement and increase of true wisdom and piety, we do in effect pray for the same blessings to be derived upon our country. In praying for their welfare, both spiritual and temporal, we do in consequence pray for the good of all our neighbours, our relations, our families, whose happiness is wrapt up in their good government, and doth, in a great measure, depend upon it.

And the same reasons that oblige us to pray for kings, will oblige us to give thanks for them also; which is the other thing we are to consider in this last part of the apostle's charge, *Let intercessions and giving of thanks* (saith he) *be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority.* And this is our solemn business on this day, wherein we are met, according to the antient and laudible custom of this and other nations, to celebrate the anniversary of her majesty's happy accession to the imperial throne of this kingdom. A blessing without doubt this is, though there was no more in it than the having a lawful sovereign quietly and peaceably succeed to the crown of her ancestors; I say, this very thing alone, though there was no regard had to other considerations, is, without doubt, a

great blessing, and must be acknowledged to be so by all those that will compare the benefits and advantages we receive, by a peaceable uncontested succession to the government, with the horrible mischief, and dismal consequences, either of anarchy, or of a government not confirmed by the people, and therefore to be maintained by force and violence. And, in truth, when St. Paul gave this exhortation to give thanks for kings, and those that were in authority, the people to whom he wrote could have no greater inducement to put it in practice than this I have now mentioned; namely, that at that time they had a government peaceably settled amongst them, by which they were kept from confusion; and they had magistrates who took some care of property; but yet the supreme governor, the king at that time, was no other than Nero; as wicked and brutish a prince as ever sat on a throne; and those that had authority under him, the Roman governors, that were sent by him into the provinces, took generally more care of themselves, than of the people committed to their charge; and all of them to a man were opposers and persecutors of the christian religion. Yet even at such a time, and in such a juncture as this, did the apostles order that intercessions and thanksgivings for kings, and all in authority, should be put into the public liturgies.

O how ought this consideration now to prevail with all christians, most devoutly and chearfully to offer up their prayers and thanksgivings to God for virtuous and good princes; princes that are in the same interests, and of the same religion with their people; when, according to St. Paul's rule, they are bound to pray and give thanks for any prince, even such a prince as Nero!

This will perhaps appear a hard saying to some; but  
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it will be mollified, when we consider that there is a great difference between our prayers, and between our thanksgivings for kings, as to the extensiveness of them, and the degree of fervour with which we put them up. We ought to pray for all our princes and governors, be they good or bad, with the heartiest zeal we can raise up ourselves to. But it is unreasonable, and in the nature of the thing it is impossible, that our thanks to God should be as zealous and as unreserved for a bad prince as for a good one. In the former case we can only thank God for the common benefits of government and civil society, that by his influence are continued to us; just as we thank God for the air we breathe in; though sometimes we may light into such an air as is not very wholesome; but yet, as bad as it is, we could not live without it. But in all other respects we can no otherwise thank God for a bad prince, than we can thank him for our misfortunes, and afflictions and punishment: They are designed for our good, and if we make a right use of them, they will prove so; and even for this we have reason to return thanks unto God. But the case is infinitely different when it pleaseth God to bless a people with pious, and wise, and virtuous princes; here our thanks will be as enlarged and as unconfined as our prayers; but the pleasure and satisfaction we feel in our happy condition, will raise us to greater degrees of fervency, both in the one and in the other.

Can there be a greater blessing to a nation (considering how much the fortune of the public, and of every private person, depends upon the qualifications of those that are to govern us; I say, can there be a greater blessing to a nation) than to have such princes placed upon the throne (be they kings or queens, or  
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bear they what style they will) as are not only descended from antient monarchs of the kingdom, but have also been always educated amongst their own people, and trained up from their infancy in the knowledge of the constitution, and in the profession of the religion established? Such princes as in no time of their life have had any blemish cast upon them, that could taint their reputation, even in a private condition? Such princes as are not only zealous defendants and patrons of God's religion, and God's church, by giving all countenance and encouragement, both to the ministers and professors of it, but also by their own unblameable conversation, by their eminent piety and devotion, by the examples they give in their own persons of modesty, humility, and charity, and universal goodness, do recommend this religion and church to all about them? Such princes as are careful managers of the public revenue; not squandering it away in luxury and unnecessary pomps, nor hoarding it up to make themselves rich, but paying out of it to every one their just dues, and employing the rest upon the public service? Such princes as are as tender and careful of their subjects rights, as of their own; nay, are more willing to recede from their own prerogative, than to do a hard or unacceptable thing to their people; so far from injuring their subjects in any respect, that they make it their business to oblige them all?

In a word, such princes as have nothing in their view, have no other design in the world, but to be as good, and to do as much good as they can?

Sure such princes as these, when God is pleased to bestow them upon a nation, and especially when they have this testimony from their people of the truth of this their character, namely, that whatever differences

or disputes may happen amongst their subjects between themselves, they all agree in professing their love, and honour, and esteem of their prince; I say, sure such princes as these must be accounted rare and uncommon blessings, and accordingly all their people, that have any sense of God's mercies, will every day thank God for them.

As for us of this nation, I doubt not but we are all so sensible of the happiness we enjoy under her majesty's government, that there is no honest man in the kingdom (excepting perhaps some few that are carried away by new speculations in politics), but doth heartily join with us on this day, both in offering up our solemn thanksgivings to God for placing such a sovereign over us, and also in most earnest and affectionate prayers to him, that he would prosper the queen in her concerns, that he would direct and influence all her councils, both public and private, that he would heal all our divisions, and unite the hearts of all her subjects, that he would give success to her arms by sea and land, that in her days, religion and piety, and righteousness may more and more flourish; and, lastly, that God would bless her with health and long life, even a life so long, that none of us here present may ever celebrate any other inauguration to the throne, than what we do at this day.

May God Almighty accept the thanks, and hear the prayers we now put up to him, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, To whom, with the Father, &c.



# SERMON VIII.

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An account of what is meant by loving God with all our heart, and soul, and mind.

MATTH. xxii. 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40.

35. *Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*


36. *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

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

38. *This is the first and great commandment.*

39. *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

40. *On the two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

HE Pharisees and Herodians, as we find in the 15th verse of this chapter, had taken counsel together how they might entrap our Saviour in his talk, and for that end they put several ensnaring questions to him. One was about paying tribute to Cæsar: Another was about the resurrection: Which questions

questions they put so cunningly, that they believed it was impossible for our Saviour to answer them, but he must render himself obnoxious, either to the government, or to one of the two parties that set upon him; but he avoided the snare by his prudent answer to their question. Now one that was there present, a lawyer, as he is called in the text; a scribe, as he is called in the parallel text of St. Mark; that is to say, one of the doctors or expositors of the Jewish law; I say, this man hearing Jesus's answers, and perceiving that he had answered well, as St. Mark tells us, he also thought fit to ask Jesus a question, tempting him, saith the text, that is, not with a malicious mind, as the others did, but by way of trial of him, that he might make yet a farther experiment of Jesus's wisdom and abilities, just as the queen of Sheba is said to tempt Solomon when she put her questions to him.

The question which the lawyer asked, was this:

Which was the greatest commandment in the law of Moses?

This question, it is likely, was one of those that were much agitated among the Jewish doctors at that time, some perhaps teaching that the law of circumcision was the great commandment; others, that the law of sacrifices was; others, that the moral duties of the law, those of loving God and our neighbour, were the greatest commandments. And of this opinion this lawyer himself was, as appears by St. Mark; and our Saviour did confirm him in his opinion; for his answer to the question was this, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* On these two commandments (saith he)

hang



hang all the law and the prophets. That is to say, the foundation of all religion is first of all the love of God, and next to that the love of our neighbour. All the other duties prescribed either by Moses, or the prophets, are summed up in these two, and may be reduced to them. He that saith, Love God, and love your neighbour, doth in effect tell you your whole duty; for all other points of religion are comprehended and contained in these two. These are a summary of the whole law.

In treating on this argument, I shall first consider that which our Saviour here calls the first and great commandment; and that is, *to love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength*. And, secondly, afterwards that which he calls the next unto it, and that is, *the loving our neighbours as ourselves*.

In speaking to the first point, I shall do these things:

First, Give some account what is meant by loving God.

Secondly, Shew in what respects or upon what grounds this is the first and greatest of the commandments.

Thirdly, Make some inferences from this doctrine.

Fourthly, Observe some practical cases about the love of God.

As to the first of these, what is meant by loving God with all our hearts, and minds, and souls, I need not speak many words; for nature must needs teach every one what this saying imports. It seems as impertinent to offer to instruct any body to know when they love another, as it is to give marks whereby they may know when they are hungry or thirsty;  
some

some things are more easily felt, than they are described.

But yet, nevertheless, it is fit something should be said upon this head ; and the rather because I must confess there is some difference between divine and sensual love ; the love of God, and the love of the things of this world. The latter is usually accompanied with much greater passion and transports than the former ; though yet the love of God, if it be sincere, will be as powerful, and produce as real and visible effects, as the love of any sensible object that is most dear to us in the world. But I would not have any persons take measure of their love to God, by what they feel in themselves, when they are carried out with some fervent passion towards some visible object : I would not have them think that they do not love God sincerely, because they do not feel in themselves such violent transports and concussions of fear and hope, of desires and longings, of joy and delight, of impatience and restlessness, and the like, that perhaps they may have sometimes felt when their heart has been set upon something or person in the world. The love of God is not oftentimes so passionate and boisterous as the animal sensual love ; but yet it is always as real and permanent ; it is as strong and effectual as the other, but more still and calm. And the reason is clear, because the seat of the one is in the intellectual reasonable nature ; the seat of the other is in the sensitive.

I doubt not indeed but that sometimes it comes to pass, that the more ardently and intensely a man loves God, the more will he draw his very animal passions to conspire with that love, and to shew themselves upon all occasions as vigorous in expressing it, as when they have a visible object to employ themselves about.

Holy David seems to have been a person thus affected. His love and devotion to God seems to have been accompanied with all the violences and raptures of passion, that the highest sensual love can be. But this is a temper that is not always, nor by all men, to be expected; and therefore I am to give such an account of the loving of God as may be true, and yet be without that fervour of passion I have now spoken of.

Now, four things I dare say every body will see to be necessarily required to the true sincere love of God, even of those whose temper is least susceptible of passionate impressions.

Namely, first of all, That we have a great esteem of God. Secondly, That we have an earnest desire to be made partakers of his perfections. Thirdly, That we heartily endeavour to recommend ourselves to his favour by doing such things as are pleasing and acceptable to him. Fourthly, That we do so far dread his displeasure, that we would not for any worldly consideration incur it.

The first thing implied in the love of God is a great and just esteem of him; that is to say, that we have such worthy apprehensions concerning God, and be so well persuaded of the adorable perfections of his nature, and withal of his infinite kindness and goodness, and love to us, that we look upon him as incomparably the best, the most excellent, the most amiable being in the world. Such is the contrivance of human nature, that we cannot love any thing that we have not first some understanding, some knowledge, some notion and apprehension of; and withal such an apprehension or notion as represents the thing to be lovely and desirable. Our opinion and fancy first leads the way, and then desire and affection followeth after; how is it possible

possible a man should love that which he has no notion of; or having a notion of it, how is it possible he should love it, when the notion of it speaks the thing to be unlovely? So that in order to our sincere loving of God, we must both acquaint ourselves with his nature, and likewise represent him to ourselves as the most amiable of all beings; and then we cannot for our hearts keep our affections from running out after him. When once God appears to us what he really is in himself, the possessor of all perfections, the fountain of all good, the author of all that happiness that we either have or can hope for; when once we are heartily persuaded that every good, every desirable thing is in God in full perfection, and that all the excellencies we admire in this world, all the charming things that here attract our hearts, are all of them but so many rivulets derived from the inexhausted ocean of his perfections, but thin and scanty and imperfect emanations from his infinite fulness; that what is here most glorious, most beautiful, most rich, most delightful, is but a faint shadow, or copy, or representation of his eternal goodness, and glory, and beauty, and blessedness; when we have such apprehensions of his nature, as that we believe there is nothing frightful or unlovely in God; that he is perfect light, and in him is no darkness at all, (as the apostle speaks) that he is such a being as that all reasonable creatures that have any knowledge of him must needs love; and such a being, that if it was possible to suppose there was not a God in the world, yet all wise and good men would most heartily wish that there were; and lastly, When we have such an idea of God, as to look upon the enjoyment of him to be the supreme happiness we are capable of, and that in possessing him we are in effect put into the possession

of every thing that is good, every thing that is desirable; all pleasure, and all riches, and all honour being bound up in his favour; he being at all times able to make his friends as great and as happy as he pleaseth, and never failing to make those happy that love him; I say, when we have such just and right notions and apprehensions of God as these, then, and not till then, do we begin to love him; then will our souls cleave to him; then shall we cry out with David, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I can desire in comparison with thee*; so that the first step to, or the first expression of love to God is a just apprehension and esteem of him.

But, secondly, To love God implies an earnest desire of being made partakers of his perfections. It is an inseparable property of love, that it puts into the heart a strong desire and inclination to assimilate ourselves in all those qualities which we account amiable in the person beloved. It is nonsense to talk of loving and admiring a person for such and such accomplishments, that he is possessed of; and yet at the same time to approve ourselves in such qualities as are directly contrary to them. If therefore we do sincerely love God, we shall certainly desire above all things to be made like unto him, to be united to him as much as we can, by possessing our minds and spirits with all those lovely qualities whereby we are capable of expressing his image and similitude. We shall so admire his wisdom, his purity, his justice, his mercy, his beneficence, his faithfulness, and truth, that we shall look upon it as the greatest interest we have in the world to be made righteous as he is righteous, merciful as he is merciful, wise, and pure, and faithful, and true, as we find him to be. We shall look upon all

fin and wickedness and impurity, as the greatest blemishes and impurities, the greatest evils in the world.

We shall not endure in ourselves any humour or quality, any habit or custom that speaks opposition to his rectitude and goodness. We shall breathe after a participation of his nature; we shall hunger and thirst after his righteousness; we shall endeavour to bring our minds and spirits in all things to a conformity with those ideas which God in his holy word hath given us of himself; nay, so heartily shall we be in love with virtue and goodness, and all other qualities that accomplish our souls, and render us like unto our maker, that if it was put to our choice whether we would possess the whole world without them, or them without the conveniencies of the world, we should certainly chuse the latter.

From this will follow in the third place, a serious care to approve and recommend ourselves to God in all our actions. As love doth naturally work towards the assimilating us in our natures and tempers to the person we love, so it will also put us upon the framing all our carriage, and behaviour, and conversation in such a way as we believe is pleasing and acceptable to the beloved object. Can we with any justice pretend that we love our friend, at the same time we make it our business in his sight and presence to do those things which we know he hates, and hath declared over and over again, that he looks upon himself as affronted by the doing of them? This is our case with God Almighty. He is not indeed properly injured, or receives any damage by any thing we can do; for as our best services add nothing to his blessedness and glory, so neither do our worst actions detract any thing from it: but yet he hath declared that there are are some sorts

of actions that are highly pleasing and acceptable to him; and, on the contrary, that others are very displeasing and unagreeable; and such as, if they be done, he looks upon as an affront and dishonour to him. And that we might not be at a loss to distinguish between them, he hath given us his laws and commandments for the rule by which we are to govern our actions and conversation, which laws he hath partly writ in our hearts, and partly revealed to us in his holy word. Here, therefore, above all things we must shew our love to God. We cannot pretend to love him, unless we do heartily and sincerely endeavour in all our actions to observe these laws. We cannot pretend to love him (on the contrary we do plainly affront him) if we willingly and knowingly allow ourselves in those actions that are plain transgressions of these laws.

Here then let us fix; whenever we are talking of our love to God, let us try it by this mark: Do we sincerely endeavour to keep God's commandments? Is it the study and design of our lives to frame our actions as near as we can to the rule that God hath given us to walk by? And do we constantly avoid, to the best of our power, the doing of that which we see and know is plainly repugnant to God's laws? This, I am sure, is every-where in holy scripture represented, both as the most proper expression, and the surest argument of our love to God. Thus, God himself, in the second commandment, joins these two things together, as inseparable the one from another: For thus he speaks in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, *I will shew mercy unto thousands, of them that love me, and keep my commandments.* So that loving God, and keeping his commandments, are but two terms expres-

sing the same thing; and thus again our Saviour more expressly in the xivth of St. John, *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*: And again, *Ye are then my friends* (that is; *Ye do then truly bear affection to me*) *if ye do whatsoever I command you*: And lastly, St. John in his first epistle, *Whoso keepeth his word, in him is the love of God perfected*; that is to say, he both truly loves God, and loves him in perfection, as far as the state of human nature in this world is capable.

It was very well becoming the wisdom and goodness of God, and exceedingly for our benefit and comfort, that the Holy Spirit should in the scriptures thus plainly and fully declare what that is in which the love of God doth principally consist, and by what marks and characters we may truly know whether we love God or no. It is not so easy a matter for every body to know whether he hath that esteem and veneration of God, or whether he doth form such lovely ideas of him in his mind as he ought to do (which is one of these instances or expressions I have mentioned of the love of God) neither is it so easy a matter for a man to know whether he hath such ardent longings and breathings after a participation of the divine nature, as the sincere love of God will inspire a man with (which was the other character I gave of it). But every man may know whether in his life and conversation he doth sincerely endeavour to observe God's laws, whether he doth really frame his life so as to study to perform those things which God hath commanded, and to avoid those things which God hath forbidden: This, I say, every body may know and find out by examining the principles upon which his actions turn, the designs by which they are managed: And therefore this



is a mark by which every man, even the plainest and the dullest, may know whether he sincerely loves God or no.

Let us all therefore stick to this mark: Let us take this, both for the truest expression of our love to God, and the best evidence we can give ourselves of it. Let none of us judge of ourselves by the warmth and fervour we do sometimes feel in our minds towards God: Let us not upon any account that we have now and then very devout affections, that we can pray with great earnestness and vigour, that we feel a great joy and delight in our spiritual exercises, that we are sometimes raised up above ourselves in our contemplations and devotions; I say, let none of us upon this account be too forward to conclude that we sincerely love God. For if this zeal and heat of affection be not accompanied with a steady constant endeavour to recommend ourselves to God by an uniform obedience to all his commandments, it will signify nothing. And, on the other side, let none of us that are dull and flat in our prayers, that feel none of those raptures and spiritual consolations, and that lively communion with God, that other men talk of; that have none of those ardours and flames of love; none of that transport and exaltation of spirit in their holy offices; but go on in a dull insipid road of duties (as they are apt to fancy it) I say, let none of those upon these accounts be in the least troubled or cast down, as if they had not the true love of God within them. For those very people, in as low a dispensation as they think themselves to be, if they be so wrought upon by the motives of the gospel, that they do unfeignedly set themselves to live honestly, and virtuously, and godly, in their whole conversation,

versation, they have assuredly the love of God abiding in them.

In a word, Let all sorts of men, how brisk or how dull soever their passions and affections are toward God, judge of their state and condition by this: Do they heartily and steadily endeavour to approve themselves to God, by an innocent, and virtuous, and religious course of life? Do they make a conscience of keeping all God's commandments as far as they know them, and as far as they are able to keep them? Do they indulge themselves willingly and knowingly in no action, or in no course of life, that their consciences tell them is displeasing to God? If they can satisfy themselves, that they do this, they have all the reason in the world to be assured, that they love God, in that degree, that he will accept; and that, whether they have, or have not, the comfort of it here, they will certainly have the reward of it hereafter.

But, fourthly, and lastly, 'There is one thing more to be added to the full explication of this precept in my text, besides what I have said; and, that is, that the love of God we are speaking of, implies such a degree of intenseness, as that, whoever pretends to love God, must have so great a regard to the favour of God, and so great a dread of his displeasure, that he would not, for any consideration in the world, run the hazard of forfeiting the one, or incurring the other.

And this is that which I take to be the full meaning of that phrase; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.* It is an idle thing to go about to distinguish nicely about the sense of these several words. This undoubtedly is the meaning of all: That we should  
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cleave intirely to God with all the powers of our souls and bodies : We should endeavour to serve him with every faculty that he hath given us : We should not give up ourselves to him by halves, dividing ourselves between God and the world ; but all other interests, all other considerations, must yield, where God, and our love to him, are concerned.

The plain English of all is, that we must love God above all things ; that we must mind his service above all other concernments ; that we must preserve our duty to him intire and inviolable, whatever come of our other affairs. And if it should so happen, that our worldly profit, or pleasures, or interests, are inconsistent with our love to God, we must quit them all, rather than depart from the laws of our heavenly Father.

And this is that which our Saviour hath told us, in the 10th of St. Mark (with which I conclude this point, and this discourse), *He that loveth father or mother, more than Me, is not worthy of Me ; and he that loveth son or daughter, more than Me, is not worthy of Me ; and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me.* Or, as he expresseth, Luke xiv. 26. *If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and his mother, his wife, and children, brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.* Not that a man ought to hate any of these, but he ought to love them all less than Jesus Christ : He ought to postpone them ; he ought to flight, and forsake, and abandon them, whenever he cannot keep them, and preserve his love, his duty, his fidelity to God. Thus much for this time.

O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee, such good things as pass man's understanding; pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promise, which exceeds all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.





## S E R M O N IX.

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In what respect, or upon what accounts, this precept of loving God is the first and great commandment : and religion, or that universal duty we owe to God, not variable, uncertain, and arbitrary.

M A T T. xxii. 37, 38, 39, 40.

37. *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*
38. *This is the first and great commandment.*
39. *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
40. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*



Began to treat on this text the last Lord's day ; and the method I proposed was ;

- I. To give some account, what is meant by loving God with all our heart, and soul, and mind.

II. To shew in what respects, or upon what grounds, this love of God is the first and greatest of the commandments.

III. To make some inferences from this proposition of our Saviour, that to love God with all the heart and soul, is the first and greatest of the commandments.

IV. To observe some practical case about the love of God.

As to the first of these points, What it is to love God, with all our hearts, and souls, and minds; I shewed you, that it must necessarily comprise in it these four things:

First, That we have a great and just esteem of God.

Secondly, That we have an earnest desire to be made partakers of his perfections.

Thirdly, That we heartily endeavour to recommend ourselves to his favour, by doing such things as are pleasing and acceptable to him.

Fourthly, That we so far dread his displeasure, that we would not for any worldly consideration incur it.

On these things I dwelt the last Lord's day, and therefore shall not now enlarge upon them; but proceed to the second general point of my proposed method, and that is, to shew in what respect, or upon what accounts, this precept of loving God is the first and greatest commandment.

Now, I say it is so, and must be accounted so, for these following reasons:

First of all, in regard, that, in the order of nature, it is before the other commandments, and is, as it were, the foundation of them.

The other duties of the law are built and grounded upon this, and do derive their obligation from it. For instance, the duty we owe to our neighbour, to be just and faithful in our dealings, to be merciful and charitable, to be quiet and peaceable: as likewise the duties we owe to ourselves, to be chaste, and modest, and temperate: These are acknowledged to be necessary indispensable precepts. But now from whence doth our obligation to them arise? How comes it that they do bind our consciences to the performance of them? Is it because they are things reasonable in themselves, and agreeable to the frame of human nature? Or is it because the practice of these things is the natural means to make our lives more easy and comfortable in this world? Why, I grant, that both these things are true, and both of them are likewise considerable motives to engage us to the practice of them; but yet, in strict speaking, neither of them is sufficient to lay a direct obligation upon our consciences, to the practising of them, without something else, and that is this: The authority of the great God (whom we are all bound to love and serve with all our hearts, with all our minds, and with all our strength), that hath made these things to be our duty, that hath prescribed it as a law to us, to be just, and charitable, chaste, and temperate, and the like: I say, it is this that layeth the direct obligation upon conscience; so that were we not bound in conscience to serve and love God, neither should we be bound in conscience to practise those other things.

The truth is, were there no God in the world, whom we were bound to love and serve, there would be no such things as love and conscience in the world: It is the consideration of God in the action, that makes

makes any action to be religious or irreligious : And it is the consideration of God's authority, that makes any thing to be a duty in point of conscience, or to be a sin against conscience. And therefore, since to love and cleave to God, is the first duty, and that which gives the stamp of conscience and religion to all the rest, it must needs be the first and greatest of all the commandments.

Secondly, this law of loving God with all our hearts and souls, is the greatest of all the rest, in regard to its excellency and dignity ; because it employeth and exercises the powers of our souls in the highest and noblest operations, and about the best object they are capable of. To love God, is certainly the highest perfection and accomplishment of human nature ; for hereby we are made like unto God ; we are made partakers of his divine nature ; for God is love : As we are men, the perfection and happiness of our nature consist in the improvements of those two faculties, our understandings, and our wills. The understanding is improved and perfected by the knowledge and contemplation of the best objects. The will is improved and perfected by love, and adhesion to the best objects. Now, though it be true, that the knowledge of God, and his perfections (which is transcendently the best and noblest object in the world), is absolutely necessary to the perfection and happiness of our natures ; for if we had no knowledge of him, it is impossible we should love him ; yet it is the loving of God, the admiring and adoring his infinite goodness, the being firmly united to him in our wills and affections ; it is this that makes us truly perfect, and truly blessed : For if we knew and understood never so much of God, and his perfections, yet, if we did not bear good-will  
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and affection to him, if we were not by love transformed into his spirit and temper, we should, for all this knowledge and understanding, be still but in the rank of devils; to whom it is rather a torment than a happiness, that they know so much of the infinite goodness that is in God, when their wills and affections, their nature and inclination, are at so great a distance from him.

In a word, the blessedness of mankind consists in the divine life; and the very root of the divine life is the sincere love of God. Whoever truly loves God, cannot but be happy, because he hath the nature of God in him; and whoever doth not love God, cannot but be miserable, because he is at the greatest distance from the greatest good. To love God, is to be really put into a possession of all that God himself can bestow: For it engages all his wisdom and power, his care and providence, for our benefits; all security and welfare; all rest and peace; all joy and delight, and comfort, do attend upon it. And therefore, since the love of God is the sum of our happiness, it must in reason be accounted the sum of our religion too; the first and greatest of all the commandments, as our Saviour here expresseth it.

But, thirdly, It must needs also be so in another respect, or upon another consideration; and that is this; that it is our hearty love of God that gives worth and value to all our other religious performances; it is upon account of that, that God has any regard, or sets any esteem, upon our other duties. No sacrifice, as one expresseth it, is acceptable, which is not kindled by this heavenly fire; no offering sweet and pure, which is not seasoned by this holy salt. Love doth of itself recommend us to our heavenly Father. But our  
other

other performances do not so, but upon love's account; they are more or less acceptable, according as they more or less proceed from, or are accompanied with, love and affection to him.

It is natural to think this, because all mankind proceed by the same measures in judging of the actions that are done unto themselves. Let one be never so civil to us, make never so great profession of serving us, be never so prodigal of his bows and cringes, of fair words and compliments; nay, though he do us some real favours and courtesies, and presents us with gifts that are in themselves valuable; yet if, in the mean time, we know that this pretended humble servant hath all this while no real kindness for us in his heart, and that all this obliging carriage and behaviour doth not in the least proceed from any respect to us, but merely to serve himself upon us, Do we in that case value the civilities that are done us? Do we think ourselves obliged to the man for them? So far from that, that we are apt to despise both him and them. Whereas, on the other side, every ingenuous man will take kindly whatsoever is said or done to him, when he knows it proceeds from real good-will. Love, though from never so mean a person, is a present for the greatest and highest upon earth, and procures the acceptance of every thing it brings along with it. Nay, the very slips and offences, and miscarriages, that others are guilty of towards us, if they proceeded from love, if there was no bad meaning in them, but the man intended kindly to us, though it was his misfortune to be mistaken: I say, even these, if they be not accepted with favour, yet will obtain an easy pardon, even from the most inexorable natures.

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And, certainly, thus also we must needs apprehend the case to stand between God Almighty and ourselves. We cannot reasonably imagine, that any service we offer to him, though it be in those instances, that he hath strictly enjoined and commanded, will find his acceptance any farther than it proceeds from hearty good-will, and from a soul that values his favour, and really sets itself to please him. To think to recommend ourselves to God by our prayers, or our fasting, by our devout discourse, by our attendance on his worship; nay, even by our moral honesty, and our acts of mercy and charity, which are the most valuable sacrifices; when at the same time God sees and knows, that our hearts are not right to him, that we have no true love to him, nor any real affection to his commandments; but do these things, either for vain-glory, to be seen of men, that we may get a reputation of sanctity; or for the pleasing of others, to whom, by these ways, we hope to recommend ourselves; or, lastly, for the serving any by-end or selfish design, which we think by these methods may be promoted; I say, for any man to think that these kind of services will be acceptable to God, is the greatest nonsense in the world. So far is he from looking kindly and favourably upon such kind of performances, that our Saviour calls such people by no better name than hypocrites: nay, tells them plainly, they have their reward, that is to say, Their serving their own worldly ends, being the business they aimed at, it is enough if they gained that; other rewards they are not to expect from God Almighty.

But, on the other side, whosoever heartily loves God, and endeavours, in all his actions, to approve himself to him; such a man never fails of God's acceptance,

ceptance, in every instance of duty that he applies himself to. Every service that he offers is kindly taken, and the more it expresseth his sincere love, still the more value doth God set upon it. Nay, our very failings, and infirmities, and miscarriages, so long as there is this principle of love in our hearts, will find his pity and compassion, but not his anger. In a word, it is love that sanctifies all the actions of our duty, and makes them of a sweet-smelling savour to God ; and it is love that will be the best cover, and make the best apology, for the worst of our errors : And therefore, since it is of such mighty worth and value with God, as that, upon account of it, all other duties do receive their estimation ; great reason had our Saviour to affirm it the first and great commandment.

But, fourthly, and lastly, To love God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds, is the first and great commandment, in regard of the universal influence and efficacy it hath to put us there, observing all God's commandments. Such is the power and force of love, that where-ever it gets possession, it brings all the powers of the soul and body into a compliance with the will of the beloved, in all the instances wherein that will hath declared itself. So that we can no sooner think what it is that God would have us to do in any instance, or how it is that he would have us behave ourselves in any emergency ; but if we sincerely love him, we shall readily put ourselves in a posture of obeying him.

Fear may go a great way towards the deterring men from some practices, and at some seasons ; but when the fright is over, the man naturally returns to his former inclinations and habits. But love is a principle that changes the bent and temper of the mind, and,

by a gentle and easy violence (if it be proper to speak so), carries us on to a chearful, and steady, and uniform obedience to every thing that we think is pleasing and acceptable to God. If any man love me, saith our Saviour, he will keep my words; it is impossible he should do otherwise; if we can once bring ourselves to love God, it is needless to bid us be kind to our brethren, to be sincere and honest in our dealings, to abstain from whoredom and drunkenness, and all such impurities; to take all opportunities of worshipping God, and offering up our prayers and thanksgivings to him, both in public and private. For these actions will come of course, because we know that it is such things as these, that God, whom we love, takes pleasure in, and hath required of us. Nay, though any of the commandments should at the first appearance seem hard and severe to flesh and blood, yet the true love of God will easily surmount these hardships. Nothing will be difficult to him that sincerely loves. When Jacob had served Laban seven years for his daughter, and in that service had undergone as many labours and difficulties as can easily be supposed, yet the text tells, *that these years seemed to him but a very few days, for the love he bare unto her.* It is the property of love, to think nothing grievous or painful that leads to the obtaining of what we desire; or that recommends us to the person that is the object of our love. And if love be thus powerful, when it is placed upon earthly objects, where the attractions are so small, and where oftentimes blind passion is interested more than reason; O how powerful must it be, when it is placed upon the most charming, and lovely, and glorious, object in the whole world! and where true understanding and reason do so fully and intirely close with that object,

ject, that with its utmost force and vigour it recommends it to all the inferior faculties, and sets them on work in the pursuit of it !

Since therefore the love of God is of such universal influence, and is so necessarily productive of obedience to all the holy commandments, we must needs be convinced, that it is, what our Saviour here styles it, the first and great commandment, and unto which all other commandments are to be reduced.

And thus much let it suffice to have spoken on my second general head. I now proceed to the third : Which is, to draw some inferences, or to make some application of this doctrine.

Our Saviour here tells us, that to love God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, is the first and great commandment ; and, in conjunction with the second (that of loving our neighbour as ourselves), it makes up the whole law and the prophets ; is in effect the summary of both ; there being no other duty there commanded, but what may be reducible to one of these two heads.

The first thing I would take occasion to observe from hence, is this : That religion (taking that word as it signifies that universal duty we owe to God, and by which we are to recommend ourselves to his favour), I say, that religion is not so variable, uncertain, and arbitrary a matter, as some men do perhaps suppose it, but is a constant, fixed, permanent, immutable thing ; the same now, that it was in the days of the Old Law ; and the same then, that it was in the days before the law was given ; and the same both then and now, that it shall be a thousand years hence, if the world should last so long. True religion, and that which is from God, was, and is, and ever will be, the same in substance

stance in all countries, and in all nations, and among all sorts and conditions of men whatsoever; and the sum of it is, to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our minds, and with all our strength; and, next to that, to love our neighbour as ourselves. This was the religion that the patriarchs and all the pious men of old lived in, and by which they obtained God's favour and acceptance, when as yet there was no revealed instituted religion in the world. And this, as our Saviour tells us, was the sum of that religion, which God, when he thought fit to make known his will by revelation, gave to the Israelites by Moses, and which he continued by a perpetual succession of prophets to press upon them; and lastly, That this likewise is the sum of that religion which hath Jesus Christ for its author, and who was the last and the greatest prophet that came to declare God's will to mankind, and whose religion is to continue in force for ever: I say, that this is the sum of the christian religion, no man can in the least doubt, that hath ever read the New-testament. If our Saviour could truly say, that the sum of the Jewish religion, as it was delivered by Moses and the prophets, did consist in those two things, the love of God, and of our neighbour, I am sure we have much greater reason to say, that the religion that he taught may be summed up in these two duties: For, in the Jewish law, there were a great many precepts that were about matters of an indifferent nature, and seem wholly foreign, and no way to look towards this business of loving God and our neighbour; but, in our Saviour's institution, there is hardly one thing recommended to us, that doth not directly relate to this matter, that is not either an instance wherein we are to express our love to  
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God and our neighbour, or a means whereby we may be furthered in the practising of those duties, or an argument and motive, and encouragement to excite us to the practising of them. It is the design of all his doctrines to give us right notions of God and our neighbour, to teach us how excellent, how good God is in himself, and how kind, how gracious to us; and, therefore, what infinite reason we have to love and serve him, and to love and serve all mankind (who are our neighbours) for his sake: It is the design of his precepts to give rules in what manner, and in what degree, we are to express our love to God and our neighbour, and to oblige us, under the highest penalty, not to fail in our duty in these matters: It is the design of his promises to encourage us in the constant and sincere performance of these duties, notwithstanding whatever temptations we meet with to the contrary, by offering to us greater assistances for the performance of them, and proposing greater rewards to the performance of them, than mankind had ever yet heard of: And lastly, it was the design of his whole life and conversation in the world, to give us a true pattern and example of love to God and man, in all the several instances wherein it will be our duty to express it.

Love therefore, as it was the sum of the Old Law, so it is likewise the sum of the New; or, as St. Paul expresses it, τὸ τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας, it is the end, the perfection, the utmost design of the evangelical dispensation, to teach us to love (namely, to love God first, and then our neighbour) out of a pure heart, and good conscience, and faith unfeigned, as you have it, 1 Tim. i. 5. so that, putting all this together, we have an easy and a true notion of that religion which



is from God, and we can never be at a loss to find out in what it doth consist: It is not a thing to be altered at pleasure; both the law of nature, and the law of God, both the natural dispensation, under which all men are born, and the revealed dispensation, as we have it either in the Old or New-testament, do sufficiently instruct us in the main heads of it: Nay, I dare be bold to say, so long as mankind do retain their nature, and are not transformed into another sort of creatures than what God made them at first, it is impossible that there should be any true religion but what may be summed up in these two things, namely, to love God and our neighbour.

There is this difference indeed, between the three dispensations, that of nature, that of Moses, and that of Christ, as to this matter; that the first teacheth these duties very imperfectly; mankind, through the universal corruption and degeneracy of the world, having lost the true notions of God, and of the way wherein he would be loved and served; and it was the design of the second dispensation, that of Moses, to restore and revive these notions among the Jews, and to oblige them more strictly to the performance of those duties by more explicit promises and threatenings; but yet this dispensation of Moses was very imperfect, and very insufficient, for the bringing all mankind to that pure love of God and man, that was required to the perfection of human nature; and therefore, when the fulness of time was come, God sent his own Son, our Lord Jesus, into the world, not to alter the principles of mankind, or to set up a religion that was never heard of in the world, but to perfect what was deficient in the law of nature, or in the law of Moses; to build upon, and to improve the old foundation of lov-  
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ing God and our neighbour, that so all mankind might be put into a capacity of performing acceptable services to God, and arriving to that perfection and happiness, which in their creation they were designed for. This work, I say, our Saviour undertook; and this work he did effectually perform and execute: First, by instructing mankind more plainly and perfectly than ever they were instructed before, how, and in what instances, they were to express their love to God and man. Secondly, by requiring of them a greater measure, or degree, or intenseness of love both to God and man, than mankind had hitherto thought themselves obliged to. Thirdly, by laying before them a great many new arguments, and motives, and inducements, to the practice of those duties, which they hardly ever thought on before. Fourthly, by procuring greater aids, and helps, and assistances, for the performance of this duty, than ever was afforded under either of the other dispensations. Fifthly, by setting a plain and easy, but withal a perfect example, in his own life, of the practice of these duties in all the several instances of them. Sixthly, by proposing greater rewards to all good men, that would sincerely endeavour to recommend themselves by universal love to God and man, than either the light of nature, or the law of Moses, did make over. And lastly, by purchasing remission of sins by his death and passion, for the encouragement of all mankind to set themselves to the practice of this true religion, how faulty or negligent soever they had before been in these matters.

This now to me seems a true scheme and a genuine representation of the christian religion. As to the main duties required in it, it seems to be the same in substance both with natural religion, and the religion of  
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the Jews; and the sum of them lies in this, To love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves; though both as to the instances of expressing these duties, and the strictness with which it requires them, and the arguments it gives for the engaging us to them, and the assistances it offers for the performing of them, and the unvaluable promises it makes to all that sincerely lay out themselves in them; I say, in all these respects, there is no comparison to be made between Christ's religion and the other; christianity having incomparably the advantage, upon every one of these accounts, both of the heathen and the Jewish religion.

But this is that which I aimed at, and all that I desire to observe at this time, that religion is not a fictitious or arbitrary thing; one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; one thing in this kingdom, and another in a distant region; but the true religion, the religion which is of God, is eternally the same, and consists in this which I have so often repeated, *That we love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul; and that we love our neighbour as ourselves.* And thus much of my first inference.

Several other observations I have to draw from this text; but they will furnish matter for my next discourse; and therefore I here break off, desiring God to give a blessing to what hath been said.

Now to God the Father, &c.



# S E R M O N X.

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Of the natural and necessary fruits and effects of love to God ; and of the little countenance either the Law or the Gospel have given to the doctrines of Merit, and Works of Supererogation, as they are taught in the church of Rome.

M A T T. xii. 37, 38.

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

38. *This is the first and great Commandment.*



Have, in two former discourses, shewed you both what it is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind ; and secondly, that this is indeed the first and greatest of all the commandments.

The business I am now upon is to make some application, to draw some inferences from this point,

and one of them I mentioned and insisted upon the last Lord's day.

I proceed now to a second inference from this point, and it is this : Is it the first and principal part of our duty to love God, and afterwards to love our neighbour ? Then we may learn from hence, how preposterous those mens notions are, who place the sum of religion in the performance of those duties we owe to ourselves, but lay but very little or no stress on those that properly and immediately concern God. There are some among us that pretend to own religion, but place it, in a great measure, if not altogether, in the practice of that which they call moral honesty, without any regard to the love of God in their mind, or expressing their sense and veneration of him in their actions. It is enough, in their opinions, to secure all the interest of their souls, that they are men of honour and justice, that they are fair and gentle in their dealings, or that they are true to their words, civil to their friends, kind to relations ; that they scorn to do any base or infamous action ; that they do to all men as they desire to be done to themselves ; and, lastly, that they are not scandalously lewd, or debauched, or profligate, in their conversation ; but then, as for the duties of piety, properly so called, such as hearty faith in Christ Jesus, love, and trust, and dependance upon God, devoting themselves to the service of him and Christ, and expressing their sense and dependance on him by prayers and thanksgivings, and other acts of worship ; all this they are perfect strangers to. They maintain no communion with God in their closet, nor is there any face of divine worship appears in their family : They do not much resort to the holy assemblies at the accustomed times,

and when they do, it is rather to comply with the custom, or to gratify some piece of curiosity, than for any ends of devotion; and as for the most solemn part of the christian worship, that of commemorating the death of our Lord in the holy sacrament, they have never any thing to do with it; unless perhaps they have some secular turn to be served by their coming thither.

But what shall I say of this sort of men? We dare not indeed call them atheists, because they pretend to believe a God, and they pretend likewise to live soberly and honestly, as being God's commandment; but we can in no sense call them christians: For, if it should prove, that they believe in Jesus Christ (which whether they do or no we know not) yet they are far from living like his disciples: Nay we may truly say, that, however they may own both God and Christ, in notion and opinion, yet really they deny both in their actions and conversation; and may be truly said to live without God in the world: So that in truth, it is but in a very improper sense that they can be said to have any religion at all.

The very life, and soul, and spirit of all religion, as I have often said, is to love God with all our heart and mind. This is the principal part in it; nay, this is the very sum of it. But now these men have a religion without the love of God; that is to say, they are religious, without having that wherein religion chiefly consists. But it will be said, Are not honesty, and justice, and regularity of life, are not these instances and expressions of love to God? Right; they are so, when they proceed from a good principle: when they flow from such a lively sense of God, and hearty affection to him, and serious desire of recommending

mending ourselves to his favour, that we do sincerely endeavour to put in practice every thing and all things that we know he hath commanded ; among the which we are deservedly to account acts of justice, and mercy, and sobriety, and generosity, and the like ; I say, when such actions proceed from this principle, they are really instances and expressions of our love to God ; but, without this principle, they are not at all. Otherwise we must say, that a perfect atheist does express his love to God, when he practises these things (as certainly such a man may live in the practice of all these things,) when yet he doth not believe that there is any God at all.

But now if a man has this principle of the love of God within him, if he do his actions out of the power and influence of that, it is certain he cannot rest in such performances as these : That principle will carry him a great deal further, and will put him upon doing a great many other things besides these : More especially it is impossible it should suffer him to live in a constant neglect of those duties that do more immediately and directly concern God himself. It is a vain thing for any man to pretend to love God, that never worships him, or but very rarely ; nay, that is not frequent in the performances of his divine offices and that too out of conscience. It is impossible we should persuade ourselves that we love God, when we find in ourselves no affections to him, no desires after him, but our hearts are quite dead as to all the things whereby communion between him and us is maintained ; when we can live day after day without reflecting on his benefits to us, or our own miscarriages towards him. If we did truly love God, we should have a hearty sense of his power, his wisdom, his

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justice, and his providence. We should feelingly own our continual dependance on him, our infinite obligations to him, and the hourly needs we stand in of his mercy and bounty. We should ardently desire to have his favour, to be at peace and friendship with him, to have him for our guide and protector in all the stages of our life, and especially that he would vouchsafe us the continual assistance of his grace, that we may not in any instance start aside from our duty, nor fail at last of safely arriving to his glorious kingdom.

Now, I say, where-ever a man feels this sense, these desires, these breathings after God and goodness, he cannot for his heart avoid the expressing of them in a constant and serious devotion. He will pray to God in private, he will pray to him in public, he will exercise acts of repentance for his former follies and sins, and over and over again renew his vows and purposes of better obedience; he will shew, that he entirely depends upon God, by returning the most hearty thanks and acknowledgments for every good thing he receives, and begging of him the supplies of what he needs; he will most seriously and importunately, both in his closet and in the congregation, recommend to his heavenly Father the care both of himself, and of all he loves in this world, imploring the continuance of his mercies, both private and public, and that he would avert the judgment and punishment which he and all of us have deserved by our manifold transgressions and provocations. Above all, he will make his most earnest supplications at the throne of grace, that neither he, nor any other devout soul, may ever want the help and assistance of God's grace and spirit to conduct them in the fear and love of God, through all the varieties and vicissitudes



of the temptations of this world. All these, I say, are the natural and necessary fruits and effects of love to God, where-ever it is entertained in any man's heart ; and therefore let men pretend what they will, if they can live without praying or worshipping God, it is certain they have not the love of God in them.

And the same thing we say as to the business of professing our faith in Christ Jesus, owning his revelations, believing his doctrines, and communicating in his sacraments, and giving up ourselves to him as our Lord, our priest, our Saviour. These are indeed things that are but of small consideration, and very lightly regarded by such persons as I before spoke of. For, as they have laid the scheme of religion, the natural indispensable duties of morality are all in all ; but for faith in Christ, and relying upon him for salvation, and the like, you must excuse them, if they have no great regard for those matters. But this also, I say, doth certainly proceed from, and is an undeniable argument of their being devoid of the love of God, and, consequently, of their wanting the main essential part of true religion : For it is obvious to every one, that, among the expressions of our love to God, this must eternally be one, and a principal one ; namely, that we do heartily and readily close with all those methods that he hath proposed and declared for the bringing us into favour and reconciliation with himself ; that we should joyfully embrace all those directions and instructions that he hath been pleased to afford us for the walking acceptably before him.

Though therefore (as I observed before) the whole of our religion (our christian religion, I speak as to the duties required of us in it) is comprehended in these two things, the love of God, and of our neigh-

bour ; yet this very first duty (the love of God) doth likewise include in it a hearty belief of, and a firm adhesion to, the doctrine and revelation of our blessed Saviour, as to all the parts of it : For, supposing that God sent him into the world out of pure kindness to us, to help our ignorance, and to strengthen our weakness, and to heal our sicknesses, by teaching us how we ought to love and serve God, by encouraging us in that service with the most forcible arguments, and the most glorious promises ; and, lastly, by laying down his life to obtain a pardon of our sins, and rising again from the dead, that we might have peace and strong consolation in our own minds, thro' the hopes of another life ; I say, supposing that all this is done for us by our Saviour (as we are sure it is) will not the love of God constrain us in this case, with our whole hearts, to embrace this kind messenger, and this kind message from God to our souls ? Will it not be joyful news to every soul that loves God, to hear of such a Saviour, such a mediator ? Or can any such forbear to thank God most affectionately, for this wonderful condescension of his, in sending his own Son among us ? Can they forbear to yield the most firm belief, to give the most hearty entertainment to every thing that this Son of his doth deliver as the will of God ? Oh ! certainly, all that love God must needs be filled with inexpressible joy and satisfaction for this unspeakable grace and favour to us, and must so entirely, with heart and mind, give into this new dispensation that Christ hath set on foot, as with the most fervent zeal to list themselves among the number of his disciples, with the greatest sincerity to embrace all his doctrines, to study and enquire into his revelations, to meditate on his arguments, to com-

fort themselves with his promises, to instruct themselves fully in the duties he hath obliged them to, to set themselves chearfully and vigorously, with all their might, to the practising of them; and, lastly, to resolve to own him and his religion, to trust in him, and to depend upon him, as their Lord, their Saviour, their Redeemer, to the last breath of their lives. All this now every one that sincerely loves God will most naturally and necessarily do, supposing that the gospel of Christ be proposed to them; I will not say, with that fulness, and clearness, and evidence, which God at first gave, but even with that degree of evidence that every thinking considering man among us may have at this day.

Away therefore with that religion which consists only in the outward practices of that which we call moral honesty: There is no heart nor life in it; it is a religion, without the sincere love of God; for, where-ever that takes place, it will so entirely possess our minds with the sense of what we owe to him, and our Lord Jesus, that it will be the delight of our lives, and the greatest joy of our hearts, to enjoy communion with both in all the instances of piety and devotion which our Saviour hath recommended in the gospel. The true love of God will make us both devout in the way that nature teacheth, and also in the way that Jesus Christ hath taught us in the New-testament.

But I proceed, in the third place, to another inference from my text, and that is this. Since the great precept, both of the law and the gospel, is, that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind; since, I say, this is the first and great commandment; then

we may see what little countenance either the law or the gospel have given to the doctrines of merit, and works of supererogation, as they are taught in the church of Rome. It is one of their doctrines, that the good works of justified persons are truly meritorious of eternal life; so the council of Trent teacheth, and pronounceth an anathema against all such as deny it; or if ye will have it in the words of the Rhemish translators of the English testament, take it thus: "Mens works (say they) done by the grace of Christ, do condignly or worthily deserve eternal joy; so as works can be no other but the value, desert, price, worth, and merit of the same." Thus the Rhemish testament.

They have also another doctrine, that a man may do good works more than he is bound to do, more than any precept of God doth require of him; and these they call works of perfection, or works of supererogation; and these, to be sure, are of all others most meritorious.

One would at first wonder for what reason these doctrines were set on foot, or what ends they served to; for that they do not any-way minister to the promoting true piety, is visible enough, because the direct tendency of them rather is to puff up mens minds, and to fill them with presumption and self-confidence, to make them proud, and vain, and assuming, which are qualities very different from those that our Saviour seems to have recommended to us; and the wonder will still increase, to consider how they have applied these doctrines, and to what a degree they have extended them; for it is a current received maxim among them, that a man may not only merit for himself, but for other folks; and that,

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If any man have suffered more than he deserved, or hath done more good works than he was obliged to, all those merits that he obtains hereby over and above what is needful for the satisfying for himself, are not lost, but may be communicated to others that want them, and shall really be available to their good to whom they are thus communicated. I say, one that looks no farther than the business of virtue and piety, would be apt to wonder much at this strange opinion: But then, when we are once let into the secrets of these doctrines, and come to know the true use they are put to, we shall not be much surpris'd at them. For here lies the thing; every man being thus capable of meriting in his works, and merits being thus transferable and communicable to others, here is a plausible foundation laid for a fund or stock of merits in the church; which fund or stock is to be in the keeping and disposal of the chief pastor; and out of this fund or stock he may supply every one's necessities that hath no merits of his own, by his indulgences; and the effect of these indulgences is, that they do redeem out of purgatory: So that purgatory brought in indulgences, as they are now used; and, for the support of indulgences, these doctrines of merits, and works of supererogation, were contrived.

But now let us a little look into this doctrine of merits and supererogation, and examine it by my text. Our Saviour's speech, that we are now upon, doth imply, that it is our duty to love God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds, and to love our neighbour as ourselves; for he saith it is a commandment, nay, and *the first and great commandment*:

I desire now to know how a man can be strictly and properly said to merit any thing by doing that which is his duty to do; much more how he can be said to earn or merit such a reward by doing his duty, as doth amount to a thousand times more in worth and value than his duty comes to? I pray let this be reconciled to the common principles of reason. We own indeed, that a man, by doing his duty, hath acted like an honest man: But nobody thinks, that he merits any thing thereby; much less, that he truly merits eternal life thereby, as the council of Trent determines. Will any man say, that, because a debtor pays the hundred pounds that he hath given his bond for, that therefore he merits of his creditor? Why, he owed it him, and had been unjust if he had not paid it him; but there are no thanks due to him for it. Well, but suppose this was a disputable point; nay, suppose, if you will, that there were some thanks due to him; yet will any man be so senseless as to say, that, because the debtor pays the hundred pounds according to his bond, that therefore the creditor is in justice bound to give him a thousand pounds for the paying that hundred, which then it was his duty to pay? And yet this is the case between God Almighty and us. We owe to him, as our Saviour here tells us, all the love, all the service, and, consequently, all the good works we can do in our whole life. It is a duty indispensably incumbent upon us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds; and we are false and unfaithful stewards of his benefits, if we do not. But now how we come to oblige God Almighty by this, nay, so far oblige him, that he should be bound in strict justice, for the little service we have done him, to bestow eternal life and glory upon us (which is ten thousand

thousand times of more value than the service of our whole life, had it been ever so exact and perfect, could amount to, or could pretend to); I say, how this should come to pass, or what reason there is in it, I am sure no man living can give an account of. Well, but there is an answer to this: It will be said, that we do not so much pretend to merit by those good works that we are strictly and indispensably obliged to, as by those good works we are not obliged to. If we perform services to God more than we are strictly bound to, more than he hath required of us, these, sure, may plead some merit, though strict duties may not. As for instance, two men may be both supposed to live innocently, and virtuously, and christianly, and both of them at last go to heaven: But one of them doth much exceed the other in devotion and prayers, in fastings and austerities, in alms and charity: Both did what they were bound to; but one of them did more than he was bound to: Both observed the precepts of the gospel; but one of them went beyond that, and proceeded even to the observance of the evangelical counsels, the rules of perfection: And here it is that the foundation of merit is to be laid. And this is indeed the full strength of what can be said for works of supererogation. But to this I answer, The distinction here between doing our duty, and doing more than our duty, between evangelical precepts and evangelical counsels, is vain and idle. For I would ask this question: Are these extraordinary performances that we are not bound to, these that you call evangelical counsels, or directions to perfection, but not strict precepts; I say, are these true instances or expressions of our love to God, or of our love to our neighbour, or are they not? If you will say they are not, how can they recommend us to God? What

reason hath he to be pleased with them, or to take any notice of them? You may as well say, that, to sit down and say over the letters of the alphabet an hundred times a day, or to go about the streets, and count all the signs between the one end of the city and the other; I say, you may as well imagine, that these works are meritorious, as that the other are, whatsoever they be, supposing they be not instances and expressions of our love to God; and therefore certainly there can be no merit or supererogation in works of that nature.

Well, but you will say, these works you talk of, are really instances and expressions of your love to God. You fast so often for God's sake. You go so many pilgrimages, for God's sake. You say so many prayers more than you are obliged to, for God's sake. You renounce the world, and vow a perpetual poverty, for God's sake. All these things you do out of the pure love of God. Yet every one of these things is more than you are in duty bound to by the laws of christianity. Why, all this seems very well; but yet it will be spoiled by asking one question more, and that is this: Do you think you can love God more than you can do? Do you think you can do things to please him more than it is in your power to do? If you say you cannot (as indeed all men in their wits must acknowledge; for no man can do more than he can do), then all these fine things are come to nothing, for you were bound to do, for the love of God, all these things that you have now talked of (supposing, indeed, that they did really recommend us to God, and were such expressions of our love as he delights in, which for my part I shall never believe of them); I say, you were bound to do all these things, because you are bound to love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
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and with all your soul, and with all your mind. It is your indispensable duty; nay, as our Saviour tells you, it is the first and great commandment. Now, if you can do more than all this amounts to, for the expressing your love to God, I will yield, that you may do more than God requires of you, and consequently may merit something from him. But, till you can love God more than with all your heart, and soul, and strength, I say, sure you cannot do any thing for the expressing your love to God, which it is not your duty to do. And if it be your duty to do it, where are your works of supererogation?

This, I think, is enough to have said in confutation of these absurd opinions, though abundance more might be offered, to shew how reasonable they are. But my text hath led me thus far, and I will not go farther than it leads me, especially upon so invidious an argument.

As for us, let us all endeavour to love God, and to serve him with all our hearts, in all those instances which he hath recommended to us by our Lord Jesus. Let us do our duty to him, and to our neighbour, as well as we can; and, when we have done our best, let us earnestly beg of him to forgive us our failings, to pardon our infirmities, to pass by all the slips, and faults, and miscarriages, we have been guilty of towards him. I am sure, all of us, even the best of us, do need his pardon; nay, do need it every day. Nor have we any other merits to plead but those of Christ Jesus. Nay, though we could be so happy as to live without sin in the world, and to do our whole duty, yet still we merit nothing from God's hands, still we have no way in the world obliged him, still the case between God and us is but the same as it is between  
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the master and the servant, in our Saviour's parable, with which I shall conclude, because indeed it is the sum of all that I have said, and may serve for a recapitulation of my whole discourse upon this point.

You may find it in the xviith chapter of St. Luke's gospel, and the 7th verse: *Which of you (saith he) having a servant plowing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by-and-by, when he is come from the field, go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken, and afterwards thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow, not. So likewise ye, when ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that thing which was our duty to do.* Thus far our Saviour. From whence we may gather, that those that do all these things which God hath commanded them, are but unprofitable servants; and therefore how unprofitable must they be, that do not an hundredth part of that which God hath commanded us! and yet I doubt this is the case of even good people among us. May God forgive the best of us all our neglects and miscarriages, and inspire us both with power and will to serve him better; and this for the only merits of his dear Son Jesus Christ. To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.



# S E R M O N XI.

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Whether those people, who though they exercise devotion towards God, yet do it with great dulness and deadness of affection, can be said to love God with all their hearts and souls?

M A T T. xxii. 37, 38, 39, 40.

37. *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*
38. *This is the first and great commandment.*
39. *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
40. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*



THE method I have proposed in treating of this text was,

I. To explain the duty here commanded, that is to say, what is implied in loving God with all our hearts and souls.

II. To shew upon what accounts this may be truly said to be the first and great commandment.

III.

III. To make some application of this doctrine, by drawing some useful inferences from them. And,

IV. To speak to some practical case about loving God with all our hearts.

Three of these heads I have already gone through in several discourses. I now come to the fourth and last.

Now the case I have to speak to concerning the love of God, is the case of those, who, though they exercise devotion towards God, yet do it with great dulness and deadness of affection; whether these people can be said to love God with all their hearts and souls?

The case is this: Prayer, and devotion, and the worship of God, are (we know) the most proper instances and expressions of our love to him; and it is readily acknowledged on all hands, that those persons who do not practise these things, who can live without praying, and worshipping God, have no true love of God in them. But now what shall be said of those persons that do indeed say their prayers, and that perhaps both in public and private; but yet they say them without any vigour or life, their affections are dead and flat in these holy exercises, they find no relish nor sweetness in them? Other people talk of a great pleasure and delight they take in these duties, and look upon it as a most agreeable employment to sing praises to God, and to pour out their souls in most fervent devotion to him; but they take no satisfaction in these kind of things. On the contrary, it is with great reluctancy oftentimes that they can obtain of themselves to engage in these exercises; and, while they are engaged, their minds are often employed about other things, and glad they are when they come to the end of their offices. What now shall we say to these persons?

sons? Is such a temper as this consistent with that sincere love of God, and that hearty sense of religion, that is required of us? This is the case: But, as thus generally put, it cannot be answered by a single yea or no. It may so happen, that a man that truly loves God may be in this dull disposition, though it doth more often happen, that this frame and disposition of mind is an effect of lukewarmness. We must therefore take into consideration several other circumstances in the persons concerned, before a right judgment can be made of their case. That which I can say about it, I shall reduce into these propositions. And,

First of all, As it is certain, that no man can be said to love God, or to have any sense of religion, who lives in a general neglect of prayer, and other exercises of devotion; so it is likewise certain, that, generally speaking, all men that do sincerely love God, supposing they be in health, and free from the disorders that arise from hypochondriac melancholy, will find their affections so carried out after God, that they will with great vigour, and the utmost intenseness of mind, perform their devotions to him; nay, they will take a great pleasure and delight in so doing. Not that they think God needs our services, or is any way better by them; but because they know and feel, that they themselves are really better by thus lifting up their souls to God; by adoring his excellencies, and setting forth his praises; by meditating on his goodness, and paying their acknowledgements; by devoting themselves to his service, and recommending the supply of all their wants to his fatherly care and bounty. These being the proper methods of growing and improving in all virtue and holiness, the natural expressions of the sense we have of God, and the love we bear to him,  
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and the chief, if not the only means of maintaining and enjoying a real communion with him, upon these accounts, as they will take all opportunities that their time and their business allow them of approaching to God both in public and private, so they will do it cheerfully and readily, and their hearts and minds will go along with the service. And so far will they be from looking upon it as a burden or imposition, thus to pay their constant tribute of prayer and thanksgiving to God, that they will reap great satisfaction and content from so doing. This, we say, generally speaking, will be the temper of those that truly love God.

But then, Secondly, We say it is not to be expected, that even the most devout persons should at all times perform their offices of religion with equal fervour, or with equal attention, or with equal satisfaction: It will unavoidably happen, what through the weakness of human nature, or what through business or unthought-of accidents, or twenty other things which may distract the thoughts; and what through the dulness and unfitness of our present temper for the exercise of these spiritual employments; I say, it will unavoidably happen, that even the most devout persons may be at some seasons very indisposed for devotion. And sometimes, when they apply themselves to the exercise of it, their minds shall be altogether so taken up and diverted by other objects (that have got the present possession of their thoughts), that they shall give little or no attention to what they are about; at other times, though they bend their minds as much as they can to the business they are doing, yet they shall find themselves very listless, and cold, and dull, and the whole performance will be very flat and insipid.

spid. At other times it shall be even against the grain of their inclinations to say their prayers at all. There is no man so spiritual in this world, but he must expect now-and-then to suffer these inconveniencies, even through the natural indisposition of his bodily temper, or through the distraction of his employments. It is a vain thing to talk of sitting so loose from this world, and having our affections so steadily placed upon God, that we shall be always in a praying frame. Human nature in this life will not bear it, and they will run themselves upon great hazards that do attempt it.

But then, here is the comfort against these inconveniencies, that generally they do not last for any long time. If we be at the present indisposed for devotion, or dead and lifeless in the exercise of it, yet in a little time we shall come to ourselves again. The fervour of our desires and affections towards God will return, and we shall perform our religious offices with the same heart, and life, and vigour that we used to do.

But then, Thirdly, You are to remember, what I have now said only concerns those indispositions for devotion, which every man now-and-then, at this or the other time, may find in himself. But now, whenever it happens that this dulness, and listlessness, and unattentiveness to our devotions, grows into a custom or habit, so that a man, generally speaking, performs them negligently and carelessly, and is hardly brought to them, and cares not how soon they are over; this is a bad sign, that the man either doth not love God so sincerely as he ought to do [as not having that regard to his worship and service, which the true notion of the love of God will necessarily

rily and indispensably put him upon]; or, if he did once love God, it is an argument, that his love wears off and decays apace, and, if great care be not taken to retrieve the fervour of his devotion, it is in great danger of being quite lost and extinguished. It is the experience of all mankind, that hath ever made any trials in these matters, that so long as a man doth heartily set himself to serve God, and to keep up a lively sense of him in his mind, it is impossible for him so long to be negligent or careless, or slight or perfunctory, in his devotions; he can as soon forbear eating heartily when he is hungry, as forbear the refreshing and entertaining his soul by communion with God, in all the offices of hearty prayer and devotion; as his affairs will allow him, and he hath opportunities put into his hands. The sense that he has of God's presence and goodness, and of his own dependence upon him, and of the continual need he stands in of his gracious influences, will necessarily put him upon this: This, I I say, will be the frame and temper of his soul, so long as the love of God is vigorous and powerful in him: But, as that declines, as the fervour of his mind towards goodness and religion doth wear off, so in proportion will the fervour of his devotion wear off also. Every degree or step of advance which the devil, or the world doth make into his affections, will presently shew itself, by taking off so many degrees from the heartiness of his devotion; and just as wordly cares, and sensual pleasures, and an unconcernedness for his spiritual and eternal interests do prevail, and get ground upon him, so he will grow more feeble and languid, more careless and unconcerned in the performance of his religious offices: They will be more tedious and irksome to him, and the less of his heart and soul will go  
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along with them: And if it should happen that those enemies of God do get an intire victory over him, so as to obtain the full possession of his heart, from that time forwards he will have no devotion at all; but however he may approach to God with his lips, his heart will be far from him.

This, I say, the constant experience of all christians doth always make good, and there is no doubt to be made of the truth of it: The more we love God, the more serious and chearful we shall be in our prayers, and other devout exercises; but as the love of God abates in us, so will our care and zeal about those things abate likewise: And when it comes to pass that we do not mind them, nor attend to them at all, and are unconcerned at ourselves that we are so regardless, though yet perhaps we have so much regard for our old customs, or the fashion of other people, that we do not quite leave them off, or absent ourselves from them: I say, when things come once to that pass with us, it is a strong argument either that we never had the true love of God, or that we are fallen from it.

I desire seriously that all of you would consider this, because I do not know any one single thing by which you may more certainly make a judgment concerning your progress in religion, and the love of God, or great abatement and decay in it, than this thing I have now mentioned. I do not say but that there are many actions much worse in their consequences, or more destructive of salvation, than the neglect of your devotions is. I do believe that whoredom and drunkenness; that pride, and malice, and uncharitableness; that covetousness, and extortion, and unjust dealing, and the like, do involve any man that is concerned in them, in a much greater guilt than the bare neglect of the worship of  
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God at due times, or than the careless and negligent performance of it doth: neither do I say, that all persons that make a conscience of saying their prayers constantly, and oftentimes too do it heartily, that all such must of necessity be truly religious, and hearty lovers of God: for I am convinced, that people may go so far in religion, as to make a conscience of worshipping God both in private and public, and yet, for all that, be very unconscientious in their other actions: Now I count, that if mens prayers and devotions have not that influence upon their spirits and lives, as to make them hate and avoid every thing that God hath declared against, and to put them upon the universal practice of purity, and humility, and meekness, and charity, and all other virtues which God hath recommended to us, it is not worth a rush, it shall never avail them to render them accepted of the great God, who is the searcher of hearts: Far am I, therefore, from placing the whole, or the greatest part of religion in this business of devotion; but this is that which I say, If ye do sincerely love God, and have a respect to his commandments, ye will know it by this, That your own hearts will strongly and powerfully incline you to be frequent and diligent in your applications to the throne of his grace. Ye shall not be able to pass a day without some act of communion with him, either in public or private; and when ye come at the more solemn times, or in a more solemn manner, to appear before God (as all christians do on the Lord's-day especially), ye will have a very serious regard to what you are about; you will not endure it in yourselves to approach to the temple of God, and in order to the solemn worship of him, as idle unconcerned hearers or spectators; but you will put out your whole strength  
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and vigour in joining with every prayer, and every thanksgiving, that is there offered up; and you will be so far from looking upon these exercises of religion, as burdensome impositions, that you will really take delight in them, and account the day wherein you are thus employed, as a good day to your souls: Thus, I say, you will certainly be affected, if your hearts be right towards God: But if ye find in yourselves, that you have no relish of these kind of things; if you can either content yourselves to live without praying at all; or if, when you say your prayers in private, you can content yourselves with the mere saying of them, without any regard or concern whether God minds them or no (as indeed there is little reason to think he should mind them, when you do not mind them yourselves,) and this not once or twice, but ordinarily and customarily; or when you come to worship God in the congregation, you come rather because you are used to come, than upon any serious design of recommending yourselves to God, and when you are there, you take so little notice of what ought to be your main business, that were it not that your eyes and your thoughts are employed upon other objects than what you come for there, you should think the whole service and attendance upon it, to be a tedious oppressive thing: I say, whenever you find your minds in this frame and disposition for any long time together, you may certainly conclude (whatever religion you pretend to,) that you have no hearty love to God, nor his worship, nor his ways: Or if you ever had any, it is strangely gone and dwindled away; and in case you do not take care, by a more hearty and serious exercise of devotion, to bring yourselves to a more divine and heavenly frame  
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of soul, you are certainly but still in the rank of mere animal, sensual, carnal men, and all your profession to religion and the love of God, will rather rise up in judgment against you, than be of any advantage to you.

But there is another case about dulness and flatness in devotion, far different from that I have now been speaking to, and which indeed the general question, as I put it in the beginning, hath reference to: This, therefore, I come, in the fourth place, to speak to.

Fourthly, Therefore I lay down this as a certain truth, that there are some people who may be very much indisposed for all religious offices, and find a great dulness and deafness of heart in the performance of them, and this too for a long time together, and yet for all that be true and sincere lovers of God, and very devout and religious persons. It is so far from being impossible, that it usually and frequently happens, that some persons who used to be very devout in their prayers and religious addresses, and took great delight in them; nay, and so fervent they were in those holy exercises, as to be raised up many pitches above their ordinary temper in their devotions, and to feel strange transports of love, and joy, and consolation, whilst they were thus employed; I say it is no strange unusual thing to see these very persons flag and abate so much, as to their vigour and fervour of devotion, as hardly to be able to pray at all; and when they do force themselves to perform their usual offices, they do it with so much wandering of thought, and distraction of mind, with so much languor and feebleness, and with so little comfort and satisfaction to their own minds, that they verily believe all their devotion is gone, all their love to God, which heretofore was

extinguished: What now shall we say to these people? Shall we say that they have lost their first love? Shall we say that they are fallen from all that sense of religion that they formerly had? Yes, we should say so, if their decay in devotion did proceed from such causes as we spoke of in the last particular; if they were so careless, and negligent, and unconcerned about these matters, as those were we now represented; but we suppose the case to be quite otherwise with them: We suppose they have the same concern and respect for all God's commandments that ever they had: We suppose they hate every thing that is evil and wicked, and pursue every thing that is virtuous and praise-worthy, as much now as they did before: We suppose that they have the same desires, and the same affections towards God and his service, that they formerly felt in themselves, and that it is their great trouble and affliction, that they can pray and worship God no better: In a word, we suppose that they do as heartily wish, and study, and endeavour to recommend themselves to God, and to enjoy communion with him, as ever they did; but it is their misfortune that they cannot raise up their minds and affections to him in their prayers and other holy offices, as they were wont to do: All their delight in those things is gone, all the sweetness and comfort that they used to find in the worship of God, whether in their closets, or in their families, or in the church, or at the Lord's table, is quite vanished and lost to them, and this is the thing that troubles them.

Why now, if this truly be the case of these persons, they need not trouble themselves at all; for I dare confidently say to them, that notwithstanding all the deadness, and dulness, and flatness of their affections towards God in the performance of their religious

duties, they are in a safe condition, and they do as truly love God with all their hearts and souls, as ever they did, only they do not enjoy so much the comfort and delight of it as they did before.

The truth is, all this dulness and flatness and indisposition for devotion, is to be charged upon the ill habit of their bodies, rather than any vicious affections of their souls : If the temper of their bodies was but well set right, the good inclinations of their minds would presently return, and all the joys and satisfactions and comforts along with them : But now, how to do that, how to restore their natural tempers to their former briskness, and vigour, is the work of another profession to direct, and not mine ; only this it is proper for me to say upon this occasion, that as this dulness and heaviness and listlessness of spirit in the exercise of religious offices doth, in such persons as I am speaking of, always proceed from an indisposition of body, and most commonly that indisposition proceeds from causes which they cannot prevent, and for the redress of which they must have recourse to the physicians ; for sometimes it proceeds from such causes as they may prevent ; and of those it is not out of my province to speak a little : I say then, that as to the keeping up in ourselves a constant briskness and chearfulness and vigour in the offices of our devotion, a great deal lies in the discreet and prudent management and conduct of ourselves as to this matter ; and the contrary effects we complain of, are often to be ascribed to our own imprudence and indiscretion. One point of this indiscretion is this, When we are too eagerly and violently bent upon our religious exercises, and do not give ourselves reasonable rest and intermission ; we would have our bodies so perfectly at the command of our spirits, that, by our good will, they should attend

no other work but what serves to the promoting their ends. Some persons, especially young beginners in religion, are of this temper ; they would be always praying or reading, or at least have their thoughts employed upon some serious or religious argument ; and all that time that is not thus spent, is, in their account, spent vainly and unprofitably.

But whatever these persons think, this is never the way to subdue the flesh to the spirit ; on the contrary, by this means they quite spoil the good habits of their bodies, on which their chearful serving of God doth all in all depend ; and the consequence hereof will be, that tho' perhaps they began very briskly, and found a great deal of peace and joy when they first entered upon the way of religion and devotion ; yet if they use themselves at this rate for any long time, they will not hold out, but will miserably flag before they be half at the end of their journey : If therefore any one means to go on vigorously and chearfully in the love of God, and avoid this dulness and flatness of affection that is here complained of, let him not harrass his mind and his body with too constant seriousness and thoughtfulness, but let him unbend himself at due times, let him follow his worldly affairs and business with all chearfulness, let him not think that he is always to be so intent upon the business of devotion, but that he may recreate and divert himself as other men do, and indulge his constitution in its innocent cravings.

But I need not insist upon this, because there are not many that stand in need of this sort of advice : God knows the most of us rather need spurs to quicken our endeavours and our diligence in the worship of God, than reins to hold us in : But there is another point of indiscretion in the conduct of ourselves, which I ought,

196 *If the Dull and Dead in their Devotion,*  
upon this occasion, to caution against, because it often proves the cause of the decay of our briskness and vigour in the service of God, and makes religion and devotion very heavy and burdensome to those that use it, and that is, the too much tying up and fettering ourselves with rules and forms of our own making. As for instance, when we make resolutions to pray so often every day, and so long, and in such a form; to read so much of a good book; to forbear wholly the use of this or the other indifferent thing; not to give above such a portion of our time to our business, or to our company, or to our recreations, or the like: this exact methodizing of our actions and our devotions before-hand, tho' it be very lawful, and tho' we meet with it as recommended in many godly books, nay, and at some time it serves really to good purposes, yet it often proves a snare to him that thus ties up himself (especially if he be a person of that temper we are now speaking of;) for tho' perhaps the rules we set ourselves were very prudent, and did exactly besit our circumstances at the time that we made them, yet if our temper or circumstances do alter, as they often do, they will cease to do so; and that which at first was both profitable and delightful, will, in time, prove not only inconvenient, but intolerably troublesome, and, by degrees, perhaps eat out the heart and briskness of his devotion and religion: We should so order all our religious exercises, as to put as little constraint upon ourselves as may be; and the way to do that, is to leave ourselves at liberty, as to the particular modes and methods, and times and circumstances of them; if we do but secure the performance of our duty, we do our work. The best way to secure it is not by binding ourselves to this or the other method, but by making it as easy as we can to our present circumstances:



stances: We must rely, if we mean to keep up the edge and fervour of our minds towards spiritual things, and would not fall into that loathing and disgust of them, nor feel that tediousness in them that we are now complaining of: We must, I say, indulge a great deal to our humours and tempers, and not always be forcing ourselves upon this or the other exercise, which is against the grain of our present inclination: Thus, for instance, if I find that my attention will not hold out to the length of my ordinary devotions, why, in this case, let me not scruple to shorten and contract them: If I cannot pray with devotion and affection in my usual form, let me take another that pleaseth me better at that time, or use no form at all, but pray as my affections lead me: If praise and thanksgiving do better fit my present humour than confessing my sins, let me chuse that, and let the other all alone.

Thus also in all the other actions of religion, where no express law of God hath interposed (for as for the rules of devotion, that you meet with in books, they are no laws to you, tho' they may be good directions; I say, where no express law of God hath interposed) there it is the wisest way to comply with our own inclinations, and not needlessly to cross and teaze ourselves: By this means we shall make religion and devotion, by degrees, natural, and easy, and pleasant to us, and in a great measure avoid that coldness of affection, those wanderings of thought, that tediousness, and dulness, and dryness of spirit, which the unnecessary restraint and obligations that men lay upon themselves in these matters, are oftentimes the occasion of.

And this is all that I have to say upon this case.

Consider what ye have heard; and the Lord, &c.



## S E R M O N XII.

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Concerning our Obligation to observe the Sabbath in general.

EXODUS XX. 8.

*Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.*



IS majesty, in his late letter to the bishops, requires, That all the clergy be ordered to preach frequently against those particular sins which are most prevailing in this realm ; as, namely, against blasphemy, swearing and cursing, against perjury, against drunkenness, and against profanation of the Lord's day : And that they do also read to their people such statute law or laws, as are provided against that vice or sin which is their subject on that day.

I intend, at this time, to treat of one of these arguments ; namely, that which concerns the observation of the Lord's day ; and for that reason the statute that concerns this matter was now read to you ; and I shall go on with the rest of the things as I have opportunity.

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The text I have chosen is the beginning of the fourth commandment, which all we of this church must needs own to be a law that obligeth us, because at the repetition of it by the minister, which is done every Sunday and holiday, we do all make this response: *Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.*

Now, if there be any thing obliging in that commandment, it is this, *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*; for that is the sum and substance of the commandment: All the other things there mentioned are but either an account of the reason why the seventh day is thus to be kept holy, or else an account of the manner how it was to be kept holy.

My argument then is the sabbath day; and in treating of it, I shall divide my discourse into four parts.

The First shall be about our obligation to observe the sabbath in general.

The Second shall be about the translation of the sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first.

The Third shall be about the great necessities and advantages of strictly observing the Lord's day, which is our sabbath.

The Fourth shall be about the manner of observing it.

I begin with the first head, concerning our obligation to observe the sabbath in general; and this will be more than enough to entertain our meditation at this time. And here I am sensible I am entering into a field of controversy, where my business will not so much be to warm your affections, as to dispute and argue; but tho' my argument lead me to talk drily, yet I shall endeavour to talk as plainly as I can.

For the preventing and avoiding disputes, as much as can be, I desire to premise these three things :

First of all, When we talk of our obligation to observe the sabbath, we own that we use the word sabbath in a very improper sense : For the word sabbath, as it is always used, both in scripture and ecclesiastical writers, is constantly appropriated to the Jewish sabbath, or Saturday ; and therefore it is with some absurdity that a great many among us do call our Lord's day by the name of the sabbath day. If any foreigner heard us express ourselves so, they would verily believe we meant Saturday, and not Sunday : But however, since it is customary among us to call our Lord's day by the name of the sabbath day, I do not refrain the use of it, especially at this time, when I am not treating of the particular day we are to observe, but of a day of rest in general, which may properly enough be called a sabbath, on what day soever it fall ; for sabbath signifies no more than a day of rest.

There are two things to be distinguished, in the sabbath, as it is used in scripture. First, That portion of time in general that is to be set apart for the more solemn worship of God ; and that is one day in the weekly revolution, or one day in seven. Secondly, That precise particular day in the seven, that was thus to be set apart. Now under the Jewish dispensation, that was the last day of the week ; but under the christian dispensation, it is the first day of the week : So that we may properly enough, when we speak in general, of a day of rest in a weekly revolution, call it a sabbath ; tho' the particular day on which we christians rest, is not so properly the sabbath as the Lord's day.

Secondly, Whatever weight I lay upon the observation of the sabbath, yet I do not fetch it from any  
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obligation that is upon us, from any of Moses's laws in this matter. The laws that God gave upon mount Sinai by Moses, did never concern any but the children of Israel, and those that dwelt among them: Nor were they ever designed or intended to be laws to any other nation, and therefore the ten commandments themselves, as they were delivered by Moses, tho' we confess they do oblige us, yet they do not oblige us at all by virtue of that promulgation, but upon other accounts; namely, either the reasonableness and goodness of the matter of them, or some new authority that is stamped upon them. Whatever therefore is wholly Jewish in the sabbath, though it be never so plainly required by God's law, doth no way concern us: And there are several laws relating to the sabbath, in the Old-testament, that are of that nature; nay, and some even in the fourth commandment (which, as I said, our church owns in the general to be a law to us); namely, not only the fixing the sabbath to the seventh day of the week, but also the strict rest both of man and beast on that day, which is there enjoined. But these things, as I shall shew hereafter, were no part of the law of the sabbath, as it is a law to us; and therefore we have no reason to concern ourselves about them.

The Third and last thing I have to premise is this: When I talk of shewing the obligation that is upon all christians to observe the sabbath, I would not have you expect other sort of proof for it than the thing affords. I will not be so positive, as some have been, to affirm that the observance of the sabbath is bound upon us by the law of nature. No, nor dare I affirm that we have any direct express law of our Lord Jesus to oblige us to it. But it is abundantly  
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enough for our purpose, if we can shew that there are evidences enough of its being a law to all of us that believe in scripture ; and that it is our duty to observe it ; and that we sin if we do not, unless there be urgent necessity in the case to excuse us.

Having premised these three things, I come to the point ; and here I have two things to offer to you.

And, First of all, if we take the lowest hypothesis that is laid down in this matter, I do not see, but that it sufficiently infers our obligation to observe the sabbath. Those that give themselves the greatest latitude and liberty in talking on this argument, yet do own so much, as that it is impossible, even according to their principles, to excuse a man from sin (if he be a christian) that lives in a constant neglect of the Lord's day. For thus we reason :

It is for ever a law to all mankind, and it is owned by all to be so (because it is a branch of the law of nature) that some portion of that time that God hath given us, some days of those many that he affords us, should be solemnly consecrated to his more immediate worship and service ; and there ought to be a very frequent return of those days. For the honour of God is concerned in these two things, and without them it is impossible that even a face of religion should be kept up in the world.

Now if God has not by any immediate revelation set out those times or days, and the returns of them, it falls to the public authority in every country that hath the care of religion to do it. And what they establish in this case, doth bind the consciences of all the subjects to its observance, even as if it was a divine law. Just as in the case of paying part of our estates, by way of tribute, to the public use of our country. The law  
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of nature as well as the law of Christ oblige us to pay tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom. But now how much, or in what way we are to pay tribute or custom, that is not determined by the law of God; but by the laws of the country where we live: And they are to be the measure of every one's conscience in that matter; and he who in that case cheats the king of those customs which the law gives him as his due, doth offend against the law of God and nature, as well as against the law of the land.

So, I say, it stands with reference to our dues to God. He that defrauds God Almighty of that portion of time, which, by the laws of his country, is solemnly consecrated or devoted to him, may be truly said to sin against God in that matter, as well as to transgress a canon, or an act of parliament.

The case now standing thus, admit that there was no particular law of God about this matter, that did any way concern us christians, yet these two things we find:

We find, in the first place, that whereas all other nations were left to the discretion of their lawgivers, for the assigning those portions of time that should be given to God's public service; yet there was one nation, among whom that matter was perfectly taken care of by God himself (who certainly is the best judge of what proportion of our time is fit to be given to him); and he determined to make it a perpetual law, that every seventh day that came over their heads, should be solemnly dedicated to his service.

We find likewise, that though our Lord Jesus made no new law in this matter, yet his disciples, from the very beginning, thinking they could not follow a better precedent,

cedent, than what God had set before them in his laws, to his own people the Jews; they likewise pitched upon the same proportion, and religiously set apart one day in every seven, to their more solemn assemblies for the worship of God. And accordingly that practice hath been ever since continued by all the christians in the world; and where-ever christianity hath been the established religion of a country, the laws of that country, both ecclesiastical and civil, have appropriated that day to the solemn worship of God.

Why now, I say, admit there was no more to be said for the religious observation of one day in seven among us, but this that I have mentioned, yet even this is abundantly sufficient to lay an obligation upon every man's conscience to do it, and abundantly sufficient to convince him that he sins if he do not. Though the gospel gives no command about the sabbath; yet both the law of nature and the gospel give this general command, That stated times should be set apart for God's public worship: And if all Christendom have agreed that one day in seven shall be that stated time, every man, in my judgment, is bound in point of conscience to the observance of that day, unless some great necessity happens that hinders him; in which case, the most express law of God, in such matters, might be dispensed with.

Thus, I am sure, we are wont to argue in twenty other cases. It will be as hard to produce a plain precept out of the New-testament, for the baptism of infants, as it will be for the observing of the Lord's day: But yet, since there is this general precept, that all nations should be made proselytes to the gospel, and the way of making a proselyte was by baptism; and since it



was the practice of the Jews, that when any family was made profelytes to the law of Moses, the children were baptized as well as the grown persons; and since, lastly, the whole christian church for many ages hath used that practice; I do think we do deservedly account it more than a breach of a bare ecclesiastical law, to refuse the bringing our children to baptism. Thus, again, there is no law, either of nature or scripture, that marriage shall be solemnized by an ecclesiastical person; but yet, since there is this general resolution, both of nature and scripture, that all cohabitation of man and woman without marriage is fornication; and since the laws of the land and the church have made it necessary to a marriage that a minister join the persons, I hope, by all sober persons, it will be accounted more than bare formality, even a necessary duty, incumbent upon them by God's laws, to be joined together in matrimony, as the church appoints, before they live together as man and wife.

I might bring many more instances of this nature, but these are abundantly sufficient, to shew that there is a vast difference, as to the obligation of conscience, between laws that are purely human as to the matter of them, and laws that as to the matter of them are divine, tho' the determination of them as to their particular circumstances be left to human prudence. In the former case, men are not so strictly obliged; they do but offend against human authority at the most, if they transgress them; but in the latter case, as they do directly transgress the laws of men, so do they interpretatively transgress the laws of God; and this is the case of the sabbath.

But Secondly, To come to the other thing I have to offer to you: We have hitherto proceeded from the  
lowest

lowest hypothesis that is laid down as to this matter ; and I think we may advance a great deal higher. That which I have hitherto said, only amounts to this, that by the law of God, some portion of our time should be dedicated to his service ; and that the return of those times should be frequent. But that one day in seven should be thus dedicated, that as to us is only of human appointment. From whence it seems to follow, that the same authority that appointed that, might, if they please, rescind, or alter it ; and instead of one day in seven, which is the notion of the sabbath, might order us to keep one day in six, or one day in eight. So that after all, the law of the sabbath is but a precarious thing, and depends altogether upon the will of our governors. This is the great objection that is to be made against that account I have now given.

Now, to obviate this, I say further, in the second place, that there is so much to be urged, not only in general, for God's requiring determinate set times, frequently returning, for his public service, but also for his fixing those times to one day in every seven, and that to continue as a standing law, in all the countries of the world, where his will is known ; I say, there is so much, from reason and authority, to be urged for this, that, for my part, I do not think it is in the power of any human authority upon earth, whether ecclesiastical or civil, to alter this constitution. Now, if this can be made out, I think there is as sure and effectual a foundation laid for the perpetual obligation to observe the sabbath as the strictest of the sabbatarians can desire. This thing indeed is not to be made out by any single argument, but by a great many taken together. We are to prove this matter, as we prove the truth and divinity of the christian religion, not by one single medium

dium or topic, but from several considerations amass'd together, and brought into one view.

And, First of all, let this be laid as a foundation; God, in the management and ordering of the very first work he did (which was the creation of the world) seem'd to design that a seventh part of our time should be consecrated to an holy rest, for his honour and service. God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. What can be the natural meaning of this, but to teach us that we should work six days, and on the seventh rest from our ordinary labours, and apply ourselves to reflection, both upon our own works, and more particularly upon the works of God Almighty, in order to the praising and celebrating his holy name? Certainly there is something of a moral instruction to all mankind, intended by God, in thus ordering the works of the creation: It had been the same thing to him, to have made and finish'd the world in one day, nay, in one minute of a day, as in six days: If he had but spoke the word, at once all the creatures of heaven and earth had been in the same actual being and order, that they were at the end of the six days: But this method he chose to do all his works in, that all the generations of the world, to whom the history of the creation should come, might, from hence, have a perpetual everlasting reason and foundation, to dedicate one day to an holy rest, after six days of labour. There is no possible account to be given of this manner of proceeding but this.

But that is not all. In the Second place, This is the very account that God himself gave to the first parents of mankind, of this his proceeding: He did not leave them to collect this conclusion from their own reason; but, because he finish'd his work in six days, and rested the seventh, therefore they should finish their  
works

works in six days, and rest a seventh: I say, he did not leave this matter with them, but he expressly declared, and gave it in instruction to our first parents, and to their children after them, that they should do as he had done. For the very first thing we hear, after the works of the creation were finished, is this, as you have it in Gen. ii. 2. *On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; that is, separated it from common uses; for that is always the notion of sanctification.* And why so? It follows, because that in it he had rested from all his works. Here is not only an express declaration, that God from the beginning, separated or consecrated one day in seven, but also the ground and reason for which he did so; namely, because on the seventh day he had rested from all his works.

What greater evidence now can we desire, for the sabbath being of perpetual obligation to all mankind, than these two things I have mentioned? Here is an everlasting ground and foundation laid for it in the very works of the creation. Here is likewise an express declaration of God's will, that upon that ground and foundation, a perpetual holy rest on one day in every seven should be established: And accordingly, from the beginning of the world, that proportion or quota of our time is, by God, consecrated to himself. And lastly, this consecration of the seventh day to the service of God, could have no respect to the Jews, or any other particular nation, because it was grounded upon the works of the creation, and was made in the time of our first parents; and therefore must be supposed to be of universal concernment, and to extend to all the children

children of Adam, to whom the history of the creation should come. I do not see what can be reasonably said against this way of arguing: I am confident, all that are acquainted with the holy scripture will be satisfied with it: Sure I am, both our Saviour and St. Paul do reason after this manner. St. Paul, in the ninth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, makes it his business to prove the superiority of man above the woman; but pray mind what topic he proves it from; why this very topic we are now upon, the method of God's creating them: *The man, saith he, is not of the woman, but the woman of the man; neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man; therefore ought she to be in subjection.* You see plainly here, that because God made man first, and out of him created woman; and declared withal, that he therefore created her, that she might be an help-mate for the man; St. Paul doth from hence conclude the perpetual obligation of woman to be subject to the man.

Thus, again, our Saviour argues just after this manner, in the business of putting away one wife, and marrying another: The pharisees had brought that case to him, whether such a practice was lawful? He answers that it was not. They urged the permission of Moses, who had allowed them to put away their wives, if they gave them a writing of divorcement: He tells them, that this was permitted to them only upon account of the hardness of their hearts (that is, the cruelty of their natures) but from the beginning it was not so. How now doth he prove this? Why he urgeth the manner of God's creation of mankind: *Have you not read, saith he, that he which made them in the beginning made them male and female; and said, For*  
*this*

*this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore, saith he, they are no more two, but one flesh: What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*

You see that our Saviour's argument here, that a man should have but one wife, and that those two should not be separated, is purely drawn from this, that God created one man and one woman at the first, and joined them together, and made them one flesh. See Matthew xix. 3, and so on.

If now this be a good argument (as there is no doubt but it is) that a man should for ever be obliged to have but one wife, I cannot imagine, but that it is as good an argument that every man should be obliged to rest on the seventh day, after six days labour, because this was the method that God took in the creation of the world; and not only so, but he did from that ground, sanctify the seventh day to be a day of rest to all the posterity of Adam and Eve.

I know of no objection against what I have said, unless it be this; it is indeed hardly worth mentioning; but, because some have urged it, I will take notice of it: They say, the institution of the sabbath was not so early as we pretend; for the first command was given by God in Marah, after the children of Israel came out of Egypt. But to this I answer, that this is said without any reason, nay, contrary to all reason; for though the command of the sabbath was then first renewed, yet it was not then first given; for it was given at the beginning of the world; and for this we have the express word of the scripture, that God, upon the finishing his works, *blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.* Ay but, say they, these words are prophetic,

phetical, or spoken by way of anticipation; that is to say, Moses, when he had given an account of the history of the creation in six days, took that occasion to shew the reason why God, in following times, appointed the sabbath to the Jews. Very well; they do indeed, in saying this, make Moses an admirable orator, as well as an historian; for they make him speak such strange figures, and tell his story in such a way, as never any good author did since his time.

Moses pretends to give us a plain history of the creation, and of what happened thereupon: *On the seventh day, saith he, God ended his work; and he rested the seventh day from all his works that he had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he rested from all his works.* Now, say these people, the meaning of these words is no more than this; *God rested the seventh day from all his works that he had made,* and, twenty-four hundred years after, in Marah, he blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, to the people of Israel: But I appeal to any man, whether this be not a plain force upon the words; and whether any man of sense, that should meet with such a passage in any other historian, could possibly so interpret it. But this is our comfort, that, though some of the Jews talk after this manner, yet the discreetest, and those that are incomparably the best and most judicious writers of that nation are of another opinion, and own the institution of the sabbath to have been from the very creation of the world.

And indeed, if there had not been such express testimony of scripture for it, yet there are a great many other arguments that would have persuaded us thereunto. I will at this time mention but one thing.

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What account can be given of all the world's computing their time by weeks; that is, counting seven days, and then beginning again? I say, what possible account can be given of this, but that original distribution of time that God had observed in the works of the creation, and had deliver'd to the first parents of mankind, and they to their children? For men to reckon time by days and nights, is obvious to sense; nay, and to compute time by months and years, hath a sufficient foundation in it from nature; for mankind cannot avoid observing the course of the moon, and of the sun, which makes months and years: But why they should count seven days, and then begin again; that hath no foundation in nature, but must be taught them from the tradition of their fathers; which could have no other original than that which I am now insisting on.

And yet this way of computing time by a weekly revolution, obtained throughout all the world, as far as we can judge, from the very beginning of time. That the patriarchs did so some hundreds of years before the law of the sabbath was given to the children of Israel, we have sufficient evidence from sundry texts of scripture: That all the antient nations, of whom we have any history, both Egyptians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Romans, nay, and the barbarous nations too, I say, that they did so likewise, is proved to us from the antientest records that are extant about them.

This practice now, that had no foundation in nature, obtaining thus universally throughout the whole world, and that from time immemorial, is to me a demonstration that they had it from the first parents of mankind, and that it was founded in God's Institution of the seventh day being set apart to his Service.

I do



I do grant, indeed, they did not know the true reason why they thus counted their days by sevens: For the tradition of the creation of the world, and the institution of the sabbath, was, in time, and by degrees, lost among them: But yet thus still they computed their time; and we that have the scriptures, know upon what grounds that computation was begun. But thus much of this point.

Two things now, I think, we have established:

First, That God, in the creation of the world, did direct to the observation of one day in seven to his service.

Secondly, That he did expressly declare to our first parents, that it was his mind, that this sabbath should be observed: And these, I think, are very good foundations to build our structure upon.

But there is a great deal more to be added, as, namely, in the third place, it is very observable, that when God came to give his body of laws to the Jews 2400 years after the creation, and by them to repair the ruins that idolatry, and the evil customs of the world, had brought upon that people, he had so great a regard to this first law of the creation concerning the sabbath, that he took care to put it among the ten words (as they are called in Deuteronomy) I mean the ten commandments, which he himself distinguished from the rest of the laws he gave by Moses, by pronouncing them with his own voice from heaven.

Fourthly, When our Saviour came to give a new law, though he did abolish all the ceremonial laws of Moses, yet the law of the ten commandments he seems to have ratified and confirmed, and consequently that law which concerns the observation of a sabbath.

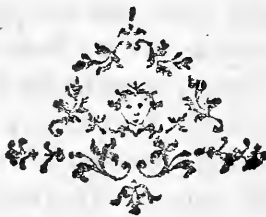
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Fifthly, In pursuance of this, the apostles, and the first christians, though they threw out of the fourth commandment all that was perfectly Jewish and ceremonial, yet they retained the substance of it, and, accordingly did constantly charge it upon themselves to set apart one day in seven for the public worship of God: And this practice, thus begun by the apostles, hath ever since continued in all ages, and in all churches of the christian world.

Whether now all these things, taken together, do not evince, that the law of the sabbath is more than a mere human ecclesiastical constitution, and that it is not in the power of the whole church to abrogate or to alter it (which was the thing to be proved) I will leave you to be judges of.

But I cannot now fill up these three last heads: I must refer that, with the rest of my discourses upon this argument, to some other opportunity.

Consider what ye have heard, &c.





# S E R M O N XIII.

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Concerning our obligation to observe the sabbath in general; and of the change of the sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week.

EXODUS XX. 8.

*Remember to keep holy the Sabbath-day.*



HAVE entered upon this argument already, and made one discourse upon it: I now design to go on with it.

The method I proposed, was to discourse upon these four heads:

I. Of our obligation to observe the sabbath in general, taking that word as signifying no more than setting apart one day in the weekly revolution for the worship of God.

II. Of the change of the sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first.

III.

216 *Of our obligation to observe the Sabbath ;*

III. Of the importance of this duty, and great advantage of strictly observing the Lord's day.

IV. Of the manner of observing it.

I began with the first of these Heads ; namely, concerning our obligation to observe the sabbath in general : And the first Thing I urged was this, That if we take the lowest hypothesis that is laid down in this matter, and proceed only upon such grounds as are allowed by those that talk the most loosely in this matter, yet by this way of reasoning we may sufficiently infer an everlasting obligation upon our consciences to observe the sabbath : For, admitting that there is no particular law of God that concerns us, which requires our observation of a sabbath, yet it is granted on all hands, that there is a general law of God, which requires, that some portions of that time he hath given us, some days of those many that he affords us, should be solemnly consecrated to his more immediate worship and service ; and there ought to be a very frequent return of those days. Now, if God hath not by any immediate revelation, set out those times or days, and the return of them, it falls to the public authority, in every country, that hath the management of the affairs of religion, to take care of it ; and what they establish in this case, suitable to the principles of reason, and the other notices we have of God's will, doth bind the consciences of all the subjects to its observance, even as if it was a divine law. Though there be no particular law of God that obligeth us christians to observe one day in seven, more than one day in six or eight ; yet both the law of nature, and the law of the gospel, give this general command, that stated times should be set apart for God's public worship : Though therefore there be no particular law of God in this matter, yet  
since

since the Christians, from the very beginning took up this practice in imitation of the Jews, setting apart one day in seven for the worship of God; and that practice, where-ever christianity hath obtained, has been strictly bound upon us by the law both ecclesiastical and civil, this is enough, in all reason, to lay an obligation upon every man's conscience to observe this day.

But, secondly, There are others do carry this matter a great deal higher; and do affirm, that God hath not left us to the general dictates of nature, and the example of the Jews, and the constitution of the church or state grounded thereupon, as to the proportion of the time that we are to dedicate to his service; but he himself has sufficiently declared his will in that matter, and has made it a standing perpetual law to all mankind, to whom the knowledge of his revelations should come, that one day in every seven should be thus dedicated to him; nor is it in the power of any church or state to alter or vary from this proportion. Now, for the proof of this, they reason after this manner:

In the first place, God, in the very creation of the world, did direct to the observance of one day in seven to his service: For what reason can be given of his making the world in six days, and resting on the seventh, but this, that he might hereby lay an everlasting ground and foundation for our observing one day in seven as an holy rest?

Secondly, He did expressly declare, that this was his meaning, and gave it in charge to our first parents, that they should rest on the seventh day, as he had done. The holy scripture tells us, that after the heavens and the earth were finished, God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he rest-

218 *Of our obligation to observe the Sabbath;*

ed from all his works. Now what was thus blessed and set apart by the order of God to our first parents, must certainly concern all the children that came of them: Thus far I went the last time.

I now proceed; Thirdly, When God came to give his laws to his peculiar people the Jews, 2400 years after the creation, and by them to repair the ruins that idolatry, and the evil customs of the world, had brought upon that people; so great a regard had he to this first law of the creation concerning the sabbath, that he took care to put it among the ten commandments; which he sufficiently shewed he had a greater value for, than all the rest of the laws he gave by Moses, in that he pronounced them with his own voice from heaven; in that he twice wrote them upon two tables of stone with his own finger; in that he ordered them to be laid up in the ark of the covenant, for an everlasting memorial. Now it is certain, that nine of those ten commandments are of a moral nature, and are of everlasting obligation to all mankind all the world over: And is it not then very probable, that the remaining one (I mean the fourth, which concerns the sabbath) is of the same nature, and was intended to be of the same obligation to all those to whom the notices of these things should come? To suppose otherwise, is indeed to charge God with such a botch, such an ill-contriv'd method of shuffling his laws together, as no prudent lawgiver would be guilty of.

Add, in the fourth place, that when our Saviour came to give a new law, that should oblige all christians to the end of the world, though he did not give any particular law about the sabbath, yet he seems to have confirmed the ten commandments (of which the law of the sabbath was one) and to have adopted them in-

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*and its change from the 1st to the 7th day.* 219

to his laws: For it is of these that he seems to speak, when he saith, in the vth chapter of St. Matthew, *I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it*, or to fill it up. It is of these that he speaks, when, to the man that asked him, what he should do to inherit eternal life? he gave this answer; *If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments.* And, lastly, It is of these ten commandments that St. James speaks, when he saith, *He that breaks one of these is guilty of all*; that is to say, because they are all bound upon us by the same authority.

These things seem to import, that it was never the design of Christ to let the authority of the ten commandments cease among mankind: And though they were no law to us, by virtue of their promulgation on mount Sinai, yet, by his exacting obedience to them, they became laws to us: It is true they all of them, except this one, would have been so, though he had never mentioned them, because nine of them are the dictates of nature, and grounded upon eternal reason: But his mentioning the commandments so often, and laying stress upon them, and never once excepting or excluding the fourth out of the number, is an argument, that he meant that all these, as they stand in the decalogue, should have authority with us: And certainly this is the sense of the church of England worship; because, in her public offices these ten commandments are given us as the measure of our duty both to God and man; and in the rehearsal of them, in the Sunday service, we do as much ask pardon of God for the breach of the fourth commandment, and implore his grace, that we may keep it for the future, as we do with respect to any of the rest: And yet, if there be any thing at all required in the fourth commandment, it is the setting apart one day in seven to God's service.

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But, Fifthly, To go on with our argument: As God, in the creation of the world, directed to the observation of one day in seven, and gave it as a law to our first parents, and renewed it afterwards in the ten commandments; and these ten commandments were adopted by Christ into this law, and consequently the fourth commandment as well as the rest; so, in the last place, in pursuance of all this, it is observable, that the apostles, and first christians, though they threw out of the fourth commandment all that was perfectly Jewish and ceremonial, yet they retained the substance of it; and accordingly did constantly charge it upon themselves to set apart one day in seven for the public worship of God: And this practice, thus begun by the first christians, hath ever since continued in all ages, and in all churches, of the christian world. This is matter of fact, and it is so evident, that none that I know do deny it; and therefore it is needless to offer to prove it.

It is true indeed, that some churches, for a considerable time after Christ, did observe both the jewish and the christian sabbath: But sure this cannot be brought as an argument against what we are saying. It is plain, by their practice, they all made a conscience of keeping one day in seven holy to God; but if, in imitation of the Jews, they would keep Saturday as well as Sunday, this rather strengthens our assertion, that they thought the law of the fourth commandment to be obliging to them, than any way to weaken it. It shews indeed, supposing they took up this practice as a matter of duty, that they were in doubt which was the right day they were obliged to keep, and therefore, for sureness, they would keep both; but, in the mean time, it is a demonstration, that they thought themselves obliged to keep one day in seven.

Thus



Thus I have represented to you, in as few words as I can, the arguments that are brought for the proving, that the sabbath, or the observation of one day in seven for religious uses, is more than a bare human institution; and that it is bound upon us by God Almighty himself. I must confess, I think there is great weight in them: But I will not censure any man that cannot come up to these measures, provided that he takes himself to be obliged in conscience to observe the Lord's day, though he fetches that obligation from other grounds and principles: But whoever doth not that, whoever hath so little sense of religion, as not to think himself bound to dedicate one day in the week to join with his fellow-christians in the solemn worship God, such a man I can hardly believe to be a christian, though he never so much calls himself by that name.

And thus much of our first head, namely, concerning our obligation to observe the sabbath in general; that is, to set apart one day in seven, for the more solemn worship of God.

I now come to the second head, concerning the change of the sabbath from the seventh day of the week, as it was observed by the Jews, to the first day of the week, as it is observed by the christians. And here the obvious question is, By what authority this was done? What law of the gospel have we to shew for this change? And, if we can produce none, how comes it to pass, that we christians do not observe the seventh day of the week, as it is ordered in the fourth commandment? God saith, *Remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy.* Now all the world knows, that the sabbath-day, that is here spoken of, was the last day in the weekly revolution, that day which the Jews observe for their sabbath; and not the first day of the

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week,

week, or Sunday, as we christians now observe: either therefore you must shew some law of Christ, whereby he hath appointed Sunday to be the day that is to be solemnly devoted to him; or else, if we be obliged to observe any sabbath at all, we are obliged to observe it according to the law of the fourth commandment.

I have put the difficulty as strongly as I can; and I doubt not but I shall sufficiently clear it, if you will have the patience to attend to what I have to say to it.

The first thing I say, is this, That all this argumentation proceeds upon a false ground: It supposeth that we were all under an obligation to observe the same day of the week that the Jews were, unless Christ should give a contrary command: But this is a great mistake; we are no more bound to observe the sabbath, as it was a jewish institution, than we are bound to observe their new moons, and solemn festivals; and this St. Paul himself hath told us in Coloss. ii. 16. *Let no man, saith he, judge you in respect of any holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.* That is to say, Let no man censure or condemn you christians, for not religiously observing those solemn days which the law of Moses commanded the Jews to keep holy, such as the new moons and the sabbaths; for these were the types and shadows of what was to come, and so are vanished by the appearing of the substance, which is Christ Jesus. These words do as plainly shew, as words can, that, if St. Paul be to be believed, we christians are not bound to keep the sabbath-day, as the Jews by their law, were obliged to keep it.

The truth of it is, no law of Moses did oblige any but the Jews, to whom they were given, and those  
that

that lived among them : So far indeed as the matter and reason of those laws were of universal concernment, so far all mankind, that came to the knowledge of them, were bound to take notice of them : And there was something in the law of the sabbath, that seemed to be of this nature ; namely, That we should keep one day in seven in memory of the creation : But, for the particular day that the Jews kept, that was appointed them by God, for a reason that did peculiarly concern themselves ; and therefore none but themselves, and those that lived among them, were obliged by it. This now being so, it is an impertinent question to ask, What law of Christ hath abrogated Saturday, and put Sunday in the place of it ? For what need there any authority of Christ to abrogate a law that we were never bound to observe ?

But here it will be said, Doth not our Church own the fourth commandment to lay an obligation upon us ? And doth not that fourth commandment expressly require the observation of the last day of the week, and not of the first ?

To this I will give two plain answers : First, tho' our Church owns the authority of the fourth commandment, as well as of the rest, yet it doth not own an obligation to practise all that is required in the fourth commandment ; for neither our church, nor any other christian church, from our Saviour's time to this, did ever teach, that christians were bound to observe that strict bodily rest, both of man and beast, which the fourth commandment seems to require, and which the Jews practised. So far from that, that several christian councils have censured them for judaizers, that thought themselves bound to follow the letter of the jewish law in this matter ; and they

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likewise passed the same censure upon those that believed they were obliged to keep the same day: So that you see we may own the obligation of the fourth commandment, without thinking ourselves concerned either to observe the same day, or the same rest on that day, which that commandment requires.

But then, Secondly, If it is strictly examined, it will be found, that the fourth commandment doth not lay any greater stress upon one day of the week, than on another; but may as well, and as properly, be applied to the day that we christians observe, as to that day which the Jews observed: For all that is there required seems to be this, that one day in seven, that is, a seventh day after six days of labour, should be dedicated to an holy rest, in memory of the creation. Run over all the particulars of the commandment, and you will not be able to find one expression that imports more: And therefore it was enough to answer all the ends of that commandment, if any one day in seven be set apart for that purpose.

Well, but it will be replied, Was not Saturday the day of the jewish sabbath? And doth not the commandment expressly refer to that day? I answer, I do readily grant it; but then I say, that Saturday was not appointed for their sabbath by virtue of this commandment, but by a former law, which was given to the Jews in the wilderness of Sin, as you may see in the xvth chapter of Exodus. In that chapter you will find, that that which fixed the day on which the Jews were to observe their sabbath, was the ceasing of the manna to drop on that day, as it had done for the six before; that was the sign, as Moses told them, by which they should know the day on which God would have them to rest. Before this they knew nothing of the day:

They

They only knew, that God would have them to rest one day in seven; and it is very certain, that on the seventh night before, (which would have been their sabbath, if they had known of the day) they were so far from resting, that they went a very long journey, as appears from that chapter: But then it was that God fixed the day for their sabbath (and I shall, by-and-by, shew for what reason he pitched upon that day); afterwards, when they came to mount Sinai, he gave, in the fourth commandment, a general law for the observance of it.

I cannot deny, indeed, that God's commandment had reference to that particular day, which had been so lately appointed them; yet the commandment is put in such words, and such a reason is thereby given for it, as would serve for any other day in the weekly revolution, as well as that.

To put this yet in a better light, if it be possible; we own, that all the ten commandments, tho', as to the substance of them, they were all of them of perpetual obligation to mankind; yet, as they were given on Sinai, there are several things added to them, on purpose for the accommodating them to the present state of the Israelites, to whom they were given. Thus God puts a preface to them, which wholly related to the Jews; *I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*: Thus the threatening in the second commandment of *visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation*; and the promise in the fifth, of *living long in the land which the Lord their God had given them*. These are plainly added to the commandments, with respect to that dispensation that the Jews were then under: And so we say, as to the fourth, the bodily rest that is there enjoined, and the precise day to which the commandment hath respect, are by no means of the essence or substance

substance of the commandment; but are to be accounted as circumstantials added to it, the better to accommodate it to the state of the jewish church that then was.

The sum of all that I have said, is this; That the owning an obligation upon us, to keep one day in seven as an holy rest to God, doth not infer an obligation upon us to keep that precise day God gave to the Jews, neither doth the fourth commandment require it; and therefore there needs not any new law of Christ for the abolishing of that day, and appointing another. All therefore that is here to be inquired into, is, What reason the apostles, who made the change, had for so doing? For if they had good reason, rather to pitch on the first day of the week, than on the last, for the sabbath, there is no doubt in the world but they were at liberty to do it; and what they did in this matter, would oblige all of us that come after them, so far as the reason they proceeded upon doth continue. Now, to give an account of this is the second thing I have to do, in order to the answering of this difficulty. And this is that which I say, That that very reason upon which God proceeded in appointing Saturday for the jewish sabbath rather than any other day; I say, that very reason and ground did the apostles (and no doubt, either by the command of Christ, or the guidance of the Holy Spirit) proceed upon in the pitching upon Sunday for the christian sabbath (if we may so call it) rather than Saturday. To explain myself as to this: You are to know, that the great end and design of God's appointing one day in seven to be kept holy, was, that all mankind should remember the creation of the world, and own that God, which created heaven and earth, to be their God. This observation of one day in seven was to be as a sign, or mark, or badge,

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that they acknowledged and worshipped that one God  
which made heaven and earth.

This is the account that the scripture all along gives  
of this matter. Thus in *Ezekiel xx. 20.* saith God,  
*Ye shall hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign be-*  
*tween me and you; that ye may know that I am the Lord*  
*your God.* And thus in *Exod. xxxi. 16.* *The children*  
*of Israel shall observe the sabbath throughout all their*  
*generations, for a perpetual covenant: It is a sign be-*  
*tween me and the children of Israel for ever.* A sign of  
what? Why, a sign that the creator of heaven and  
earth is their God: For thus it follows; *For in six*  
*days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the se-*  
*venth day he rested;* and this indeed is the true account  
and meaning of the fourth commandment.

Now, this account of the sabbath, you see, doth e-  
qually concern both Jews and Gentiles. If the sab-  
bath was therefore appointed, that, by the observation  
of it, men might testify to the world, that they owned  
the one supreme God that made the world, to be their  
God; then certainly all men that profess the true reli-  
gion are equally concerned in the observation of it.  
Well, but then, how come the Jews to observe one  
day, and the christians another? Why, this is the  
thing I now come to give an account of.

You are to know, that God, in delivering the chil-  
dren of Israel out of Egypt, took upon himself a new  
relation to that people: He was their creator from  
the beginning; but from henceforward, after he had  
delivered them out of the house of bondage, he be-  
came their redeemer, their deliverer; and under that  
notion he would have himself to be acknowledged in all  
the acts of worship that that people were to perform  
to him. There are an hundred instances of this in the  
laws

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laws of Moses, but it very remarkably appears in this business we are now talking of ; for when God comes to renew the commandment of the sabbath, (which was at the first instituted for the owning of the creation of the world) he adds a new consideration to it, and orders the Jews, in the observation thereof, not only to recognize him as the creator of heaven and earth, (which all mankind were bound to do as well as they) but also to acknowledge him as their deliverer out of Egypt ; and for that purpose he pitched upon that day, in the weekly revolution, to be their sabbath, on which he had wrought their deliverance out of Egypt, by drowning Pharoah and his host in the Red Sea : So that the Jews had a twofold reason for observing the sabbath. As they were a part of mankind, they kept the sabbath, to acknowledge thereby, that they owned the supreme God, the creator of heaven and earth ; and this they did, by observing one day in seven, according to God's original institution ; as they were embodied into one national society, called the people of Israel, they kept the sabbath to acknowledge thereby, that God had delivered their nation from the bondage of Egypt ; and this they did, by observing that particular day in the seven, which God had appointed in the wilderness of Sin, in remembrance of their coming out of Egypt.

If any one ask what proof I have for this, or how it doth appear, that God therefore pitched on that particular day to be the Jewish sabbath, because on that day he wrought his deliverance for them out of Egypt ? I answer, I have an express text of scripture to vouch for it, which cannot well be interpreted in any other sense than what I have now said. The place I refer to is the vth of Deuteronomy ; there the ten commandments.



ments are repeated : But this is observable in the repetition of them, when the fourth commandment comes to be repeated, that no mention is made of the original universal reason of God's appointing the sabbath ; namely, the creation of the world in six days, as it is given in the fourth commandment, delivered in the xxth of Exodus : But another reason for the observation of the sabbath is put in the place thereof ; I will read the words to you, as they are in the 15th verse of that chapter, and they are worth your observing : *Remember (saith God) that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence with a mighty hand, and stretched-out arm ; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath-day.*

These are the words of God, in Deuteronomy : But what is the meaning of them ? Did God therefore command the observation of the sabbath, (that is, one day in seven) because he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt ? That cannot be : For the reason is quite otherwise given, both in the beginning of Genesis, and in the delivery of the ten commandments, in the xxth of Exodus ; by both those places it appears, that God therefore commanded the observation of one day in seven, because that he made the world in six days, and rested on the seventh : This therefore must be the meaning of this text. God therefore commanded the observation of that particular day in the seven, as a day of rest to the Jews, because that on that day he delivered his people from the bondage of Egypt with a mighty hand, and stretched-out arm.

These things now well considered, we have a sufficient reason given us, both why we should not keep the same day of the week for our sabbath, that the  
Jews

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Jews did, and likewise why we should keep the first day of the week rather than any other in the weekly revolution.

St. Paul tells us, the observations of the new moons and sabbaths were shadows of things to come, but the body is Christ. Now, since it appears, that the day of the sabbath, as it was appointed to the Jews, was in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt ; and since that deliverance out of Egypt was but a type of our redemption by Christ Jesus from the spiritual bondage of the spiritual Pharaoh, that is to say, the devil ; then, certainly, after this deliverance, this redemption, is actually wrought, the type is out of doors ; and if that be no more to be remembered, then is not the day, which was set apart for the commemoration of it, to be any farther remembered neither.

But that this is not all : The Jewish day of the sabbath is not only vanished ; nay, indeed, it would be horrible superstition to observe it ; but another day is, actually set up in the place of it by the apostles, and that, without doubt, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit ; and such a day, that no man can in the least be surpris'd, that it was pitched upon rather than any other day in the weekly revolution ; for, since both Jews and christians do agree, that one day in seven is to be set apart for the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth ; and since it is evident, that, in the Jewish dispensation, that day was so ordered, as that, together with the acknowledgment of the supreme God, it should put them in mind of that God's being their redeemer and deliverer out of Egypt ; what can more naturally fall into the thoughts of any christian than this, that as, with the Jews, we are to set apart one day in every seven to the solemn  
worship.

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worship of God, the maker of heaven and earth; so, as we are christians, we are to pitch upon such a day for that, as shall at the same time put us in mind of the great redemption and deliverance that was wrought for us by our Lord Jesus Christ? And what day, in the weekly revolution, can that be, but the day on which God vanquished the devil, and redeemed us out of our spiritual bondage, by raising up our Lord Jesus from the dead, and thereby begetting us to a lively hope of everlasting life?

There is nothing more remains to be done, upon this argument, but to shew, that the apostles of our Lord did really, for this reason, pitch upon the first day of the week for the solemn day of their worship: But that being only matter of fact, and the proof of it to be made by testimony, I believe you will rather choose to take a man's word for it, than to be held any longer to hear quotations.





# S E R M O N XIV.

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Of the change of the sabbath-day : The great advantages of strictly observing the Lord's day ; and the manner of observing it.

EXODUS XX. 8.

*Remember to keep holy the Sabbath-day.*



HAVE made two discourses upon this argument already ; and my business hitherto has been to shew, that we christians are obliged to keep one day in seven as a sabbath or holy rest unto God ; and the day we are to keep to this purpose, is the first day of the week, or Sunday.

As for the keeping one day in seven, I shewed,

First ; That God making the world in six days, and resting on the seventh, meant, by this action, to lay a foundation for an obligation on all mankind, to whom the knowledge of it should come, to set apart one day in every seven to the honour and acknowledgment of that God that created the world.

Secondly ;

Secondly; That God sufficiently declared that this was his meaning, by giving an express law to the first parents of mankind, and, in them, to all their posterity, that they should separate the seventh day, and keep it holy in memory of the creation.

Thirdly, That though this commandment, through the prevailing of idolatry in the world, was, in time, forgot; yet, when God came to restore the true religion to his own people the Jews, and to give laws about it, he took care to retrieve the memory of this commandment among the rest of the laws of the creation; accordingly he put it into his two tables wrote with his own hands, by which he sufficiently distinguished it from the temporary laws given to the Jews, and shewed that it was of obligation to all mankind for ever, since all the rest of the ten commandments were certainly and indispensably so.

Fourthly; When Jesus Christ came to give his laws to all mankind, and to set aside all that was perfectly Jewish in the worship of God, yet he all along seems to be so far from abrogating any of the ten commandments, that he lays great stress upon them; and yet the law of observing one day in seven is one of these ten.

Fifthly; All his disciples, from that time to this, made a conscience of keeping this commandment as well as the rest: Nor was there ever any christian church known, that did not observe one day in seven as holy to God.

In the second place; as for the change of the day from the sabbath to the lord's day, and that it is this latter day, the first day of the week, that we christians are to observe, and not the Saturday, as the Jews observed; I say, for the satisfying you about this, I went upon these grounds:

First

First of all ; That the observation of that particular day, namely Saturday, more than any other of the seven, was perfectly Jewish ; nor did the law that required it ever concern any other nation, but that people, and those that dwelt among them ; so that there was no need of having that day abolished.

Secondly ; That the observation of that day is not required in the fourth commandment, more than any other day in the seven ; but that it is sufficient, for the fulfilling of that commandment, that any one day of the seven be observed in the memory of the creation.

Thirdly ; That the reason why God pitched on that day, rather than any other of the seven, was not any reason that did concern all mankind, but only the Jewish nation ; namely, because on that day he delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, by drowning Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea.

Fourthly ; That, for the very same reason that Saturday, among all the days of the seven, was pitched upon for the sabbath to the Jews ; Sunday, among all the days of the seven, was pitched upon for the sabbath of the christians : I say, both these days were pitched upon for the same reason ; that is to say, as in the old law, that of Moses, God would have the Jews observe a sabbath in memory of the creation, but yet would have it observed on such a day, that, together with the creation, they might remember their redemption out of Egypt ; so, in the new law, that of Jesus Christ, God would have the christians observe a sabbath in memory of the creation ; but yet he would have it observed on such a day, that, together with the creation, we might remember our redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ : Which redemption was then wrought and affected, when he rose from the dead : On that day was satan  
and

and his host confounded; and on that day was salvation wrought for all mankind, from a greater slavery than Egypt was in: And this is the reason why we christians observe Sunday for our day of rest, and not Saturday. And, indeed, if we should do otherwise, we should shew ourselves Jews, and not christians: We should not seem to own our Saviour's redemption; in a word, we might as well quit our baptism, and go back again to circumcision.

Thus far I have already gone: There remains one thing yet to be done upon this head, and then I leave it; and I shall dispatch it very briefly: And that is, in

The fifth place, To shew what evidence we have, that the christians, from our Saviour's time, did proceed upon this ground that I have named, and did keep the first day of the week for their sabbath. Now, as to this, I only mention these few things:

That the first Lord's day that was kept, was solemnized on that very day on which our Saviour rose from the dead. Then, as St. John tells us in the xxth chapter, *then all the disciples assembled together*; and he takes notice of this circumstance, that it was the first day of the week; and at this meeting did Jesus first shew himself to them all, that he was risen from the dead. But Thomas, it seems, was not that day with them, and therefore doubted of the truth of what the rest had told him concerning our Saviour's shewing himself alive among them. What now came upon this? Did our Saviour presently appear to him for his conviction? No, not at all; but he let him remain under his doubt till the next Lord's day, till the day that the disciples met together again in a solemn manner: And this the same St. John takes notice of in verse 26th of the same chapter; *After eight days* (says

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(says he) *the disciples were within, and then Thomas was with them, and then came Jesus and stood in the midst, and spoke particularly to Thomas.* So that here we see the second and first Lord's day the disciples met together, and both those days were graced and sanctified by the apparition of our Saviour among them. That they met thus every first day of the week during our Saviour's conversing upon earth after his resurrection, there is no doubt to be made, tho' the gospels do not mention it ; but that on the eighth Lord's day, from the resurrection, they were solemnly assembled together, the scripture takes notice of with a witness : For on that day, when they were all together with one accord, and in one place, then did the Holy Ghost descend upon them in a visible manner, and endowed them with the gift of tongues ; and, by the virtue thereof, St. Peter preached so powerfully, that on that day were added to the church three thousand converts. We have not henceforward particular mention made in the New-testament of their assembling on the first day of the week ; but that they did always hold their religious assemblies on that day, is abundantly plain from these two testimonies ; the first is out of the 1st of the Corinthians, chapter xvi. There, in the 2d verse, St. Paul adviseth, that every one should bring in his offering, or his alms, on the first day of the week, to be laid by for the use of the poor ; which plainly implies, that on the first day of the week they used to hold their religious meetings.

The other testimony is still more convincing, and it is in the xxth chapter of the Acts, verse the 6th ; there St. Luke tells us, *We came (saith he) to Troas in five days, and there we abode seven days ; and upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together*



*then to break bread, Paul preached unto them until midnight.* It is not said here, that St. Paul called the christians together on that day; but the words imply, that it was the custom of the christians to meet on the first day of the week, in order to the religious worship of Christ, by hearing the word preached; and partaking in the holy sacrament; and therefore that opportunity St. Paul took of preaching so long to them.

These two texts are undeniable evidences of the practice of the church in those times, as to this matter: But there is one thing more to be taken notice of out of the scripture, that is beyond all that I have yet said; and that is this: St. John, in his book of the Revelations, doth, in exprefs words, call the first day of the week by the name of the Lord's day; and he brings it in so, that any one may conclude, that he did not impose that name upon it, but that it was the usual name by which it passed among all the christians in those days, and accordingly by that name it is called even to this day: What now can we conclude from hence? Certainly, one of these two things; either that that day was appointed by our Lord himself for the christian sabbath; just as we call the sacrament of the communion the Lord's supper, because it is appointed by our Saviour; and this some of the first christian fathers expressly assert: Or else, at least, that all christians had agreed together to consecrate and set apart that day to the honour of our Lord, and in memory of his resurrection, as the Jews set apart the seventh day in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt. Now, which way soever we take it, it proves sufficiently to us, that the first day of the week was, from the beginning, the day that all christians were to observe for their sabbath; or, to speak in a more proper language, the day that they were more solemnly

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solemnly to dedicate to the worship of God, and Christ  
Jesus.

All this proof now we have for the Lord's day, out of the holy scripture of the New-testament; and as for the following times, the proofs are infinite. It is certain matter of fact, that all christian churches, from the apostles time to this, have enjoined and practised the religious observation of the Lord's day as a christian duty: Nor, of all the heresies or schisms that ever we read of to have broke out in the church (and abundance of such there have been), do we ever find any one that called this point into question. Howsoever men have differed in other points of christianity, yet never was there any sect of men, no, nor any single man, that we know of, that ever denied or doubted of our obligation to observe the Lord's day. And this is a mighty thing, if it be well considered, to our present purpose.

Having thus given you as plain an account as I can, of our obligation in general, to dedicate one day in seven to the solemn service of God; and the reason for which we christians dedicate the first day of the week, rather than any other day of the seven, to that purpose; I now come to shew, in the third place, of what infinite concernment it is to religion, and the souls of men, that this day be strictly and religiously observed.

And here I do solemnly address myself to all of you, that you would seriously take this matter into your consideration, and not (as we are wont to do) look upon this business, of the observation of the Lord's day, as so inconsiderable a duty, that a little thing may excuse our neglect of it; for assuredly, very great matters depend upon it, even no less than the very being of christianity, as well as the salvation of our own souls.

You

You may perhaps hear some dissolute atheistical men ask, What is one day better than another? Hath nature made any difference between days? Nay, hath not your religion forbid the making any difference? But you know this sort of men droll, they do not argue; they know very well, that we do no more believe one day to be better or more holy in itself than another, than they: but yet, if they would consider, they would be as sensible as we, that some days ought to be employed differently from other days, because the ends of piety and religion do necessarily call for it. But that is the thing they hate, and, for that reason, they hate all days that are devoted to it.

You will hear others talk more gravely: but yet, if not with as ill a design, yet to as mischievous an effect as the former; they will tell you, that every day ought to be dedicated to God Almighty's service; and therefore Sundays and holidays do not so much minister to religion, as to formality and superstition.

But I pray be pleased to consider, that tho' we ought to dedicate every day to God Almighty's service, yet this doth not hinder but that some days should be dedicated in another manner, and to other parts of his service, than it is possible for us to dedicate every day. We grant, that whoever lives with a constant sense of God upon his mind, and makes a conscience of performing his daily devotion, and following his calling and employment diligently and honestly, and takes care to spend the remainder of his time, that is not thus employed, as well as he can, at least innocently; I say, we make no scruple of allowing that every such man may be said to dedicate every day he thus spends, to God Almighty's service. But yet, for all this, it is absolutely necessary for us to set apart some days in another

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other manner, and to another kind of service of  
God, than this amounts to. And since both the  
laws of God and man have fixed upon the first day of  
every week for that purpose, he seems neither to fear  
God, nor reverence man, that doth not strictly and  
religiously devote that day to the more solemn service  
of God.

But I pray, if you please, let us look a little further  
into this matter, and examine the merits of it, and see  
what is to be said in point of reason, for this observance  
of the Lord's day, which we so earnestly press; that  
it may not be said, that we altogether rely upon arbi-  
trary authority, whether of God or man, without any  
other intrinsic reason for this custom.

And, in the first place, I pray, think with your-  
selves, whether it is not really a great mercy and kind-  
ness to all of us, that one day in a week is, by a pub-  
lic law, consecrated to a holy rest. Do you think it is  
either for the good of man or beast, that they should  
be constantly drudging and toiling without any respite,  
but just what the night gives them, wherein they can-  
not work? If such a weekly rest was not appointed,  
would it not be the wish and desire of all men that it  
should? Or, imagine, that the laws of God or man  
should oblige us to drudge all the days of our lives, in  
our employments, without any intermission, should not  
we look upon that as a very hard and severe imposi-  
tion? Certainly, any one would think, not only ser-  
vants, but masters too, that follow their callings as  
they should do, should all be of this opinion. That  
time, therefore, which God, out of his bounty, hath  
ordered for our rest and relaxation from our labours,  
and men, in obedience to him, have ratified by their  
laws, we are the sullenest, perverrest creatures in the  
world,

world, if we do not joyfully and thankfully make use of it to those benefits and advantages. But it will be said, might not every man have been left to his own discretion in this matter, and set apart such times of rest for himself and his family, in order to the worship of God, as he judged most convenient for his own affairs? Why should we all be tied to one day?

I answer; If men were left to their own discretion in this matter, God help poor servants, who, generally speaking, were but like to have had a hard time of it! Nay, and God help the masters themselves! For, it is much to be feared, they would not have been a quarter so kind to their own souls, as God and the laws have been to them. But if it be seriously asked, why we should all be tied to one day? I answer, The reason is obvious; because, otherwise, the end of setting apart any day could not have been attained. The very reason of our consecrating some of our time to God is, that thereby we might have opportunities of joining together in his public worship, and being instructed in the duties of our common christianity: But what opportunities could we have for this, unless some common day be agreed upon for our assembling for these purposes?

But besides, I may urge another reason, which will perhaps more open some peoples eyes, to see the reasonableness of such a common day, than any spiritual consideration; and that is this; That the setting apart one such day, to the observance of which all shall be obliged, is least prejudicial to our worldly affairs. For, by this means, care is taken, that no man shall make advantage of the works of his calling on that day, to the prejudice of any of his neighbours; because all men are, by this law, put under the same obligations

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of resting from their labours. But now, if every man had been at liberty to appoint his own time of resting for himself and his family, a great inconvenience would have ensued upon that account. The sum of this consideration is this; That the reasonableness and equity of the law of the sabbath, even upon a political account, is so evident and so obvious, that men of sense cannot but thank God for his institution, as one of the most wise and prudent things that could have been contrived for the ease and benefit of mankind.

But, Secondly, Let us advance a step higher: Let us leave the political consideration of the day, and come to the religion of it. And this I have to say to you:

You pretend to be christians, and you hope for salvation in another life; and you hope for that salvation likewise no otherwise, but in the way that Jesus Christ hath appointed for the obtaining of it. Now, is not this a main part of Jesus Christ's religion, that you should publicly, in the face of the world, own his faith, and join with the rest of his members in offering up to God the solemn sacrifices of prayer and praise, and hearing his gospel preached, and partaking in his holy sacraments? If this then be a part of the religion that our Lord and Master hath taught us (as it certainly is, and a principal part too), how dare any of us think ourselves at liberty, whether we will practise these things or no, on such days, as both God and the church, and the laws, have most solemnly devoted and set apart for the performance of them? It is a strange christianity, that will encourage a man, to hope he shall live with Christ hereafter, without shewing himself a member of Christ here. And how a man should shew himself a member of Christ, that doth  
not

not shew himself a member of his church, which is Christ's body, is a hard matter to conceive. And how a man should shew himself a member of Christ's church, that doth not make a conscience of worshipping God with the church, and partaking of the public ordinances of christianity at those solemn times that God hath appointed, is every whit as hard.

But some men have got other notions of christianity: It is enough, in their opinion, to approve themselves good christians, that they live soberly and righteously, and now-and-then, when they have occasion, make their addresses in private unto God. Why, this is very well; and I heartily wish, that those men, that give this account of their religion, did really practise even what they own to be their duty. But yet, if they did, they come very far short of the true notion of Christ's religion: For they do not consider, that all the great promises of Christ of the pardon of sins, and the grace of the Holy Spirit (without which it is impossible to live a christian life) are tied to the using the means of reconciliation, which Christ hath appointed; which means are, doubtless, public ones; that is to say, these promises are chiefly made to those, that, with contrition and devotion, join with their fellow christians in the solemn administrations of the church, confessing their sins, and imploring God's pardon, and partaking in his holy word and sacraments, which are both the signs and the seals of his acceptance of us.

Whatever therefore people may pretend, that they serve God in private (though it is much to be feared they do not serve God at all, that do not make a conscience of joining in the public worship on the Lord's day) yet it is infinitely to their loss, that they do not serve him in that solemn way that Christ hath appointed.

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ted. For they have not the same reason to expect God's blessing in their way, supposing they did seriously endeavour it, because they do not take the method he hath prescribed for the obtaining it; and besides, they live in a direct contradiction to the laws of the gospel.

But, Thirdly; Let us go a step farther: Admit that Christ had laid no such great stress upon these public means, but we were perfectly at liberty, whether we would make use of them or no; yet, whether would not the necessities of our own souls require that we should at least set apart one day in seven for the purpose of devotion and religion, if ever we meant to preserve in ourselves any sense of piety?—And consequently, when the Lord's-day is thus, by God and man, consecrated to that business, whether it is not every man's interest, as well as his duty, most strictly and religiously to observe it? I pray consider, that in this hurry of worldly affairs, the business in which we are all engaged; in this constant road of worldly objects, which we every minute converse with, and the continual temptations upon the account thereof, we are exposed to; I say, pray think how it is possible for a man (be he never so well disposed) to preserve in himself a sense of God or religion, unless he takes times for frequent recollection, and abstracting himself from all material objects, and applying his thoughts to God and spiritual things. If we would live to any great purpose, it is fit we should do it every day: but yet mankind cannot be brought to this. It is very well, if we can but rescue so much time from our other affairs, that we can afford half an hour in our closets to God in the morning, and as much in the evening: I say, even this is very well; but yet I am afraid a great many do not do this. God help us, in what a miserable condition are we in the mean while!

assuredly



assuredly our souls do require the use of spiritual exercises, such as prayer, and reading, and meditation, in order to the keeping them alive towards God, every whit as much as our bodies do require the use of meat and drink, in order to the preserving natural life. And yet so befotted are we by the objects of sense, that we can neither find time, nor be in humour, for these things. Is it not therefore happy for us, that since we cannot, or will not, in this croud of business, take care of our souls ourselves, that God hath taken such care of us, that, whether we will or no, we shall be obliged to spend one day in seven, for the benefit and advantage of our souls; that while we are all the week working and labouring for the body, one day may be appropriated to their use and service?

I say, it is a happy institution, and we should all be undone, if it was not thus: We should all, notwithstanding our little devotions on the week days, unavoidably sink into carelessness and sensuality, and unconcernedness for God and religion, were it not that there is every week a day appointed for us wholly to apply our minds to these spiritual matters, and to consider what we have done amiss, and what it is our great interest to pursue; and to revive our good resolutions, and fortify ourselves against the temptations we are continually exposed to.

Sure I am, that all persons that do seriously apply themselves to God and virtue, are deeply sensible of the truth of this: They find, that notwithstanding their private devotions in their closets, notwithstanding their reading the scripture, and other good books; the taking all opportunities likewise that they have, of resorting to public prayers on the week days; I say, they find, notwithstanding all this, that they have need enough of the Sunday institution for the keeping

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their mind in a good frame; and they are so far from looking upon it as an oppression, when it comes, that they esteem it the best and the most delightful, as well as the most desirable day in the week.

Oh! therefore, if we have any concernment for our own souls, if we have any desire, that the work of God (I mean, that work that tends to our eternal salvation) should prosper in our hands, let us make a conscience of strictly and religiously observing the Lord's day to those purposes it was designed for.

But then, in the fourth place, I have another thing to say upon this argument: We are not only bound upon our own account, and for our own benefit, to this observation of the Lord's day, but also upon a more public account, even for the sake of the religion we do profess, our common christianity I mean; of which the observation of the Lord's day is one of the greatest supports and preservatives.

I look upon this appointment of the Lord's-day to have been one of the great means that hath preserved the christian religion to this day in the world, and to be the great security for the continuance of it among us: And if it was laid aside, I can hardly imagine there would be a face of religion kept up among us for many years together, but in a few generations we should all turn heathen. When I speak here of the appointment of the Lord's-day, I would not have you think that I lay any stress upon the appointment of the day; but it is the work, the business, that is to be done on that day, that I lay weight upon.

The design of setting apart that day, is, that all men should join in the solemn worship of God; that they should be instructed in the doctrine of the gospel; that they should be taught from God's word what they

they are to believe, and what they are to practise, in order to their salvation; that they should have the motives and arguments that the gospel offers, for their living a holy christian life, fairly proposed to them; that they should have an opportunity seriously of thinking upon these things, and examining the state of their own souls, and making new resolutions of living according to their christian profession, and humbly imploring the grace of God, that they may practise what they do resolve.

This, I say, is the proper business of the Lord's-day; and taking it thus, were it not for this public establishment of the Lord's-day, I doubt whether it would be possible, humanly speaking, to preserve the christian religion in the world: For, were not people obliged to worship God frequently, and to hear their duty told them, and that duty pressed upon them by all the arguments that can prevail upon human nature; I say, were not this constantly used and practised among us, I cannot see but that, in time, we should fall back to paganism.

But it will perhaps be thrown in our dish, that we have little reason to brag of the good effects of our Sunday preachments; for people are now no better than they always were, and that is bad enough: And of those that frequent our assemblies more come out of custom and curiosity, than for any end of devotion. I answer, If people do not grow better, it is a very great blessing of God that they do not grow worse: And I am sure that is owing, in a great measure, to the keeping up the religion of Sundays.

If we are generally so bad, even when we have so many excellent means afforded us for growing better, and we are forced, in compliance with the custom of the country, to make a shew of using those means;

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how bad, think you, should we be, if we had none of those means; or, having them, never pretend to make use of them?

If a man continue an atheist, or an hypocrite, or a whoremonger, or a drunkard, when yet he comes every Sunday to church, and there confesseth his sins, and begs God's pardon, and cannot avoid the hearing many terrible things denounced in the word of God against him, so long as he continues in his sins; do you think he would not be a ten times worse atheist, or drunkard, or whoremonger, if he never came to church at all, but so spent his time, that he should never have any thing of religion, not perhaps the very name of it sounding in his ears? Never therefore talk of what little reformation there is among us, for all our coming to church; and how many come, whether to serve other ends, than those of religion; for assuredly it is foolish talk, if you mean thereby to discourage people from that practice: A great many, undoubtedly, do receive infinite benefits by their thus doing. Those that are virtuously disposed are undoubtedly hereby rendered more virtuous. Those that are viciously disposed, a great many of them, no doubt, are in time, and by degrees, brought off, by the use of these means, from their dissolute and wicked course, and wrought to a better mind. And as for those that give no visible signs of amendment, and yet frequent our churches; as for them, I say, nevertheless, great reason have they to thank God, both for his appointing these weekly days for his worship, and likewise for his keeping them from that impudence in sinning, that they do not despise Sundays, but will on those days come to church, and do as their neighbours do: For certainly, though they do not grow better hereby; yet, by using these means, they are kept  
from

from growing worse. And if they should give themselves over to the total neglect or disuse of these public exercises of piety, good God ! to what a deplorable condition would they, in time, reduce themselves ? Whoever therefore hath any serious desire, either that men should grow better; or that they should not grow worse; whoever hath any hearty concern for religion and piety, and would not have it quite banished out of the world; every such man must needs be convinced, that it is of infinite concernment, that the strict observation of the Lord's-day should be most religiously kept up among us.

I have one thing more to add upon this point, and I have done.

In the fifth place; if these arguments I have insisted on will not prevail with you, to make a conscience of strictly observing the Lord's-day, yet, I beg of you let other peoples experience do it. When reason doth not prevail, we appeal to experience; and in this matter I appeal to all men that have made trial of it.

And these two things I account all men, that have made trial, will give their assent to :

First of all; Whoever makes a conscience of strictly observing the Lord's-day (supposing he doth it not out of hypocrisy, but bears an honest mind towards God; I say, every such person) never failed to grow in virtue and goodness. God always accepted his services; and he finds the good effects of them in the greater measure of grace and strength that is afforded to him for the living a holy and virtuous life.

Nay, some devout persons have extended this point farther; they will tell you, That they have always observed, that, as they kept the Lord's-day more or less carefully, so has their business prosper'd more or

less successfully all the week after : and that they have particularly experienced, over and over again, that when they have most fervently set themselves to observe God on Sunday, they have been remarkably blessed the following week.

But, Secondly ; It hath been hardly known, that any one that was a notorious sabbath-breaker (which is the word we usually express such offenders by) ever came to good. Those persons that make no conscience of observing the Lord's-day, as they rarely ever attain to a true sense of virtue and piety ; so, most commonly, they are given over to a reprobate mind, and do grow worse and worse.

And this thing is very observable, that most of these lewd and profligate people, that have run into all sorts of extravagancies, when they come, at their death, to reflect on their lives past, and to give an account of what led them into all those excesses and wickednesses, the most common thing that they impute all to, was, their not observing the Lord's-day ; but, when they should have been at the church, they gave themselves up to idle and vicious company, that by degrees perverted their manners, and drew them into these mischiefs, which it is now too late to redress.

These things, I think, may be sufficient to possess you all with a hearty sense of the obligation that is upon us, strictly to observe the Lord's-day. I dare not stay to enforce this farther.

*I pray God give us all grace, that we may so serve him here, both on this day, and all the other days of our life, that hereafter we may be partakers of his eternal glory,*



# S E R M O N X V .

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A description of the Joys of Heaven.

H E B. IV. II.

*Let us labour therefore to enter into that Rest.*



TAKE it for granted, that all that now hear me do believe a future state; and that we do not cease to be, when we leave this world, but that we must live for ever, either in happiness or misery.

I take it for granted, that none here doubts, but that there doth remain a rest for the people of God in the other world; and therefore this point I wholly wave, and shall not trouble you with offering at a proof of it.

My present business is, to do what I can to persuade you all to the practice of the apostle's exhortation in my text; to wit, to labour to enter into that rest, in shewing you that it is a rest exceedingly worth our labouring for; that it doth richly deserve all the diligence, and pains, and application, that we can possibly bestow towards.

towards the obtaining of it; because, when it is obtained, it will abundantly compensate for them all.

Now you see, that, in order to the speaking justly to this point, I am obliged to enter into a discourse of the excellency of this rest, and to give some account of the many blessings that are contained in it.

And I hope nobody will think this to be an improper argument at this season; since it was the great business and end of our Saviour's death and passion (which we commemorate this week) to procure this eternal rest for us, and the great business of our Lord's resurrection (which we are to commemorate the next week) to assure us that he hath effectually done it; and that he will one day raise us up to partake of that glory, which he now possesses at the right-hand of God.

To come then to my business, to give some account of the many blessings that are contained in that rest, which our Saviour hath purchased for us: And, Oh! that I could do it so effectually, that we might all fall in love with it; that we could so affect our minds with the solid happiness of the other world, that we might be quite put out of conceit with the trifles and vanities of this; that we might leave our fondness for these earthly tabernacles, these dark prisons, wherein our souls are confined, and groan after the glorious liberties of the sons of God, and those heavenly regions, wherein God and angels do enjoy themselves in the fullness of blessedness for evermore.

But who is sufficient to declare the great things that God hath laid up for those that love him? The apostle tells us, *That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of them; and there-*



therefore little can it be expected that any words of ours should describe them.

Alas ! we are much in the dark about these matters; we know not yet what we shall be, as St. John has told us : We understand not a thousandth part of the circumstances that will contribute to the bliss of good men in that other state. But tho' our conceptions, as to these matters, be very narrow and scanty, and God hath not thought fit to reveal his good pleasure, as to the particularities of this state ; yet so much hath he been pleased to discover to us concerning it, and so much we are able to understand of those discoveries, that it will not be an uselefs undertaking to give some general account or description of it.

And here we must be careful not to indulge our own fancies, nor to take our estimate of that state from such notions of happiness as we are often apt in this world to take up ; but we must keep close to the divine revelation : If we steer ourselves by any other compass, every man will form such ideas of heaven as suit best with his present desires, and humours, and inclinations ; and then it will be the elysian fields, or the rabbins garden of Eden, or the paradise of Mahomet, or any kind of thing that will give satisfaction to a man's sensual appetite.

With some it will consist in victory and triumphs over their enemies ; with others it will be stately palaces, and crowns upon their heads, and sceptres in their hands, and every thing that tends to the gratifying their worldly and ambitious desires.

With others, it will be the most delicious eating and drinking, and all manner of corporal pleasure ; and lastly, with others, it will be a lazy unactive life of gazing and contemplation.

It will concern us therefore, whenever we think or speak of that happy state, to form our thoughts and our notions according to those measures that God hath given us in the holy scriptures; and not rashly to conceive any thing of it, but what we have warrant for, either directly, or by consequence from the discoveries that are there made. This therefore I shall take as my rule in the discoursing of this matter.

And here, the first thing that offers itself to our consideration, is, the term by which it is expressed in my text, namely, a rest, taking that word in the most usual signification.

Rest, when it is applied to man, what is it, but a ceasing from all toil and trouble, a freedom from every thing that is uneasy and afflicting? Whoever is at perfect rest, is at perfect ease, is in that state which the Stoics call indolency.

Now such a rest is the state of good men in the other life; not a state of idleness and doing nothing, but a state that is perfectly free from all pain, and trouble, and disquietness: It is a life of perfect peace, a refreshment after all our labours and sufferings, by which term the scripture sometimes expresseth it.

There will be then nothing to disturb us, or cause any allay or interruption to our quiet. All those things that were apt to ruffle or discompose our spirits, while we were tossed upon the sea of this world, will then be far removed from us, and we shall find a perfect calm both within and without us.

This is indeed the sum of all that can be said upon this head; but yet, methinks, I would not dismiss it so.

It will excite our desires after that rest, to think a little more particularly of the evils from which it will  
 set:

set us free; and therefore give me leave to dilate a little upon this head.

We shall then rest from sinning, and offending God, which is now one of the greatest troubles of our lives. Oh! what would not a good man give, that he might always so govern himself, as to perform a constant, steady, uniform obedience to the laws of his heavenly Father! But yet such, alas! is the infelicity of this present state, that even the best of men do offend in many things, and have their bitter reflections upon themselves for those offences. But the other state we are speaking of, will perfectly set us free from this: We shall not any more displease God, nor behave ourselves ungratefully or unkindly to him; we shall not any more have need of sorrow and tears for our daily miscarriages; we shall not any more complain of the hardness of our hearts, or our unfruitfulness under the means of grace, or our frequent lapses and infirmities.

But we shall be holy as we desire; and Christ will present us to his Father without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, pure and without blemish. We shall then also rest from all the temptations and allurements to sin, with which we are here continually assaulted. All the rubs and stumbling-blocks which are thrown in our way by the devil, or the world, will then be taken away. We shall not then have the trouble of being always upon our guard, always watching over ourselves, always conflicting with dangers and difficulties, always in fear, lest the enemy should surprize us, or be too strong for us; for our warfare will then be over, we shall have finished our course, and no tempter, no adversary, shall, from henceforward have access to us. We shall then also rest from all doubts and suspicions of our own state. We shall not then any longer call  
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our own sincerity into question, or be in fear, lest our sins should not be pardoned; or that God should withdraw his grace from us, and leave us to ourselves; or that we are not yet arrived to that degree of virtue, and holiness, and piety, that our religion requires of us.

For then our own senses will convince us, that those jealousies are vain; and that God is infinitely good, and we everlastingly happy. We shall then rest from all our divisions and quarrels one with another; which in this state, it is to be feared, even good men do sometimes too zealously pursue. There will then be no parties or factions; one will not say, he is of Paul, another of Apollos; but we shall all lay aside our heats and animosities, which our different educations, and our different ways of thinking, and our too much accepting of some mens persons, may unhappily have engaged us in; and we shall be all of one mind, and one soul, and embrace one another with open arms, and a hearty love, and be perfectly one household; under that one shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

We shall then rest from all that grief and trouble we now undergo, upon account of other folks misfortunes. As the present state of things is, to see or hear of the misery of others, though we ourselves are in good circumstances, must make a good-natured man very uneasy. Whoever hath any bowels of humanity in him, cannot but be very melancholy at the dismal spectacles that are every day presented to our eyes; to see some ready to starve for want of bread, others languishing under great pains of body; to see one near relation ruined by cross and sad accidents, another taking bad courses, and growing atheistical and profane; in a word, to converse every day with miserable persons, as in truth

the world is nothing but a great hospital of such ; I say, the reflections upon these things must needs make our lives very uncomfortable, tho' our condition otherwise be never so prosperous.

But, in the other state, we shall have none of these objects before us ; we shall have no use of our pity and compassion, but all that we converse with will be happy as ourselves: And as for those that our gracious God hath justly punished, for their obstinate wickedness and impenitence, we shall be so infinitely satisfied of the fitness, and reasonableness, and equity of his dealings with them, that we shall have no more concern for them, than if they were not in being.

We shall then rest from all the labour and toil of our employments, which is now one great part of the curse derived upon us from our first parents. We shall not then earn our living with the sweat of our brows, nor exhaust our spirits in doing such drudgeries as our callings do here necessarily require of us. All the care, and the pains, and the burden we undergo, in the providing for our families, in the bringing up our children, in the dispatching our business, and all the anxiety and solicitude we have about those things, will then be at an end : And we shall live free from all manner of tormenting thoughtfulness, and be able to enjoy ourselves, and dispose of our time according to our own desires.

Lastly, to conclude this point, we shall then rest from all our personal sufferings and afflictions, from all troubles, and inconveniencies, and ill accidents that this mortal state doth expose us to ; we shall then be free from all manner of sickness and diseases, from hunger and thirst, from poverty and nakedness, from every thing that causeth grief and pain. We shall then  
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be no longer obnoxious to the treachery of our friends, nor the malice of our enemies, nor the idle slanderous reports of backbiters; we shall then be quit of all our troublesome passions and appetites, such as anger, and fear, and grief, and immoderate love of any thing. We shall then be out of danger of disappointments, as to our designs, or loss of our goods, or death of our dear friends, or the oppression and tyranny of hard masters. In a word, we shall be in a perfect rest from all discontents, from every thing that renders our condition in the least troublesome. And all our past sufferings will be no farther remembered by us, than only as the remembrance of them contributes to the increase of our joy and delight. And now, is not such a state of life as this, which I have been now describing, infinitely desirable? Will it not abundantly answer all the pains and labour that we can be at, for the acquisition of it? And yet this, that I have named, is the least part of the happiness of the other state. I have hitherto considered that state only in a negative way, as it is a rest from our labours; which is the term by which my text expresseth it: So that indeed I have rather told you what it is not, than what it is. But I shall now come to consider it with respect to those positive blessings, which make up the happiness of it: Which shall be the second part of my discourse.

And here several things do present themselves to our consideration: As,

First of all; The great change for the better that shall then be made to the persons of good men.

Secondly; The glory of the place where they shall have their abode.

Thirdly; The agreeable company they shall there converse with.

Fourthly;

Fourthly; The delightful employment in which they will spend their time.

And, Fifthly; The unspeakable favours and communications of God to their souls.

Of all these as briefly as I can; still taking the holy scriptures for our guide.

And, First; As for the vast improvement that good men shall find in that state, as to their persons, it is enough to say, that both their souls and their bodies shall then be advanced to the highest perfection that they are capable of.

And, first of all; That their souls will be so, is plain, beyond contradiction, from those words of the apostle, Hebr. xii. 23. where, describing the heavenly Jerusalem, and the inhabitants thereof, he calls those of mankind that shall have a place there, *the spirits of just men made perfect.*

But what is it to have our spirits made perfect? Wherein doth this perfection consist? Why we all know there are two principal faculties in our souls, the understanding, and the will; and to these two all our other powers are reduced. So that, when these two are arrived to their full perfections, our souls, or spirits, are made as perfect as they can be.

Now, as to the understanding, the perfection of that consists only in the comprehension and knowledge of truth, as that of the will doth in the choice and love of that which is good. So that then are our souls or spirits made perfect, when they know and understand as much as their capacities will allow them; and when they are carried out with the most fervent desire and love towards the greatest good. And both these perfections will the souls of good men be advanced to in the other world.

First,

First, They shall be perfected in knowledge. Here in this world, as the apostle tells us, 1 Cor. xiii. *We know but in part ; we understand but as children ; we see but as through a glass darkly.* It is but very little that we do understand ; and that little that we do, it is but imperfectly, obscurely, confusedly.

All that we know of God, and those other most glorious objects (which it is most our interest and happiness to know), is but, as it were, in a picture, or by reflexion, as from a glass. But, as the apostle goes on, when, from children in this world, we come to be men of the other world, then that which is in part shall be done away ; and in that state *we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known ;* that is, we shall know fully and evidently ; we shall know God, and all those infinite other objects which we desire to contemplate, as we know those that we look upon and converse with, as we ourselves are known to others, not by our picture, but by being personally seen by them and acquainted with them. And as our understanding will be thus made perfect in knowledge, so our wills also will be made perfect in love, this indeed being a natural consequence of that : For our minds having so thorough a comprehension and perception of God's infinite loveliness and perfections, as they will have in that state, cannot but represent him to us as the greatest good, and the most amiable object in the world. And hereupon we cannot avoid the cleaving to him with our whole hearts, and shall find the greatest pleasure and satisfaction that is possible in so doing. All our grosser loves will be quite burnt up in this new fire that will be kindled in our breasts. We shall see such an infinite, inexhaustible treasure of good in God, that we shall love, and admire, and delight in him, incomparably  
more



more than in any other good in the world : Nay, we shall love so long, and so intensely, till our souls be quite transformed into the nature of our Beloved ; till we become as like God, as it is possible for creatures to be : His will, will be our will ; his perfections will be our perfections ; and we shall, in a manner, be one with him : And this is the perfection of love. But, Secondly ; As our spirits or our souls will be made perfect, so will also our bodies. Reason, indeed, will tell us, that no earthly gross bodies (such as ours now are) can be fit instruments to serve the soul in such exalted operations as these we have been now speaking of. But God hath not left us to the bare conjecture of reason in this matter ; he hath assured us by his apostle, that when that time comes, *we shall be clothed upon with an heavenly tabernacle*, 2 Cor. v. And again ; in the xvth of the 1st of Corinthians, that we shall have *spiritual, immutable bodies* ; because such flesh and blood as we now have, is not capable of *entering into the kingdom of God*, as he there tells us. But that by which we may best judge of the perfection of our bodies in that day, is what St. Paul tells us, in his epistle to the Philippians, chap. iii. ver. 21. namely, That Christ will then fashion our bodies like unto his glorious body ; that is to say, we shall then have such bodies as our Saviour now hath, that he sits at the right hand of God. Now, how bright and illustrious that is, will in some measure appear, from what the apostles saw at his transfiguration, and St. Paul afterwards, when our Saviour appeared to him, in order to his conversion ; so glorious was the splendor of it, that it was insupportable to their mortal senses. The apostles were put into an ecstasy ; and St. Paul was struck blind for three days ; Flesh and blood could

not bear the glory of it. Yet such bodies as these, the apostle assures us, our souls shall be clothed with at the resurrection; bodies as bright and glorious as the light; bodies as pure as the regions are where we are to inhabit; bodies so nimble and agile, that our souls may move them whither and how we please, nor will they be the least clog or incumbrance to us. But come we, in the second place, to speak something of the mansions where blessed souls are to inhabit. In what part of the vast creation of God those mansions are placed, or this country is situated, we do not know.

But sure we are, they are in the purest regions of the world; sure we are, they are out of the stench and vapour of this corruptible earth; because sure we are, that they are in heaven: Nay, as the scripture tells us, the highest heaven, or, as St. Paul expresseth it, the third heaven. But, where-ever this country is, that which may give us infinite satisfaction, that it is the most happy, the most delightful, the most glorious country in the world, is this consideration, that here it is that God keeps his court, and manifests his glory, and here it is that our Lord Jesus in person dwells. For that all good christians shall go to that place where Christ keeps his personal residence, is very clear from St. Paul, who wisheth that he may be out of this body, that he may be with Christ. But most of all from our Saviour's own words (John xiv. 2, 3.): *In my Father's house* (saith he) *there are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* Now, where is it that Christ now is, but at the right hand of God, in that place which is here called the house of God, and else-  
where

where the throne of God? In that place where God doth after a peculiar manner exhibit and shew forth his glory? That place therefore is the happy country that good souls shall go to at the end of the world. It is true, God, as to his essence, is not in one place more than another; for he fills all places, and is equally present in all places in the world: But yet this doth not hinder but that he may manifest himself to others more in one place than another. He hath often done so, as the scripture informs us; witness, to Moses in the burning bush, to all the elders of Israel at the giving of the law: All these at that time (as the text tells us) did see the God of Israel. And thus, we say, he doth continually manifest himself in that part of the world, where our Saviour, as to his human nature, dwells, namely, in an external and visible manner. Hence it is, that that place is called the throne of his glory, and the light inaccessible to mortal men: And that is one reason why our Saviour describes the happiness of heaven by this phrase, *Of seeing of God*; and St. Paul, *Of seeing him face to face*. Not that God can be seen by bodily eyes; for God is a perfect spirit, and falls not under the perception of corporal senses. One may as well talk of seeing a sound, as of seeing God in the literal sense of seeing: But this is the meaning of those expressions (at least, one part of their meaning), that God, in that part of heaven where our Lord Jesus dwells, will be pleased to reveal himself in so much majesty, with such illustrious and magnificent appearances, even to the very senses of good men, that they shall be filled with ineffable joy and delight; and perceive, by the glory that they see, that God hath his residence there. And now, must it not be a place beyond all imagination glorious, where

the King of the world keeps his court, and where he never ceaseth to display the full beams of his majesty to the senses of all his happy subjects? Must it not be a happy country, which, besides all the natural beauties and pleasures of it, is adorned with the illustrious presence of the Son of god, who, after all his sufferings, and all his combats with the kingdom of darkness, is there triumphantly sat, as in the fulness of power and glory, and made governor and Lord both of angels and men? Yet no worse a place than this will fall to the share of all good christians, for ever to dwell in. No meaner a presence than this shall they ever stand before; no less a glory than this shall they ever behold, and be enravished with. *Father* (saith our Saviour), *I will that those that thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.*

But, thirdly; That which will render the condition of good men, in that state, still more happy, is the excellent company they shall converse with; for, as they are come unto Mount Sion (that I may use the apostle's language) *as they are come unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to God the judge of all, to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant* (of which we have already spoken), *so* (as the apostle goes on) *they are come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, written in heaven, to the spirits of just men made perfect*, Heb. xii. 22. There is the general rendezvous of all angels, and all good souls; there they live in one family, and converse in the most familiar manner, and embrace one another with the most tender love. There is no solitude there, no strangeness to one another, no selfishness, and narrowness of soul; but the communion of saints is in full perfection. There we

shall know and be known, love and be beloved by the gracious sons of light, the holy angles of God, who, in the days of our pilgrimage here, did us many good offices, that we never knew of ; who, whenever any sinner of us is converted from his evil ways, rejoice at it in heaven ; but will then much more rejoice, when we come to be partakers of their glory, and of their conversation. There we shall rejoice in company of the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and all those burning and shining lights in the world, whose zeal for God and his religion, in their several generations, hath embalmed their names and memories amongst all good men. Lastly ; There shall we meet and embrace all our righteous friends and acquaintance, whose deaths we so much regretted. There we shall again possess our husbands, our wives, our children, that died in the fear of God, for whom we have always been so much concerned, and whose loss (as we called it) was so very grievous to us : In a word, all those good people whom we loved, and whose company was ever dear to us, shall then be again restored to us, or rather we to them ; and so restored, as never to be separated any more ; but to dwell in perfect peace and joy, to enjoy one another to eternity, with all the endearments of love and friendship, without fear, without care, without envy, or jealousy, or any other perturbation. And now, how transporting a consideration must this needs be, to all those that have any sense of the pleasure that arises from friendship, and agreeable conversation ! Who can ever be weary of such company ? Or, rather, who will not be so weary and unsatisfied with the short, imperfect enjoyment we have of one another in this world, that he will not long to be admitted into that happy society above ?

Cicero, tho' an heathen, was so affected with the thoughts of these things (which yet he had no stronger grounds for the belief of, but what natural reason suggested to him), that he cries out, in the person of Cato, to this purpose (the words are wonderful, to be spoken by an heathen) :

“ Oh ! how I long (saith he) to see and be present  
 “ with those friends of mine departed, whom I have  
 “ so much loved and honoured ! Nor is it them only  
 “ that I have known, that I desire to go to, but all  
 “ those brave men I have heard of, and read of, and  
 “ writ of. If I were once a-going thither, none  
 “ should draw me back : If God should offer to re-  
 “ store me to my youth, and to begin the world a-  
 “ gain, I would resolutely refuse it : For what advan-  
 “ tage is there in this life ? Or rather, what pain and  
 “ trouble is there not ? Oh ! happy day, when I shall  
 “ depart from this sink of the world, from this un-  
 “ quiet, tumultuous company, and go to dwell with  
 “ the assembly and congregation of divine souls !”  
 Thus far Cicero.

But, fourthly, pass we on from the company that good men shall have in the other state, to the manner of life they there lead, the employments in which they spend their days. And here, tho' we are much to seek as to particulars, yet, in general, we may be sure they are such as are suitable to such perfect natures, and very becoming the place where they live, and the presence of that God before whom they stand, and the excellent company with which they do converse. We need not doubt but that all the powers both of their souls and bodies are employed to the best ends, and in the most excellent manner, they are capable of. It is not a dull unactive life they lead there ; but as all  
 their

their faculties are inconceivably enlarged, and rendered most sprightly and vigorous, so there is a new world of objects to employ and entertain them, and that to their unexpressible satisfaction. Whether they exercise their understanding in the discovery of new mines of truth, in contemplating the infinite perfections of God, in considering the admirable contrivance of his works, in searching out the stupendous mysteries of his holy word, in pleasing themselves with the speculations of the eternal goodness and righteousness of his laws, and the exact order and regularity of his government of the world.

Or whether they exercise their wills in acts of the most ardent love, and devotion, and adherence to God, and of the tenderest charity to all his creatures; or whether they exercise their memories in repeating to themselves all the occurrences of their life past, and how graciously every event of their lives was ordered and managed by God's providence for their own good, and the good of the world; or whether they exercise their eyes in viewing or contemplating the infinite variety of the creation, and the magnificence of every part of it; or whether they exercise their tongues and ears in telling and hearing the rare dispensations of God's providence in all parts of the world, from the beginning to the end thereof; or, lastly, whether they exercise their whole man in solemn acts of worship and adoration, and in receiving orders from God, and readily putting them in execution, as the angels of God do: I say, in all these instances, the employment will be exceedingly delightful, and will fill them with inexpressible joy and satisfaction. But, of all the other works they exercise themselves in, that of praise and thanksgiving, is in the scripture taken notice of, as

their peculiar office, and constant employment in that state: *They cease not day and night to cry out, holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come, Rev. iv. 1.* There they fall down, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created, Rev. iv. 11.* There they chaunt forth the praises of the Lamb, saying, *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. For he hath redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation; and hath made us unto our God kings and priests, Rev. v.* There they sing the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb, saying, *Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy, Rev. xv. 3.* And now consider what pleasant, what chearful lives they must needs lead, that are always thus employed. If, in this dull state, where our souls are sunk down into the very dregs of matter, and are thereby become, in a great measure, insensible of God's infinite perfections, and the unvaluable supplies and favours which we do every minute receive from him, and are very difficultly brought to raise up our thoughts and affections to him; I say, if in this state, it be yet so good a thing to sing praises unto God; so joyful and pleasant a thing to be thankful, as David expresth it: Oh, how delightful will it be, to send forth his praises, when we find ourselves in perfect freedom and liveliness! When our souls can spread forth their wings in the vast regions of light and glory,



glory, when we have a full view of the excellencies of God, and of his astonishing goodness; when we can take a just estimate of all the blessings that he hath heaped upon us all our lives long; when we can look back upon all the dangers we have escaped, all the favours of God to us, while we were in this troublesome world; and at the same time look into our present happy state that he hath put us into, and look forwards also to those rivers of pleasure that are before us, and will never cease to flow upon us from that inexhaustible spring of goodness! Oh! how transporting will this be to us! how will our hearts be melted into love and joy! and how will that joy break forth, and express itself, in the most rapturous and never-ceasing praises!

But, fifthly and lastly, to conclude; As another addition to the happiness of that state, let us farther consider the ineffable communications that God will then be pleased to make to the souls of good men. These, in scripture, are set forth to us under several sorts of expressions: Good men shall then enjoy God, and they shall be his sons, and they shall inherit all things: They shall drink of his pleasures, as out of the river: They shall know the love of God, which passeth knowledge; and they shall be filled with all the fulness of God. And, lastly, the same thing our Saviour principally seems to intend, when he describes the happiness of the other life, in the term of *seeing God*. It is true, as I said before, God doth, in that state, exhibit his glory and majesty to his people in a visible manner, to their very eyes and senses. Which appearance, or representation, is that which the Jews call the *Shekinah*, or God's dwelling among his people. But tho', in this case, good men may be truly

said to see God ; yet that phrase contains a great deal more in it : For, to see God, in the scripture-language, is to enjoy him ; to receive such favours from him, as he will be pleased to communicate unto us, in that holy place where he dwells ; to have a participation with him in his blessedness : For, to see, in the scripture-phrase, is the same thing as to enjoy. Thus, to see good days, in the xxxivth Psalm, is to possess them, to lead a happy life. To see life, and to see the kingdom of God, is, to be put into the enjoyment of those blessings. To see God, then, is something more than to dwell whole ages in gazing upon some outward appearance or manifestation of God's presence (in which yet several have been so sensual, as to place the whole of the beatific vision) ; it is to have real enjoyment of him, and as sensibly to perceive him ; to be as pleasingly and delightfully affected with him, as we do perceive, or are affected with any good in this world : In a word, it is to be made partakers of all God's perfections, as far as our capacities will bear ; and to receive such vital communication from his infinite love and goodness, as will make us really, and substantially, and eternally, happy, like as he himself is.

And now I have said as much as I can in the little time that is allowed me ; but I have not said, neither can we think, the thousandth part of the blessedness and happiness of those good souls that God thinks worthy of receiving into his kingdom : It is enough to say, it is unmeasurable, and everlasting, as God himself is. Now blessed, for ever blessed be God, who hath prepared such wonderful things for them that love him. Blessed be our Lord Jesus, who hath made known to us the certainty of them, and taught us the way how we may attain them. Blessed be the Holy Spirit

Spirit of God, who, if we be not wanting to ourselves, will not fail to conduct us safely to them, in making us meet to be partakers of this inheritance of the saints in light.

Oh ! let us rejoice and be glad all the days of our life. Oh ! let us all quit our little trifling designs, and set ourselves in good earnest to the purchasing this pearl of great price. Oh ! let us make it the business and design of our lives, to labour to enter into this rest, which, as you see, is a rest so extremely worth our labouring for.

*And Thou, O blessed God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee, such good things as pass man's understanding ; pour into our hearts such love towards Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain thy gracious promises, which exceed all that we can desire : To whom, &c.*





# S E R M O N X V I.

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All Oaths not unlawful : And against Perjury.

J A M E S V. 12.

*But above all things, my brethren, swear not.*



HAVE chosen these words of St. James for my argument, which are as exactly levelled against the sin of profane swearing, as words can be ; *Above all things* (saith he), *my brethren, swear not.* Sure, that must not be a little thing, concerning which such words as these are used to dissuade us from it. Sure, an apostle of Christ, that was inspired by the Holy Ghost, would not have said, *Above all things*, have a care of such a sin, unless that sin had been of a more than ordinary malignity ; nay, unless it had been a sin of the most heinous nature : And yet it is no other sin than swearing, that sin which is so common, and which is generally thought so small a matter among all sorts of people, that is here forbid in so earnest and so solemn a manner.

But before I come to that I mainly design for my text, it is fit I should give you some explication of it,  
and

and vindicate it from such false glosses, as some among us are wont to put upon it: You know there is a sect of men in our days, that hold all swearing utterly unlawful; and, agreeably to their principles, they refuse to give their promise, or their testimony, upon oath, in all cases whatsoever, though never so much by law required to it. The great thing they urge for this principle, is this text of St. James I have now read unto you, and the other text of our Saviour, in the vth of St. Matthew. Our Saviour there saith, verse the 34th, *Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; and so on: but let your conversation be, yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.* St. James here saith, *Above all things, my brethren, swear not; neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest you fall into condemnation.* How (say they) can words be invented, that shall more effectually forbid all sorts of oaths whatsoever, and in what cases soever, than these words do? And suitably thereunto, several of the primitive fathers, say they, have utterly condemned the whole practice of oaths among christians.

I must confess, this that they urge, doth, at the first sight, seem very plausible, and would really stumble an honest-minded man, that looks no farther than the bare sound of words. I hope, therefore, I shall not mispend either my time, or my labour, if I endeavour to give a plain account of this matter.

Two things therefore I propose to do upon this text:

I. To explain the meaning of this prohibition of swearing; and to shew, That neither Christ, nor his apostles, did intend hereby to forbid the use of oaths in all cases, but only in some.

II. To reprove, from hence, that extravagant, ungodly practice (too much in use among us) of swearing in our ordinary conversation; which, indeed, is the only thing here forbidden.

I begin with the first of these points (which will be sufficient for your entertainment at this time) to give an account of those prohibitions about swearing: and to shew that they were never designed to be extended to all swearing whatsoever, but only to swearing in some cases.

And here I have three things to offer:

First, The words themselves do not require such a general sense.

Secondly, The practice both of our Lord and his apostles, do evidently shew, that no such sense was intended by them: To which I shall add, in the

Third place, Some other considerations, which do farther clear this matter.

I am now to prove against the Quakers, that all swearing is not unlawful, nor can it be concluded from these texts. Now, in order to this, let us consider these texts:

And I first begin with our Saviour's law, in the vth chapter of St. Matthew, which indeed is the original from whence St. James copies: *I say unto you (saith our Saviour) swear not at all.* It is a general and uncontested rule, in the interpreting of scripture, and all other writings, that the scope of the author, and the subject-matter of his discourse, is to fix and limit the sense of all his propositions; so that tho' a proposition be seemingly universal, yet it is to be extended no farther than the subject-matter that then is treated about. Thus, for instance, these two propositions, *Take no thought for your lives; Be careful for nothing;* are as general and universal as words can make them: But  
yet

yet it is certain, all care and thoughtfulness is not here forbid, but only that which is spent about food, or raiment, or such-like worldly things; because that is the subject-matter of our Saviour's discourse in these texts. If therefore it doth appear, that when our Saviour saith, in this place, *swear not at all*, the subject-matter of his discourse is not all oaths whatsoever, but only oaths of one sort; that is to say, voluntary oaths, and such kind of voluntary oaths too, as were customarily sworn in common conversation; I say, if this do appear, then, certainly, his forbidding of all swearing, is not to be extended to all oaths whatsoever, but is to be limited to such oaths as these.

Premising this, I come now to give an account of the passage. You are to know, that the Jews in our Saviour's days, were generally faulty, as to this business of oaths, in two respects:

First of all; They accounted no swearing directly unlawful, but false-swearing.

If a man did but swear that which was true, or made good that which he swore he would do, they accounted him no transgressor of the commandment, though he often made use of oaths where he needed not. For the commandment, as they understood it, was only against perjury. The commandment was, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*; that is, as Moses himself interprets it Lev. xix. *Thou shalt not swear by my name falsely*: Or, as our Saviour here expresses it, *Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform thy oaths unto the Lord*. For undoubtedly, it is the third commandment that our Saviour here hath reference to.

Secondly; They had another odd notion about swearing: They would swear frequently by the creatures;

tures; as, by the heavens, by the earth, by Jerusalem, and the like; and this they accounted no swearing at all; that is, they did not account it perjury, if such oaths were false, or were not performed. Thus one of their own authors; “If any (saith he) swear by the  
 “heaven, or by the earth, or by the sun, or the like,  
 “although the mind of the swearer be, under those  
 “words, to swear by him that created them, yet this  
 “is not an oath.”

These, I say, were their generally received principles about swearing, as doth yet appear by their books. Now, our Saviour, who came to give a perfect law of holiness and religion to mankind, seeing of what mischievous consequences these notions and practices were, how much the name of God was brought into contempt, and the religion of an oath was profaned by them, takes care, in this sermon on the mount, to give his disciples better instructions about these things; and as he had just before been improving the sixth commandment about murder, and the seventh about adultery, to higher instances of duty than the letter of those commandments required, so he now comes to do the same with the third commandment about swearing.

And thus he begins his discourse upon this argument, in the 33d verse of this vth chapter of St. Matthew: *Again, ye have heard, saith he, that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: (There is the letter of the third commandment). But I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thine head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your commu-*  
*nication*



*lication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.* Two things our Saviour here improves, as to this commandment. First; Whereas the letter of it did only forbid false swearing, (at least, the Jews then generally thought so, and, upon that account, were not scrupulous of swearing in their ordinary conversation, so long as they swore but truly) he now commands, that we should not swear at all, but avoid all oaths in our conversation. And, in the second place, whereas the letter of the law did only forbid the taking the name of God in vain, but did not forbid the taking the name of the creature (from whence they concluded, that swearing by the creature was not an oath) our Saviour here teacheth us, that swearing by heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, or by our heads (which were the usual forms of swearing among the Jews, in their common conversation) are truly and properly oaths; for all these things, when they are sworn by, have relation and respect to God. Heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool, and Jerusalem is his peculiar city, and our heads are intirely at his disposal: And therefore, having this relation to God, the honour of his name is concerned in them; and we ought not to swear by them in our conversation, any more than by the name of God.

But what then must we do? How must we behave ourselves in this matter of oaths? Why, he tells you in the next verse; *Let your conversation be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.* As if he had said, This is the rule I would have you constantly to observe in your commerce and dealing with men, and in your whole conversation: When you have occasion to affirm a thing, be constant to affirm it without an oath: When you have occasion to deny a thing, say, it is not so, without an oath.

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When you have occasion to promise that you will do a thing, or not do it, promise, but do not swear: And when you have promised, be sure you be as good as your word. *Let always your Yea be yea, and your Nay be nay*, as St. James here expresseth it; that is, Let your words and your deeds agree together. Not that we are bound to use those precise words of yea and nay, and those words only, as the Quakers most foolishly interpret it; but thus; go no farther in your communication, or your common conversation, than merely to affirm a thing, if it be true; to deny a thing, if it be false; and to be true to your words in whatsoever you promise. This is more becoming you than the most solemn swearing in the world; and whatsoever is more than this, either proceeds from some evil principle in your minds, or is suggested to you by that evil one the devil, who promotes the interest of his kingdom, by tempting you thus to abuse your tongue.

Taking now together all this that I have said, it appears, methinks, very plainly, that all swearing is not here forbid by our Saviour, but only needless swearing; swearing when we can avoid it; swearing when we are not called to it; swearing when there is no necessity, nor any great charity to be served by it; in a word, swearing in our common conversation: For it is plainly of such kind of swearing and oaths, that our Saviour here treats. That he did not intend to treat here of such oaths as are imposed upon us by authority, whether to the giving testimony to a truth, in a business in controversy, or giving security to the public for our performance in any matter: I say, that our Saviour did not here treat of such kind of oaths, is abundantly plain from the oaths he instanceth in; such as, swearing by heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem; for these kinds of oaths were never allowed in any court of  
 judi-

judicature among the Jews. Whenever an oath was exacted of any one, it was always in the name of the God of heaven.

And then, Secondly ; This is plainer, from the opposition that follows after this his command against swearing ; *Swear not* (saith he) *at all ; but let your communication be, yea, yea ; nay, nay.* It is our communication, our ordinary daily converse and commerce with men, from whence our Saviour would have all oaths banished ; and, instead of which, he would only have direct affirmations or denials used. But it by no means follows from hence, that because we may not swear in our communication, where there is no need of it, therefore we may not swear upon extraordinary occasions, when we are called to it for the sake of righteousness and peace and truth.

And thus much (if not too much) about this text of our Saviour's. As for the other passage of St. James's, which is now the argument of my discourse, I need say nothing farther about it, considering that what has been already said, doth sufficiently give an account of it ; for, undoubtedly, as I said before, St. James, in these words, copied after our Saviour, and only repeats his commandment, varying a little (and but a little) his expressions. And therefore whatever is the sense of our Saviour's passage, is certainly the sense of his : Only the last clause of this text I think it worth while to take notice of to you, because I believe it is not rightly translated. *Above all things* (saith St. James), *my brethren, swear not ; neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath : All that is plain : But let your yea be yea, and your nay be nay ;* that is, as I said before, let your words and your actions be both of a-piece. That this is the sense, is plain from that  
expres-

expression of St. Paul, in the first of the 2d of Corinthians, the 18th verse: *As God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay*; that is, I did not say one thing, and do another. When our yea is yea, we are true to our words; but when our words are yea and nay, we are false to them. This is the scripture-language about that matter. And then follows that clause, which, I said, was not rightly translated, *Lest ye fall into condemnation*; — instead of ὑπὸ κρίσειν, *into condemnation*; the best copies read εἰς ὑπόκρισιν, *into dissimulation, or lying*: so that this is the meaning of the passage; I give it you in the words of one of your best expositors: “This especial caveat I give you, That  
 “you permit not yourselves that custom of swearing  
 “by heaven, or earth, or any other form of oath.  
 “instead of such unnecessary customs, it will be much  
 “more for your turn, that ye take care that your per-  
 “formance be agreeable to your words, that ye fall  
 “not into lying and false speaking.”

But, Secondly; As it cannot be proved from these texts, that all swearing is forbidden to christians; so, farther, it is evident, both from the practice of our Saviour and St. Paul, that all swearing is not forbidden. It cannot be imagined, that our Saviour would, in his own actions, contradict his own doctrine; that he should swear himself, and yet forbid his disciples the use of swearing. And yet nothing is more certain, than that our Saviour did swear in the most solemn manner that could be; for he did answer, upon oath, to the demands of the high-priest, when at his tryal, in the xxvith of St. Matthew, the high-priest said to him, *I adjure thee, by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ.* Jesus answered him, and told him, *he was.* Which was as much

an answer upon oath, and was so accounted by all that stood by, as if one in our days should answer, after he had kissed the gospels, *That he would swear the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.* For, among the Jews, the constant way of tendering oaths in their public courts, was by way of adjuration. The magistrate did adjure them; that is, he commanded them to swear, in the name of the living God, to the truth of such questions as he asked them: And their answers to those questions were always accounted oaths. And for this practice, they had the express law of God, as you may see in the vth of Leviticus, 1st verse; *If a man hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of such a thing; if he doth not utter it, he shall bear his iniquity.* If he hath heard the voice of swearing; that is, if being adjured or required to answer, upon oath, concerning what he hath seen or heard, he doth not declare the truth, he is perjured.

And then, as for St. Paul, so far was he from thinking all oaths unlawful, that, in several of his epistles, he voluntarily makes use of them; that is to say, in weighty, momentous matters, where the truth of God's word, or the salvation of mens souls, was concerned. *God is my witness*, saith he in one place. *As God is true*, in another place. *I call God for a record upon my soul*, in another place. *Before God I lye not*, in another place. What are all these expressions, but solemn forms of swearing? Indeed, they are as truly and properly oaths, as words can make. And yet, I dare say, there is none of you harbours a thought, either that St. Paul was ignorant of the christian doctrine in this matter; or that, if he had believed the christian doctrine to have forbid all oaths, he would, in any case have practised it himself.

But,

But, Thirdly ; There are a great many other considerations, from whence the lawfulness of swearing, when we are called to it, may be evinced ; and the frivolousness of the Quakers objections against it may be detected.

I will just touch upon some of them. First of all ; So far is swearing from being forbid in the Old-testament, that it is in some cases commanded, and looked upon as a piece of religion. Thus, Deuteronomy iv. 13. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him ; and thou shalt swear by his name.* And David tells us, Psal. lxxiii. 11. *All they that swear by him shall be commended ; but the mouth of those that speak lyes, shall be stopped.*

Secondly ; God himself is represented to us by the apostle, as making use of this practice of swearing, for the greater confirmation of his promises. Thus, Heb. vi. 13. *When God made the promise to Abraham, because he could swear by none greater, he swore by himself. And being willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, he confirmed his promise by an oath.* Thus far St. Paul. Now, certainly, God would not have done this, had an oath been unlawful in itself.

Thirdly ; All mankind hath been always sensible, not only of the conveniency and lawfulness of oaths, but of the necessity of them, both in order to the securing human society, and the ending differences between man and man : And accordingly, all mankind hath not only allowed them, but required them. And this is that which St. Paul saith, in the fore-cited place, of the vith of the Hebrews, *An oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife.* Now, certainly, that which is so necessary, both for the peace of the world,  
and

and the ending differences among men, cannot be thought an unlawful or wicked thing.

Fourthly, and Lastly; Even of those that have spoke most against swearing, as there have been several, both of Jews, and heathens, and christians, in the old time; yet it doth not appear that any of these did condemn or disapprove of all oaths, but only of such as were needless and impertinent. Pythagoras, and all his followers, gave it as a rule, that a man should fear an oath: But their meaning was not to forbid all oaths, but to caution men that they did not use them rashly, and upon slight occasions.

The Essenes, which were a sect among the Jews, talked as much against oaths as our Quakers: But yet, for all that, every one of them took a solemn oath at his admission into their society.

I told you before, that several of our christian fathers talk much against swearing upon any occasion; and this the Quakers urge against us as a strong argument, that the christian doctrine about swearing is different now from what it was in those days. But they are much mistaken: These authors, that speak most against swearing, speak against it in no other sense than our Saviour and his apostles do, of which I have given you an account. They never designed to possess their hearers that all oaths were unlawful, but only such as were unnecessary. And their constant practice shews the truth of this: For, oaths before a magistrate, whether for giving security to the public, or for rendering their testimony to the truth of a thing, were as much in use then, as they are now: And yet we never hear of any christian that scrupled to take oaths in these cases; provided that, in the oaths they took, they did not swear by some false deity. On the contrary, we have  
suf-

sufficient evidence, in those times, that christians were as ready, when they were called to it, to give their oath, as any other people were.

But I have said enough upon this point. I would not, indeed, have said so much, had it not been for the Quakers, who think they have such a mighty advantage against us, as to this point.

But now, having proved that all swearing is not unlawful; it is fit, on the other side, that mighty care should be taken that we do not swear unlawfully. In our conversation we must not swear at all; that is sufficiently taught us by our Saviour: But when we are called upon by law to swear, then we may do it; nay, we must: But then, at that time, it infinitely concerns us to be wonderfully careful both how we swear, and what.

An oath is the most sacred thing in the world; for it is the most solemn appeal to God that we can make. The very notion of an oath is, that a man thereby calls God to witness to the truth of what he saith, or promiseth: Nay, he doth not only appeal to him as a witness, but as a judge and avenger. Every man that swears an oath, whether it be in the way of promise, or by the way of asserting the truth of a matter of fact, is supposed to speak in these terms: *I call thee, O God, the Lord of heaven and earth, who knowest the secrets of all hearts, I call thee to witness, that I uprightly and sincerely speak the truth in this matter.* Or, if it be a promissary oath; *I call thee to witness, that I do sincerely mean, and purpose to perform, that which I do now promise: Nay, I do not only call upon thee as a witness of my truth and sincerity in this matter, but as an avenger of my sin, if I swear falsely. Those men, for whose satisfaction I*  
take



*take this oath, do not know my heart; and for that reason, I appeal to thee, who dost know it. Thou art the Lord of all: And accordingly as I deal truly or falsely, in this matter, do thou deal with me, both in this world, and that which is to come.*

This, I say, is the nature and importance of every oath that is taken. Oh! how infinitely, then, doth it concern all men, whenever they are called to give an oath, to consider extremely well, what they are going about, and to act in that matter with the greatest caution, with the greatest reverence, and with the greatest sincerity in the world! how shall a man for ever answer it to his own conscience; Nay, how can he ever expect to escape hell and damnation, if he forswears himself; that is, if he either declares that for truth, which he knows is not so, or promiseth that, which he doth not intend to perform! Nay, that is not the only perjury: For a man is guilty of that sin, even when he is uncertain whether what he swears be true; and likewise, when having promised a thing, with an intention to perform it, he fails afterwards in the performance, provided it was in his power to perform it.

I am loth to say, that there is too just occasion, at this time, and among ourselves, to speak against all these sorts of perjury; but I am afraid it is too true. Perjury, in all these kinds, seems to be too frequently practised in this kingdom; nay, I am afraid it is one of the crying, reigning sins of the nation: But if it be, good God! in what a miserable condition are we, unless it please God to work a reformation among us!

Perjury is one of those sins, that, above all others, calls upon God for his judgments upon a nation. Thus, God tells us, by his prophet Jeremiah, in the xxiiiid chapter, and in the 10th verse, *Because of swear-*

*swearing, the land mourneth.* And God himself has put a mark upon it, above all other other sins, in the third commandment; *Whosoever taketh the name of the Lord his God in vain* (that is, as I told you, whoever forswears himself) *the Lord will not hold that man guiltless*; such a man shall certainly be punished severely.

And accordingly, amongst the heathens, it was the general sense, that, of all sinners whatsoever, the perjured man was the worst; and such a one was particularly to expect the vengeance of God both upon himself, and his family.

And there is great reason for all this: For a man, in forswearing himself, doth really defy God, and renounce all his hopes of mercy from him. For whereas, in the case of other sins, there may be an appeal made to God's mercy; yet, in this case of perjury, there is none: For he that is perjured, hath precluded himself of this benefit, because he hath braved God Almighty, and hath, in effect, told him to his face, that, if he was forsworn, he would desire no mercy.

I pray God make us all sensible of the heinousness of this sin; that so, upon all occasions, we may preserve inviolable in our minds the sacredness and religion of an oath; and whenever we are called upon to swear, may, as the prophet expresseth it, swear in truth and righteousness and judgment.

And thus much of the first head I proposed to insist on. As for the other part of my argument against profane swearing in our conversation, I shall refer it to the next Lord's-day.

*Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, &c.*



# S E R M O N XVII.

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Several Arguments against common swearing  
and cursing.

JAMES V. 12.

*Above all things, my brethren, swear not.*



HAVE already, in my last discourse, given you a large account of the meaning of this text, and likewise of that other command of our Saviour, in the vth of St. Matthew, from whence this is taken; and have shewed, that these prohibitions do not extend to all oaths, but only oaths in our common conversation, or heedless, unnecessary swearing, or taking God's name in vain, in our discourse.

This is that I now come to treat about, and which St. James means, when he says, *Above all things, my brethren, swear not.*

I am sorry, indeed, there should be any occasion for preaching against such a practice as this: One would think, that in a civilized nation, where learning and the

the arts flourish, and where politeness and good breeding in our conversation is every-where pretended to; and especially in a nation where the authority of our Lord Jesus is owned, and his religion is professed, and that too with greater purity than in our neighbouring countries; I say, in such a nation as this, one would think there was no such thing as profane swearing to be heard in communication; but we should, upon all occasions, use the name of God with the greatest reverence in the world.

But, alas! to our shame, it is quite otherwise. No practice is more common amongst us than swearing and cursing: We outdo the very heathens, in our profane usage of the name of God: No order or degree of men is free from it: The gentleman and the mechanic, the person of honour and the beggar, are equally tainted with this vice. The mouths of several of us are so used to oaths, that they cannot tell a story, they cannot pass a jest, they cannot transact their business, nay, they can hardly ask a question, or answer one, without an oath, or a curse. It is the seasoning of all their discourse: It is to pass for the evidence, both of their wit, and truth, and sense too. Nay, the very children in the streets are perfect at it. The many of those that are not taught to say their prayers, are yet taught to swear and damn roundly, in almost every sentence they speak. O God! whither doth all this tend, and what will be the conclusion of these things, if this deluge of profaneness, which overflows our land, hath not, through the mercy of God, and the care of the government, some stop put to it!

I mean, at this time, most heartily to set myself to shew both the sin, and the danger, and the folly, and the inexcusableness of this vice. I will not pretend to

say any thing that is new to you, upon this argument : But I only desire, that the plain, obvious things, which you have, perhaps, heard over and over again, and which every one may readily suggest to himself upon this occasion, may be seriously weighed and considered by all of us. And if they be so, two things I hope for: First, That some of those, at least, that are guilty of this fault, will, upon the consideration of these things, endeavour to break themselves of it. And, Secondly, That some others, who are not guilty of it, will yet be so sensible of the mischief that it doth in the world, that they will do what they can, as opportunity is offered them, to correct this fault among those they converse with.

And, in truth, if those who are free from this in themselves, would but have the charity, or the courage (as it fairly comes in their way, and when they may do it without offence, or breach of good manners) to discountenance it among those they have dealing with, a good step would be made towards the bringing it out of fashion. For there is so little to be said for this naughty custom, even by those that use it most, that, if their friends and acquaintance would take a little pains with them, there might be hopes of their cure.

I hope I may go a great way towards the setting the hearts of all serious and considering men against this vice, by shewing this, That, taking all things together, there is no sin in the whole world, that doth afford more arguments against itself, or for the practice of which a man can say less in his own excuse or justification, than this sin of profane swearing. And if the case be thus with it, who but a fool or a madman would ever use himself to it ?

Now, for the making out this point, there needs no more but to consider these following things, which are all undeniably plain :

I. That it is a grievous sin in itself.

II. That it is attended with very mischievous circumstances.

III. That it is contrary to all good manners, and good breeding.

IV. That it highly deserves and destroys those ends that a man means to serve by it.

V. That what is pleaded in its justification, still makes it more unjustifiable.

And, lastly, That it is a fault that is very easily avoided ; which still renders a man the more inexcusable for continuing in it.

Of each of these things in their order.

First of all ; It is a very grievous sin in itself. No man can doubt of that, that is, in the least, instructed in the doctrine of christianity. There is not any one sin more plainly, more expressly forbid, by the law of our Saviour, than that of swearing : *I say unto you, saith he, swear not at all ; neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem, nor by your heads.* All these forms of oaths, which are used in conversation, are wholly forbid to christians : not only those solemn ones where the name of God is sworn by, but even the lesser ones, where God is not named, but only the creatures ; all sorts of swearing in conversation are prohibited by our Saviour. Nay, his apostle St. James lays such a stress upon this command of our Saviour's, that he says, *Above all things, my brethren, swear not ; neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor by any other oath.* Surely, that cannot be a slight sin, that the apostle

is so vehement in his caution against; *Above all things, my brethren, swear not.* Why, he could not have said more against murder, and adultery, and sacrilege, and perjury. Not that I think that every oath a man swears in his common discourse, is a sin of so horrid a nature, as those I have now mentioned; but this is that I would remark from hence, that swearing is as directly and expressly forbid to christians, as any of these sins, and consequently, must be a great sin: And therefore, for my part, I do wonder how any man can call himself, or think himself a christian, that lives in the practice of it. It is a thing so strictly forbid, and, withal, so much in a man's power to refrain, that I cannot believe a man can have any reverence of his Saviour, or any regard in the world to his authority, that can live in a practice so directly contradictory to his most sacred and express laws. Why, a religious Turk will forbear wholly the use of wine (though there be more temptations to it than that of swearing) because his prophet hath forbid it. A devout papist will not eat flesh on a fasting-day, be he never so much tempted to it; though yet that is not a commandment of God, but only an ordinance of their church. But yet we can live in the daily practice of swearing, which is as expressly forbid by our Saviour as any thing in the world, and pretend all the while to be christians. But it may be said, Are there not many sins that christians are too often guilty of, which yet, for all that, do not hinder them from being good christians? I answer; sins of ignorance are indeed consistent with our christianity; nay, and so also are sins of infirmity: But then, I much question, whether the practice of swearing can fall under either of these notions: A sin of ignorance it cannot be, because we all

know that it is a sin. And as for sins of infirmity, they are chiefly committed in two instances ; that is to say, either in the failure of a man's performance ; as for example, when a man doth not his duty so well as he should do in any case, or when he doth it not so often as he should do ; or, secondly, when, through inconsideration or surprize, he falls into some sin, which, if he had been careful over his own mind, he would have avoided. These, I say, are sins of infirmity : But no man that understands things, can take that for a sin of infirmity, which is not barely an omission of our duty, but a downright transgression of a known prohibition. No man can take that for a sin of infirmity, which is not barely an irregularity or disorderliness of our passions and appetites, but is a sin of the action ; of the action, I say, which every man hath at his command, though he hath not the motions or passions of his mind always in his disposal. And, lastly, No man can take that for a sin of infirmity, which is not one single action, or an action only now-and-then, upon extraordinary temptation, committed ; but is a habit of action, a custom, a practice, a course, that is as frequently repeated, as there are temptations to it. No man, I say, can think such a practice as this to be a sin of infirmity, but must acknowledge it to be a course of wilful sin : And if so, then I am sure, the custom of swearing in our conversation, is as much a wilful sin, as any other whatsoever. But how then it can consist with a man's christianity, that is to say, with the state of grace and regeneration, or the hopes of salvation in another world, let all such as are concerned, look to it.

But to go on with the sinfulness of this practice : We may be apt to look upon it as a slight matter, and



to be therefore only evil, because our Saviour hath forbid it. But, really, there is a great deal more in the thing: The taking of God's name into our mouths upon every trifling occasion, and especially swearing by it, is a thing really bad in itself, and which the light of nature doth sufficiently shew to be so; and therefore, all men, that had any sense of religion, even among the heathens, did very seriously reprove the practice of it, as well as our Saviour. Thus the philosopher, in Stobæus; "Some (saith he) advise men to be careful to swear the truth; but I advise, principally, that a man do not easily swear at all." To the same purpose Epictetus; "Shun oaths, if it be possible." And so likewise Simplicius; "We ought wholly to avoid swearing, except upon occasions of great necessity." And Plato, to the same purpose; "The name of God is not to be made use of upon slight occasions." And Hierocles tells us, "That the true way to preserve the reverence that is due to it, is to abstain from swearing."

There is an infinite reverence and veneration due to the name of God, which all those that use it slightly, or commonly, do violate. Here then is the sinfulness of swearing in our discourse, that it is an affront to God, a violation of that honour and respect we owe to him, an impudent abuse and prostitution of his sacred name, against all the reason and religion in the world. In a word, the sinfulness of common swearing and cursing lies in this, that it is blasphemy; which, certainly, all men, that have any sense of God must needs apprehend to be a dreadful sin.

It is likely, many of those that are used to swear and curse, have other notions of this matter, and do not dream that they are guilty of blasphemy, while they

are calling to God to witness at every sentence they speak ; while they are swearing by his name, by his life, by his wounds, by his blood ; or while they are, in his name, cursing, or damning, or confounding themselves, or others. But this is truly the blaspheming of God, whether they think so or no : For I know no other notion of blasphemy, than that it is an unworthy, injurious, and contumelious treating of God in our words and discourse.

Now, if oaths and curses, in our common discourse, be not of this nature, I know not what is. What can be an indignity put upon God, or a profanation of his sacred name, if these be not ? Every one must needs think so, that considers, that the practice of these things is a direct exposing his tremendous name to contempt ; it is a making it vile and cheap and despicable ; it is a prostituting it to serve the ends of our silliest humours, our most foolish passions, and our most diabolical furies and transports. Nay, more than all this, it is a most impudent appeal to God, to witness every foolish, trifling, or wicked word that we speak ; and if there be any imprecation added to it (as there is in all the damn-me's and confound-me's that are used among us) it is a downright braving and hectoring God Almighty, and challenging him to do the worst he can to us.

Oh, poor creatures ! if God should vindicate his own honour, while we are thus defying him, and should strike us dead for these execrable profanations of his holy name, none could blame his justice. But in what a miserable condition should we then be ! oh, the prodigious degeneracy of mankind ! oh, the wonderful patience and clemency of the maker of them, that they should continually thus dare God Almighty to make them examples of his vengeance ! and that he  
should,

should, instead of taking them at their word, continue still to pour out his mercies upon them; and thereby to engage them, if it be possible, to repent!

I would to God, that all of us, that have unhappily got this custom of cursing or swearing, or are apt to take the name of God idly or vainly into our mouths, would consider seriously what we are doing, when we do so. Is it for us, who, at the best, are but dust and ashes, but as we have made ourselves by our sins, are an hundred times worse; is it for us to take the name of God into our mouths upon every little occasion, and to sport ourselves with it? For us, who are grievous sinners, and obnoxious, upon a thousand accounts, to the divine vengeance, even for the most innocent part of our lives? For us, who are altogether precarious beings, and cannot subsist one moment, without the continuance of that providence that brought us hither, and the repetition every hour of ten thousand mercies, more than we take notice of? I say, Is it for us to make light of the name of that God that made us, and doth, every minute, thus infinitely oblige us? Can we use that name irreverently? Can we, for the gratifying a silly humour, or for the want of something else to say, or for the recommending ourselves to a set of fools and brutes, that we converse with, toss that name in our mouths without fear, or without wit? That dreadful name, which all mankind, that hath sense, do fear and reverence? That name, which we ourselves, if we have any religion, do invoke in our prayers, and think we can never sufficiently express our veneration of it? That name, which, when we do pray, we pray, that it may be hallowed, and sanctified, and preserved from abuse and profanation? That name, which is privy to all our

blasphemies? That name, which the devils themselves (as hardened as they are) do fear and tremble at? And, lastly, that name, which all the holy angels of God, in heaven, do continually adore; and yet they do not adore it without covering their faces? (so imperfect, so nothing are the highest of created beings, in comparison of the name, the majesty of him that created them) I say, all these things considered; can any one, that hath the least grain of sense, think that this is a name to be taken into our mouths lightly or rashly or unadvisedly? Can any one without horror, think of putting it to common uses, to tell a story with, or to answer a question with, or to express a passion with, or to make an implement with it in our drunken humours, to fill up our discourse, when we are at a loss for other words? And, and most of all, to call upon this dreadful name (either in sport or passion) to damn us, or those we speak to? Blessed God! for thy infinite mercies, in Christ Jesus, forgive all of us, that have ever thus abused and profaned thy holy name; and let thy unspeakable patience and forbearance, which thou hast expressed towards us, in not executing speedily thy vengeance upon our blasphemies and profanations, as they justly deserved, lead us, at length, to such a sense of the honour of thy name, and the veneration that is due to it, that we may never more take it into our mouths, but with that reverence and godly fear that becomes the creatures of Almighty God, and the disciples of our Lord Jesus. Amen, O God, for Jesus Christ's sake.

But thus much of our first particular, the sinfulness of profane swearing. The second thing I have to represent about it (which is all that I shall trouble you with at this time) is this; that as it is a grievous sin in itself,

itself, so it is also attended with very mischievous consequences, and that both with respect to the public and ourselves.

First of all, to the public ; This sin is of very evil consequence in this respect, in that it tends to abate and take off that dread and reverence that men ought to have for oaths, and by that means weakens and loosens the bands of human society. All mankind have, in all ages, been aware that there is no true hank to be had upon men, but by binding their consciences ; and that is no otherwise to be done, but by concerning God Almighty in the matter, and ordering all those, of whom any security for their faith and truth, in any matter, was demanded, to make their solemn appeal to God, as a witness, and as a judge, that what they said, was true ; and what they promised, they would perform. This is that we call an oath ; and accordingly, those oaths have been, from the beginning of society, used among men, as the best and the only effectual means, both to oblige men to do their duty in the particular places and offices they were trusted with in the public ; and to oblige them likewise to speak the truth, in any doubtful, controverted matter, when they were called to give their testimony : This, I say, hath always been the practice of mankind in all ages, and continues so to be at this day. And, suitable to this, Cicero tells us of the Romans, “ That they had *nullum vinculum ad astringendam fidem jure jurando arctius* ; They had no tie so effectual, for the securing a man’s faith, as his oath.” And St. Paul, a greater man than Cicero, hath told us, that *among men, an oath for confirmation is the end of all strife*. Since therefore so much depends upon an oath ; since the public is so much con-

cerned in it; since the administration of justice is so much influenced by it; it will readily be acknowledged, that it is one of the greatest concerns of human society, that all men should be obliged to swear truly; and nothing can be of greater mischief to the public, than that men should be careless of their oaths, and swear hand-over-head, as their humours or their passions or their interests prompt them; all the world will acknowledge this: And we of this nation have as much reason to be sensible of it, as perhaps any people in the world. Now, admitting this to be true, I appeal to every man, whether any thing can be more pernicious to human government and society, than such a practice; which, if it be admitted, doth naturally take off from men all that religion and veneration they have for an oath, and makes it, in a manner, an indifferent matter whether they swear truly or falsely. Yet such a practice (and no better) is that I am now speaking of, the practice of oaths in our common conversation. If the devil himself was to study and contrive a way for the disarming mankind of that natural reverence and veneration they have for oaths, and bringing them, without much scruple of conscience, to swear any thing, at any time, whether true or false, as their own interest, or the importunity of others, did tempt them to it, he could not, in the world, pitch upon a more effectual one than this; to make oaths familiar to them upon all occasions, to bring them into customary use in ordinary conversation. That man that can swear an hundred times a day, when there is no reason for it, I cannot imagine what regard he can have for an oath, when he is called upon to give it, when there is reason. When a man is come to that pass, that he hath used himself to call God to witnesses

for every thing that he saith; nay, and to call upon him almost every hour to damn him, and confound him; pray, what is there to hinder such a man, or what reason is there to believe, that he will not call God to witness with the same freedom and unconcernedness, when he is called to it in a court of justice? Would you make a man's conscience different, according to the different places he is in, so that he may make a conscience of swearing in one place, but yet shall make no conscience of swearing in all other places whatsoever? I must confess, I am as willing to believe well of mankind as is possible; and therefore I dare not say, but there may be such men found in the world, that, in spite of the natural consequences of things, may be so honest, that though they do not fear an oath in their discourse, yet would fear one before a magistrate. But this I say, and I am sure of it, that nothing in the earth doth more tend to make men heedless and regardless of their most solemn oaths, than to inure themselves to the practice of oaths in their common discourse. And I am very much afraid, that, to this practice, which hath so much obtained among us, we do, in a great measure, owe those many false oaths that have deprived men both of their lives and their estates, that we, at this day, do not without reason complain of. And therefore, certainly, it concerns the public, if they would have the reverence of oaths kept up, if they would not have faith and truth lost from among mankind, to suppress, as much as is possible, this vile, detestable custom of swearing and cursing in our conversation.

But, Secondly, to conclude; This custom of swearing is not only of very mischievous consequence to the public, but to ourselves also. When I say this, I do

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not mean the mischief that it doth to a man's credit and reputation, by giving occasion to all the world to believe, that the man that useth it is a man of no conscience, that he hath no religion, nor no truth; which yet is the constant fate of those that are much given to swearing: I say, though this be a very mischievous consequence of swearing; and a necessary one too, and ought to be seriously considered by all those that give themselves up to this practice: Yet I do not here insist on it; it will fall more naturally under another head. But that which I intend, is this; That there is this evil consequence doth always attend the custom of swearing, that it engages a man in a world of perjuries, which he before-hand is not aware of; or, if he was, he would tremble at the thoughts of them. It is an old observation; "He that sweareth continually (they are St. Chrysostom's words), both wilfully and unwilfully; both ignorantly and knowingly; both in earnest and in jest; such a man, being often transported by anger, and many other things, will frequently forswear himself." It is almost unavoidable, but a man that is much given to swear in his discourse (a man that useth to bind every thing he says, or every thing that he promiseth, with an oath), must say a great many things that are not true, and must likewise promise a great many things which he never performeth. In a multitude of oaths there cannot want perjury (as a wise man said).

God help us! As the condition of human affairs is in this world, there is no man, that considers well, that dare be accountable for the exact truth of every thing that he hath occasion to say in conversation, be he never so careful of what he saith. And if so, in what a condition are those open sluices among us, that



vent every thing that comes into their heads, and serves to fill up talk, whether it be news, or stories of other persons, or fancies of their own, and clinch all they say with bitter oaths and imprecations !

I dare say, you are all sensible, that those who make a practice of swearing in their talk, make no great distinction about this matter, and the occasion upon which they use their oaths ; but they come from them in course, without thinking, without deliberating, upon all occasions.

How then is it possible, that in such a multitude of idle discourse as slips from them, they should not, many times a day, over-shoot themselves, either in affirming more than is true, or in promising more than they make good ? And yet, by their calling God to witness to the truth of such things, they become really and strictly perjured and forsworn ; if, indeed, it be perjury to swear that which is false, or that we are not certain is true ; or if it be perjury to say a thing that we do not mean to do.

I would to God, all that have accustomed themselves to take the name of God into their mouths upon slight occasions, would seriously consider this ; and withal, consider what a sort of crime perjury is : What a horrid defiance it is of God Almighty, and what a solemn address made to him to destroy us and confound us, if he either have power or justice.

But I have said enough upon this head : As for the four following, which remain, I have not time to treat of them as they deserve, and therefore I shall reserve them to the next opportunity.

I pray God give us all such a lively sense of the excellence and holiness of his nature, such a sense of his

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his greatness, his majesty, and power, and wisdom, and justice, and goodness, that we may, in all our thoughts, and actions, give him that honour, and reverence, and adoration, that is for ever due to his most holy name.

*To this God, immortal and invisible, be all glory, &c.*





# SERMON XVIII.

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More reasons against Swearing and Cursing in  
our ordinary conversation.

JAMES V. 12.

*Above all Things, my Brethren, Swear not.*

**Y**OU may remember the argument I am engaged in, and consequently may know, beforehand, what sort of discourse you are to expect at this time ; that is to say, a hearty dissuasive from that practice which is too much in use among all sorts of persons, and may justly be accounted one of the reigning sins of the nation ; I mean, the practice of swearing and cursing in our discourse.

I believe I said enough, in my last discourse, to convince any serious man, both of the great sinfulness of this practice, and of the evil consequences that do attend it ; which were the two heads I then proceeded upon.

I now

I now come to lay before you some other considerations ; which, if they be added to what I have before represented upon this point, cannot but weigh so far with all men that ever reflect upon their own actions, as to set them perfectly against this practice ; since it will appear to be, upon all accounts whatsoever, so infinitely unreasonable and inexcusable. I am sensible those who are not used to this practice, will think that I have already said enough against it ; but I desire them to remember, that I do not preach to those that are innocent, but to those that are guilty of this fault ; and for the rescuing of such from so detestable a custom, all that can be said is little enough.

I desire, therefore, in the third place, those that are apt to swear or curse in their common discourse, would be pleased to consider, not only that it is a grievous sin, and brings many evil consequences upon mankind, as I shewed the last time ; but also, that it is contrary to all good manners and good breeding. This will, perhaps, be very surprising to a great many ; for, it is probable, several of the better sort among us, that are given to this vice, did for this reason take up the custom, because they thought it the best breeding, since the gentlemen and the persons of quality, they saw, did so much use it ; and from whom, but from them, should they take their measures in these matters ? And as for the better sort, that have really had a liberal education, sure, they should know good breeding better than that sort of men, whose bread it is to be precise and formal, and to teach others to be so.

Why, be it so : But then, I pray, be pleased to consider what is that which we call good manners or good breeding. If there be any fixed notion of it amongst mankind, it must be this ; to have an easy, in-

offensive,

offensive, obliging way of address and behaviour ; to be more courteous and civil upon all occasions in conversation, than the rustic, untutor'd part of mankind can be supposed to be : This, I say, must certainly be the notion of good breeding and good manners ; because the contrary to it is always accounted ill breeding and ill manners ; that is to say, all sorts of scurrilous, rude, unbecoming treatment of any one. When we say, that any man shews ill breeding, or doth an ungentle thing, we mean no more than this, that he doth not behave himself with that civility or decency towards others in that matter, that a well-bred man ought to do.

I pray now apply this notion of good breeding to the thing we have before us. I hope, as mad as the world is, there is a very great number of men, that have a hearty sense of God and religion upon their minds, and would be ready to shew it upon all occasions, even with the loss of all that they have : The honour of God is as dear to them as their own ; and so great a respect they have to his laws, that it is a real trouble to them to see any affront or violation done to them in their presence. Why, now, must it not be wonderfully grievous and uneasy to all this kind of men, to hear at any time, the name of God blasphemed ? To see the most sacred laws of our Saviour despised and trampled upon ; to have oaths and curses sounding in their ears upon all occasions, and without any provocation ? Certainly it must be thus : A man that is truly religious, can no more avoid the being concerned and wounded and filled with deep resentments, when God's holy name is abused and profaned, than he can avoid it, when he hears himself traduced, and his parents and family unjustly rail'd upon.

upon. Nay, and even those that are not sincerely religious, but only would be thought to be so, even these, though, I say, they are not inwardly concerned at these practices, yet they must appear as if they were so, whenever they hear the name of God profaned: Otherwise, they do not maintain the person and character they design to go under.

These things now being so, where is the good manners, or the good breeding, of swearing in conversation, provided there be but any one in the company, that have either any sense of religion, or but pretends to have any? Why, it is so far from that, that every oath, every curse, every thing that is vented in contempt of God, or of religion, is really an affront and indignity put upon those you converse with; and you use them every whit as barbarously, when you treat them in this manner, as if you should spit in their faces at every time you would answer a question; or give them the lye at every thing they would affirm. I grant, indeed, that swearing and cursing is no ill-breeding, among those that have banished all sense of God and religion from their minds; because there is, in that case, no affront, no rudeness offered to those you converse with, but only to God Almighty, who, in that company, is not supposed to be present.

I pray, then, let it be used only in such company: For, if there be but one sober virtuous man present, he is as ungentlely dealt with, as if you had offered him a downright affront. Either, therefore, men must forbear swearing, except where they are secure of their company, or they must quit all their pretences to civility and good manners.

But, Fourthly; I desire it may be further considered, that this practice of profane swearing in our discourse,  
doth

doth not really serve any of those ends which it is made use of for ; nay, in truth, it doth really deserve them : And therefore, certainly, all men that are not mad, but would so act as to be able to give a reason for what they do, must needs conclude this practice one of the most unreasonable in the world, because it is destructive of those very ends it pretends to serve.

I grant, indeed, some sorts of swearing may now-and-then happen to do a good turn to them that use it : As for instance, a false oath in a court of justice may now-and-then gain a cause ; or, if it do not, the witness, we suppose, is well paid for his perjury : Though, of all men in the world, woe be to those that serve their ends by these means ! for, if there be a just God in heaven, the portion of such men (both the swearers, and the suborners) will be, of all others, the most wretched and intolerable. It often proves so in this world, but it will certainly prove so hereafter.

But now, to come to our point : As for this customary swearing and cursing in our discourse, I do not know any end it serves to, unless to honest people, to teach them to distinguish between good and bad company, and to give them a mark by which they may know what conversation they are to avoid. I can but think of three ends that people can propose to themselves in the use of it ; that is, either to gain more credit to what they say, or to give reputation to their wit, or to express their courage.

But now, in fact, it is found, that common swearing and cursing is so far from promoting any of these ends, that it is the most effectual way to disappoint them all. I will touch a little upon each of them.

In the first place ; some may have a fancy that they shall be better believed in what they affirm, or promise, if they

they bind it with an oath, or if they damn themselves, if it be not true that they say. But, sure, these men must be little acquainted with the world, that take up such a notion. Mankind are a great deal better at this time of day, than to be caught with such flourishes. There are few that deal in the world, but will much sooner believe a man that doth not use to swear, upon his bare word, than he will believe a common swearer upon his oath. Nay, the very using of oaths, where there is no need of them, gives a very just suspicion to any man, that there is no sincerity at the bottom. And, indeed, of all men living, as the world goes, those that swear most, and damn themselves most, are the least believed in any thing they say or promise. And there is great reason for this: For, why should a man go beyond the common rules of conversation, unless he meant to serve some private turns by it? And how can that man be supposed to make conscience of speaking truly in any slight matter he affirmeth or promiseth, that makes no conscience of affronting and blaspheming the name of God; in our religious veneration of which, all our obligation to speak truth is founded?

But, Secondly; Others, perhaps, may look upon the use of oaths, as an expression of their wit, and good parts. This is, indeed, a very low notion of wit; but yet some, I do believe, have taken it up. They cannot but think that oaths are a grace to their discourse, and a seasoning to their conversation: They fancy that a repartee is not so brisk, or a story not so well told, or a man's sense about any thing so solemnly delivered, unless it be larded, at every turn, with the name of God, or a curse upon themselves. Indeed, from such people, nothing (as they think) comes gracefully, unless it be embellished with the ornament of some silly  
word



word they have taken up, either a round oath, or a curse, or the corruption of one, or something that is near akin to it. But these men are really to be pitied, if they think such kind of phrases to be any ornaments to their discourse; for all men, that have wit, are sensible sufficiently, that none but those that want it, would endeavour to supply its place by such kind of gibberish: I call it gibberish, for it really is so. A man that swears and curses, to add grace to his discourse, might as well serve his purpose by repeating a word or two out of *propria quæ maribus*, or saying any scrap of pedlars French; which, whether it would be an argument of wit in any one, I leave to all to judge.

Wit and profaneness are infinitely different things, as likewise is wit and impertinency. There is, indeed, no sort of kindred between these things. I do not deny but that some men, who are profane enough, may have wit: But this I am sure of, no man is therefore witty, because he is either profane or impertinent. Nor was there ever any man accounted a wit, that had nothing to shew for it but oaths or curses, or a set of insignificant words, that made nothing to his purpose: Nay, so far from that, that those who most practise this way of conversation, are most justly to be suspected to have the least share of that which they would be thought to have.

But, Thirdly; Though men do not much increase the reputation of their wit by swearing; yet, it may be said, they shew courage and bravery thereby. Perhaps there are some that think so: Nor would they swear or curse so often, but that they fancy that they do hereby strike a terror into those that hear them, and make them believe they have no ordinary mean persons

to deal with. Alas, poor men! in this too they are deceived; for every body knows, that these hectors and bravoes are the furthest from true valour and courage, of all in the world. They may, indeed, by this trick, fright children, and silly people, as it is likely they do; and they would fright them as much, or more, likewise, if they put on a vizer painted with a devil's face. But all mankind, that can distinguish between things, are sensible, that hectoring and swaggering is the worst argument of courage; nay, on the contrary, the most certain argument of no courage, that can be. True valour and fortitude is no flash of passion, but a sedate composed temper of mind, grounded upon a good reason; and therefore it is always cool, and even, and temperate, upon all occasions: But blustering of conversation, and making use of a set of frightful words, to amuse, some, and fright others, is only a sign that a man pretends to courage and boldness, but hath it not. This, I do believe, is the sense of mankind in these matters: And therefore I do heartily wish, that all those that are apt, for their shewing their magnanimity, as they may think it, or for the expressing their resentments of any thing, to break out into oaths, and damning themselves or others; I say, I wish they would consider how much they deserve the reputation they would get by these practices, and how poor and sneaking, and cowardly they represent themselves hereby to all considering men.

But this is a small thing: It concerns them infinitely more, to consider who that God is that they are a braving and hectoring, that they may thus shew their courage. Is it an equal match between God Almighty and them; they, to shew themselves bold, will affront him; to make themselves feared by little people, will shew

themselves fearless of him? But what do they think of God all this time? Do they believe that he lives, and that he sees this impudence of theirs; and do they not tremble? If God be holy and just, he will not suffer himself to be always thus affronted by rude men, without calling them to account for it. If God be Almighty, he hath thunderbolts to revenge the blasphemy of bold, atheistical men; and it is out of his infinite mercy, that he doth not strike all blasphemers dead with them: But he spares us, and we hope he will spare us, that, if it be possible, we may be brought to repentance. But let us not play the fool for ever, in hopes of impunity; for a time will come, when we shall, as certainly as we are here present, be called to an account, and a terrible one, for all the injuries, and abuses, and profanations we have done to God, and his religion, unless it be our happiness to prevent it by a timely repentance.

But, Fifthly; To leave this, there is this further thing to be said against this practice of swearing, which will still render it more inexcusable; as it serves no end, so neither doth it admit of any apology to be made for it: So far from that, that even what is pleaded in its justification, doth still make it more unjustifiable.

I know but two things that any one, that is addicted to this custom, can urge in his own excuse; and you shall hardly talk with a sensible man, but he will readily pitch upon one of these things as an apology for it: That is to say, he is either provoked to it, by being put into a passion, or he doth it when he is heated to it with wine and strong drink.

But I beg of all those that make use of these pretences, to consider how very ridiculous they are. You

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would not swear nor curse, but that you are put into a passion, or that sometimes you have no government of yourselves, having drank to excess. But can either of these things apologize for your abusing and affronting the name of God, and transgressing his most express laws? If they can, why then the most horrid blasphemies, adulteries, rapes, and murders may be apologized for upon the same account; for most of these villanies, are the effect of passion, and, many of them, of drunkenness too.

Would you admit it as a just excuse in your servant, when he hath told a gross lye to you, to say, that he was under the passion of fear when he thus abused you? Or, would you count it justifiable in him, to go and speak all the ill things he could of you in the neighbourhood, and to have no other pretence for it, but that you had some way or other provoked and stirred up his passion of anger? If the same servant, when he came drunk home, should beat or wound you, would you put it up, and say, Alas! he was not himself when he did it, he had drank too much, otherwise he would not have used me thus?

I dare say, every man, when it comes to his own case, hath other notions of this matter, and will not easily think that the committing one fault, will be an excuse for another that follows after it. A murder is not less sinful, because a man was in passion, or in drink, when he committed it; he ought rather the more to be sorry for it, because he hath two crimes to answer for. And if it be thus with swearing, as most certainly it is, the best apology that is made for it, is but a wretched one: For it owns, that he that swears the most justifiably, hath always a double sin to ask God Almighty pardon for,

for, that of his swearing and cursing, and that passion, or drunken humour, that led him into it.

But then, after all, as bad as this apology for swearing is, yet it is much to be questioned whether it be true. I doubt much whether any swearer can justly impute his oaths or curses purely to transports of passion, or wine; there is this strong reason why he ought not; there are a multitude of persons in the world, that are as subject to passions as other men, and may, now-and-then, be overtaken with drink: But yet in their greatest excesses, both of the one sort, and the other, never find any temptation in themselves to curse and swear in their discourse; be they never so angry, yet their mouths not being accustomed to oaths, they know not how to vent their passions in that way; and in their cups, though they cannot, perhaps, avoid nonsense and impertinency in their discourse, yet oaths and curses they can avoid. This is a plain argument, that, whatever men pretend, it is not their passion, or their infirmities of any other sort, that betrays them to this evil practice of cursing and swearing, but only a wretched custom which they have unaccountably contracted: It is a practice they first took up heedlessly, and in imitation of others; and afterwards, growing upon them by use, it is at last become, in a manner, natural to them: So that this custom of swearing is such an unaccountable sin, that a man hath not so much as his lust, his passion, and infirmities (by which he is wont to excuse all his other crimes) to plead for it.

And this leads me to the sixth and last particular I have to add upon this argument; and that is this; That this sin of swearing is still the more criminal, and the more inexcusable in all of us, in that it is so easily

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avoided. You have seen, there are no ends to be served by it; nay, on the contrary, it is destructive of those ends that men pretend to in the using of it. You have seen, there is no apology to be made for it; because these things that are most to be pleaded in its excuse, rather make it worse than better: Nay, you have seen, that even our passions and vices do not much tempt us to it. What then can be the temptation to this sin, or where doth it lie? Is there any pleasure in it? I dare say, no man will say there is. There can be no more pleasure in using the name of God profanely, than in using any other word or name; unless it be a pleasure to affront God, by thus using his name out of pure hatred to him, which is the utmost pitch of wickedness that the worst of devils can arrive to. Is there any profit or advantage to be got by it? Sure, there is none, unless a man had money given him for every oath. But I believe that is not done but upon solemn occasions, where there is a deep malice to be served, or an estate to be got, or to be secured, by a false oath. What then? Is there any reputation to be purchased by it? Why, a man would venture a great deal for that; but yet, in this case, the thing we are speaking of, is so far from procuring a reputation or good name among men, that it is the certain way to ruin it. What then is the temptation to swearing and cursing? None in the world. Why then do men use it? For no reason in the world. What then are we to attribute it to? To an unaccountable custom. Men, by accustoming themselves to such a sort of company, have in time, and by degrees, learned a set of words and phrases, which they cannot, without some violence, forbear to make use of upon all occasions, and especially when they are

disordered by drink or passion; and if they had been thus taught by their company to bark like a dog, or to bray like an ass, there is no doubt but they would have done it as naturally upon the same occasions. And this, as far as I can judge, is the true account of this unaccountable sin; I speak as to those that use it most innocently.

And now, if this be the case, how easy is it for any man, that hath never so much used himself to it, to forsake it!

That which makes it so hard a matter for most men to forsake some of their sins, is, that those sins are planted in the very make or constitution of their natures; They are strongly inclined to them in their tempers; or they have continual temptations to them in the course of their lives; or they cannot part from them, but they must part from that which is extremely either pleasant, or profitable, or reputable, or some way or other conducing to their ease and conveniency. But now, though all or most of these things may be pleaded on the behalf of mens other lusts and vices, yet none of them can be urged in favour of this sin we are speaking of; therefore what should hinder but that every man, with a little consideration, and a few trials, should as easily leave it off, as he first took it up; or, if he do not, what can be said in his excuse?

To conclude this whole matter:

Having thus, as plainly as I can, represented to you a few of those many things that are to be urged, by way of argument, against this vice, I desire to add a word or two more, by way of advice or exhortation, and then I have done.

In the first place; I earnestly desire, that all those persons that are under the power of this sin, would seriously consider of these things; and if, upon that consideration, they are convinced that it is really their duty, and their interest, to leave this silly, as well as impious practice, they would sincerely and heartily endeavour so to do. Now, in order to the breaking themselves wholly of this wicked custom, there are but a few things needful to be done. The main thing of all is, a peremptory resolution to forsake it. The next thing to that is, to keep a constant guard and watch upon their words, that they be not unawares surprized into oaths and curses. It is heedlessness that makes this sin so very rife. If a man would but carefully watch over his words for some few weeks, nay, I may say, for some few days, he would not find it very difficult to break himself of this custom. It was nothing but practice that introduced it; and a little disuse of that practice will as certainly destroy it.

But if a man should find it hard to contest against an inveterate custom, let him call in other assistances which are ready at hand: Let him beg of his friends to be his monitors, as to that matter, upon all occasions: Let him bind himself voluntarily to undergo such mulcts, and penalties, and forfeitures, as he thinks reasonable, for every oath or curse he pronounceth: But, above all, let him avoid all such company, and all such occasions, as he finds are most apt to betray him into these extravagancies. In truth, I think the most profligate swearer, if he was once in good earnest resolved to quit this practice, might, with a very little of this care and attention, easily effect his purpose.



In the second place ; I seriously recommend it to all persons that have any concern for religion, or good manners, that they would, as they have opportunity, give their helping hand towards the reclaiming of such of their friends and acquaintance as labour under this infirmity, if, indeed, I may call it by that name. We are really too tender, generally, to the company we converse with, as to this point. I do not desire any man to be rude, or to break the respect that is due to the conversation he is in, upon this account ; but there are so many ways of inoffensively reprovng, at least of shewing our disgust of this practice, without any breach of civility, that, indeed, it can be imputed to nothing but an unconcernedness for the honour of God and religion, that we do so tamely and patiently hear his name so often blasphemed, without the least expression of our resentment at it.

We might do a world of good to mankind, as well as expresse a mighty charity to our friends, if we would make it our business to discourage, and put out of countenance, as it came in our way, all those rude affronts that are daily and hourly put upon God and religion in conversation. And, certainly, it discovers a great deal of cowardice and pusillanimity in us, that we do it not. The atheists and the profane are bold enough, even to impudence, in affronting God and religion : And we, who know we have a thousand times a better cause, are mealy-mouthed, and dare not open our lips in the vindication of God, and that cause, which yet we do pretend is dearer to us than all things in the world.

But, thirdly and lastly ; It were to be wished likewise, that the magistrates, and the government, would  
take

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take a little care in this matter. It is a shameful thing, and a reproach to our nation, that those lewd practices of swearing, and cursing, and damning, almost at every word, should be thus universally practised among us; nay, even that a man cannot pass the streets, but he hears it ringing in his ears; and this without any notice taken of it, without the least mark of disgrace or infamy put upon it. I do not say, but that we want some severer laws and punishments, for the effectual suppressing of these vices; but yet, even these laws we have, were they but carefully executed, would put a great stop to the inundation of this kind of wickedness that now overflows us; at least, it would let people see, that these practices are really faults and crimes, which now they hear nothing of, unless, perhaps, now-and-then it be told from the pulpit.

Oh! may God Almighty, at last, put it into the hearts of all those that have any authority in this kingdom, sincerely to endeavour the suppressing of all atheism and blasphemy, and Irreligion, and the profanation of the name of God, that is now too rife among us! And may every one of us, in our places and stations, contribute all we can to so good a work! By this means, and by this only, may we expect to see happy days. Then, when righteousness, and truth, and peace, and true devotion, take place, and an universal reformation is made of our wicked and corrupt conversations; then, and not till then, are we capable objects of God's favour: Then, and not till then, are we a people prepared and qualified for the Lord to dwell among us.

Oh!

Oh! may God, of his infinite mercy, produce these blessed effects among us, for the glory of his name, and the universal happiness of this nation, and of every soul in it!

*Which God, of his infinite mercy, grant, for the sake of his dear son, &c.*

*The END of the Fourth Volume.*



in the ordinary Conversation.  
God, of his infinite mercy, produce their  
filled with, and for the glory of his name,  
of the most high, of his name, and of every  
and in it.

Which God, of his infinite mercy, grant, for the sake  
of his dear Son, &c.

THE END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.



