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Disputes Review'd.

5

Four Things this Text teacheth us, who are all in Profession *Disciples* of Christ, as we are baptized Christians.

I. That we must all expect to be called to an Account by our Lord Jesus.

II. That we must in a particular Manner be call'd to an Account about our Discourses among ourselves.

III. That among our Discourses we shall especially be call'd to an Account about our Disputes.

IV. That of all our Disputes we shall be most strictly reckon'd with for our Disputes about Precedency and Superiority.

For the First, We must all expect to be call'd to an Account shortly, by our Lord Jesus, concerning the Temper of our Minds, and the Course and Tenor of our Lives, now we are *in the Way*.

1. We are all now *in the Way*, following Christ, as his Disciples here, in Consort; we are *Viatores*, Travellers, under the Conduct of our Great Master, towards the *better Country*; And here we are upon our Trial; 'Tis the State of our Probation; and according as our *Steps* are, while we are in the *Way*, our *Rest* will be when we are at our Journey's End. It concerns us therefore, what we have to do, to do it *while we are yet in the Way*, and whatever we do *while we are in the Way*, to do it with an Eye to our End. Mat. 5. 25.

2. There will be a *Review* of what passeth in the *Way*; 'twill all be call'd over again, *every Work* Eccl. 12. 14. and *every Word* will be brought into Judgment, will be weigh'd in a just and unerring Balance, will be produc'd in Evidence for us or against us. There will not need any Repetition, every thing is now recorded in the Book of God's Omniscience, and it is enough that in that Day the *Books* will Rev. 20. 12. be open'd, and all will be judg'd out of those things which were found written in the Books, according to their Works. It concerns us therefore whatever

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we do *in the Way*, to do it as those that *must give Account*, and to consider how it will pass in the Account; how it will look *in the Review*; that we may dread doing that which will make against us then, and may abound in that which will be *Fruit abounding to our Account*, and which we shall meet again with Comfort, on t'other Side Death and the Grave.

Phil. 4. 17.

Isa. 33. 22.

John 5. 22.

Acts 17. 31.

2 Cor. 5. 9, 10.

3. The *Account* in the great Day must be given up to our Lord Jesus, for we call him *Master and Lord*, as these Disciples did, and to him therefore we are accountable, as *Scholars and Servants*, how we spend our Time. He is our *Judge*, for he is our *Law-giver*, and to him the Father has committed all *Judgment*, particularly that in which he will judge the *World in Righteousness by that Man whom he has ordain'd*. Christ shall have the *Honour of it*, and let all good Christians take the *Comfort of it*, that he who is an Advocate for all Believers will be their Judge; But withal let it oblige us to the utmost Care and Circumspection in our Walking; We must therefore *labour to be accepted of the Lord*, and approve ourselves to him in our *Integrity, because we shall all appear before the Judgment-Seat of Christ*, to give Account of every thing done in the Body. God made the *World by his Son*, and by him as the fittest Person he will judge the *World*.

Now this is a good Reason,

1. *Why we should judge ourselves*, and prove our own *Work*, and see that our *Matters be right and good* against that Day. Let us *examine our selves* concerning our *Spiritual State*, that we may make sure *Work for our own Souls*, and often call *ourselves* to an Account concerning the *Way* we are in, and the *Steps* we take in that *Way*, that we may renew our *Repentance*, for whatever we find to have been *amiss*, and make our *Peace with God in Christ*. And if we would thus *judge our selves*, we should not be judged of the *Lord*.

1 Cor. 11. 28,

31.

Disputes Review'd.

7

Lord. When we come to our Journey's End, it will be ask'd, How we carried our selves *in the Way*? Let us therefore carry our selves accordingly, and *Ponder the Path of our Feet*.

2. 'Tis a good Reason *why we should not judge one another*, or be severe in our Censures one of another: we thereby *invade* Christ's Throne, for it is his Prerogative to *call* his Disciples to an Account; and tho' he design'd them to be one another's *Helpers*, he never intended they should be one another's *Judges*. *We must all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ*, and therefore must not *judge one another*. We must be *judged* our selves, and may expect to be judg'd with Severity, if we be severe in judging our Brethren, for the *Measure we mete will be measur'd to us*. Our Bre- Mat. 7. 1, 2.
thren likewise must be *judged* by the Lord Jesus, and therefore if we pretend to judge them, they are *coram non judice*. Who are we that we should Rom. 14. 4,
judge another Man's Servant? to his own Master he 12, 14.
stands or falls, and to his Judgment 'tis fit we should leave him.

For the Second. Among other things that pass *in the Way*, we must expect to be call'd to Account for *what we have talk'd among ourselves*. We are apt to make a *light Matter* of this, and when we have talk'd at *Random*, what comes uppermost, without Regard to God or Man, we think to *turn it off* with an Excuse that it was but *Talk*, and *Words are but Wind*; But we wretchedly *mistake* and *put a Cheat* upon ourselves, if that be true which our Saviour has told us, and undoubtedly true it is, that not only for every profane and wicked Word, for every false and spiteful Word; but for every idle Word that *Men speak*, they must *give Account in the Day of Judgment*; Nay, and so shall their Doom be, for *by thy* Mat. 12. 36,
Words thou shalt be justified, and *by thy Words thou* 37.
shalt be condemn'd. Christ takes Notice of what we say now, and we should think we hear him
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Disputes Review'd.

Luke 24. 17. say to us when we are in Conversation, as he did to the two Disciples going to *Emmans*, *What manner of Communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk and are sad, or as ye sit and are merry? Are they such as becomes Christians? Are you not saying that which must be unsaid again by Repentance, or you'll be undone? And as Christ takes notice of it now, so he will call it over again in the Day of Account.*

What we talk *among our selves* with the usual Freedom of Conversation, we do not expect to hear of again; it is *inter nos*, and therefore we think we may allow our selves a Liberty. What is said under the Seal of Conversation, we think almost as safe in point of Honour, as what is said *under the Seal of Confession*: None but a *Tale-bearer*, that great Mischief-maker, will reveal such Secrets: But tho' it be talk'd *among our selves*, it cannot escape either the Cognizance or the Judgment of our Lord Jesus.

1. If we talk *any thing that is good*, among our selves, and that is *to the use of edifying*, which manifests Grace in the Speaker, and *ministers Grace* to the Hearers, Christ takes notice of *that*, and we shall hear of it again to our comfort, in that Day, when those who thus *confess Christ before Men* shall be own'd by him *before his Father*, and the Holy Angels. When they that *feared the Lord spake often one to another*, for their mutual Encouragement to hold fast their Integrity in a time of general Apostasy, *the Lord hearkned and heard it*, as one greatly well pleas'd with it, and a *Book of Remembrance was written before him*, in which were enter'd all those pious Conferences of *them that feared the Lord*, and thought upon his Name; and the Day will come when *this Book*, among the rest, *shall be open'd*.

There is not a good Word coming from a good Heart, and directed to a good end, but it is *heard in Secret*, and *shall be rewarded openly*, tho' perhaps there

Disputes Review'd.

there are those now who ridicule and banter such Language: What is spoken for the Edification of others will turn to a good account to our selves; and it will add to our Joy in Heaven to have been any way instrumental to help others thither. Nay, if it should not reach their Hearts for whom it is design'd, yet the Comfort of it will return into our own Bosoms; and what was well intended for the Honour of Christ, shall not be overlook'd in the Day of Account.

This should engage and encourage us to keep up religious Discourse, that it will be remember'd to our Advantage in the Account shortly, tho' we may forget it; as the Righteous could not say that ever they saw Christ hungry and fed him, or thirsty Mat. 25. 37 and gave him Drink, yet Christ will not forget it, but will place it to account, as an acceptable Service done to him.

2. If we talk any thing that's ill among our selves, if any corrupt Communication proceeds out of our Mouths, dictated by the Corruption of our own Minds, and which has a tendency to corrupt the Minds and Manners of others, Christ observes that too, is displeas'd with it, and we shall hear of it again, either by the Checks of our own Consciences, in order to our Repentance, or in the Day of the Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God, when according even to Enoch's Prophecy, the Lord shall come to reckon with Sinners, not only for all their ungodly Deeds, but for all their hard Speeches, spoken against him. It will be ask'd sooner or later, What was it that you talk'd such a time, proudly, vainly, filthily, that foolish Talking and Jestings which is not becoming? What was it that you talk'd in such and such Company by way of Reproach to your Neighbour, when you sate deliberately, sate magistrally, and spoke against your Brother, and slander'd those, whose good Names you ought to have protected? Or, which aggravates it, by
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Jude 15.

Psal: 50. 20.

- Exod. 22. 28. way of Reflection on your Superiors, *reviling the Gods, and speaking evil of the Rulers of your People,*
 Eccl. 10. 20. little thinking that a *Bird of the Air may carry the Voice?* Let this Consideration oblige us all to
 Psal. 39. 1. *take heed to our Ways, that we offend not with our Tongue, and to keep our Mouth as it were with a Bridle, that we may say nothing but what we can bear to be told of again. And we have need to beg of God, that by his Grace he would set a*
 Psal. 141. 3. *Watch before the Door of our Lips, a double Watch upon the Door of our Hearts, out of the abundance of which the Mouth speaks, that nothing may proceed from them to his Dishonour.*

For the Third, As other our Discourses among our selves by the Way, so especially our Disputes will all be call'd over again, and we shall be call'd to an account about them. What was it that ye disputed among your selves? What was the Subject of the Dispute? and how was it manag'd? Disputing supposeth some Variance and Strife, and a mutual Contradiction and Opposition arising from it. Disputing by the Way is falling out by the Way, a thing directly contrary to the Charge which Joseph as a Type of Christ gave to his Brethren, See that ye fall not out by the Way; and therefore we may expect to be reprov'd for it.

Gen. 45. 24.

There are Disputes that are of use among the Disciples of Christ, and which in *the Review* we may reflect upon with Comfort. Did we dispute for the Conviction of Atheists and Deists, and other the Enemies of our Holy Religion, or for the Confirmation of those that were in danger of being drawn away by their Delusions? Did we contend earnestly for the Faith once deliver'd to the Saints, and with Meekness and Fear both instruct

Jude 3.

2 Tim. 2. 25.

1 Pet. 3. 15.

others that oppos'd themselves, and give a Reason of our own Hope that is in us? Did we fairly and calmly discourse lesser Matters in difference between us and our Brethren, that we might find out the Truth, and have our Mistakes rectified; or if

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we cannot hereby come to be of the same Mind, yet we may see that even those we differ from have so much Colour of Reason on their side, as that they may still differ from us, and yet not forfeit their Reputation either for Wisdom or Honesty? Did we with *Prudence* and *Mildness* debate our Cause with our Neighbour himself, and not Prov. 25. 8, go forth hastily to strive, and tell him his Fault between us and him alone, before we tell it to the Mat. 18. 15. World or the Church, in order to a friendly Accommodation; these are Disputes which will pass well in the Account, when they come to be call'd over again.

But our Disputes are too often such, as that when we come to be ask'd about them, as the Disciples were here, we shall like them hold our Peace, as being asham'd to have them spoken of again, and having nothing to say in our own Vindication; And (as the Town-clark of *Ephesus* urg'd) when we are call'd in question for the Up-Acts 19. 40. roar, can shew no justifiable Cause, whereby we may give an account of it.

Three things may occasion Disputes among Christians, among Ministers, Neighbours, Friends, Relations, which perhaps when they come to be reflected upon as here, will be found to have a great deal in them that was culpable, different Opinions, separate Interests, and clashing Humours.

I. Disputes commonly arise from *Differences of Opinion*, either in Religion and Divine things, (about which oftentimes the Disputes and Contentments are most violent) or in Philosophy, Politicks, or other Parts of Learning, or in the Conduct of Human Life. While Men differ so much in Capacity, Temper, Genius and Education, and different Sentiments are receiv'd by Tradition from our Fathers, it cannot be expected that Men should all agree in the same Notions. The same thing seen with different Eyes, and by different Lights,

Lights, may appear to one *true* and very good, and to another *false* and very bad, tho' both employ their Faculties about it with equal Diligence and Sincerity. This cannot but give rise to Disputes, for we are naturally forward (and sometimes over-forward) to *clear our selves*, and *convince others*, and have such a Conceit of our own Judgment, as to think that every body ought to be of *our Mind*, and that if they will be rul'd by Reason, they *will be so*; for *vain Man would be wise*, would be thought to be so, tho' he be *born as the wild Asses Colt*.

Job 11. 12.

But these Disputes are often such as we may justly be *asham'd of*, when we come to look back upon them.

(1.) Upon account of the Matter of them. *What was it that we disputed among our selves?* What was it we were so hot and eager about?

Deut. 29. 29.

Perhaps it was something *above us*, about the Nature and Attributes, the Counsels and Decrees of God, and the Operations of his Providence and Grace, and the Person of the Mediator, those *secret things which belong not to us*; things which we did not understand, nor could; things which it was Presumption for us to dispute about, for the Angels with an awful Reverence humbly *desire to*

1 Pet. 1. 12.

look into them, as not pretending to be Masters of them: And the Great Apostle, who had been in the third Heavens, not only own'd that the

2 Cor. 12. 4.

Words he heard there were *unspeakable*, but was so much at a loss to express himself concerning the Work of Redemption, tho' it is in some measure *reveal'd*, that despairing to find the Bottom, he sits down at the Brink, and adores the Depth

Rom. 11. 33.

of that Mystery: *O the Depth of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God!* O what reason have we

Job 42. 3, 5.

with Job to *abhor our selves*, and to *repent in Dust and Ashes*, because, like him, in our Disputes with our Friends, concerning the Reasons and Methods of God's Proceedings, we have *darkned*

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Counsel by Words without Knowledge, and have utter'd that which we understood not, things too wonderful for us.

Perhaps it was something below us, not worth disputing about, especially with so much Warmth and Violence: 'Twas a Trifle, a meer Strife of Words, a Dispute *de lana caprina*, as if the Matter were started only for want of something to wrangle about; so *inconsiderable* a thing, that which way soever it goes, the Costs are much more than the Damage. In the Reflection we may justly blush to think that we should make so much ado, so great a Noise about nothing.

Perhaps it was something foreign to us, that we were no way concern'd in; some Matter of Politicks it may be, which belongs not to those of our Rank and Station, but must be left to wiser Heads, whose Business it is to deal in things of that nature. Our Lord Jesus after his Resurrection twice check'd his Disciples for a *vain Curiosity*, once in enquiring concerning one another's Affairs, when Peter ask'd concerning John, *What shall this Man do?* Christ answer'd him, *What's that to thee? Follow thou me.* And another time in enquiring concerning God's Counsels, *It is not for you to know the Times or the Seasons.*

Perhaps it was something *indifferent*, like the Controversy among the Primitive Christians concerning the *observing of Days*, and making a *Distinction of Meats*, which the Apostle himself doth not think fit to *determine*, but leaves each side to practise according as their Judgment was, without imposing upon either, since they might be of either Mind, and yet be *accepted of God*, only forbids them to fall out about it, or to *despise*, or *judge one another*.

(2.) Upon account of our Management of them. When our *Disputes among our selves by the Way* come to be review'd, it will be found that the *Mischief* was done not by the things themselves,

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Disputes Review'd.

concerning which we differ'd, but by our Mismanagement of the Controversy.

Our Master will be displeas'd with us if it be found that we have been hot and fierce in our Disputes, and have mingled our Passions and peevish Resentments with them; If a *Point of Honour* hath govern'd us more than a *Point of Conscience*, and we have contended more for Victory and Reputation than for Truth and Duty; If we have contended about things of small moment for or against them, and have neglected the weightier Matters of the Law and Gospel; If we have spent more of our Zeal on Matters in Difference than they deserve; and have lost the Vitals of Religion in our Heat about Circumstantials, and have disputed away our Seriousness and Devotion, *what then shall we do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall we answer him?*

Job 31. 14.

If in our Disputes for the Truth we lie against the Truth, and speak *deceitfully for God*, the good Intention will be so far from justifying the Lie, that the Lie will condemn the good Intention, and convict it of Hypocrisie; for if the Intention were *really good*, such a Practice would be *abhor'd*. If we have the *Itch of Disputing*, and a Spirit of Contradiction, that is certainly one of those foolish hurtful Lusts, *from whence come Wars and Fightings*.

Rom. 14. 1.

If we receive our Brethren that are weak to *doubtful Disputations*, and love to perplex and puzzle them, and run them a-ground with Objections against what they and we believe, it shews a great Contempt both of the Truth, and of their Souls, and is a jesting with both. If we judge and censure and condemn our Brethren that are not in every thing of our Mind, and tho' we call our selves *Disciples*, set up for *Masters, many Masters*, if we give reproachful Language, and call *foul Names*, which commonly betrays the Weakness of the Cause, and is *ingloriously* press'd into the Service

James 3. 1.

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to make up the Deficiency of Argument, we shall have a great deal to answer for, when all our Disputes will be call'd over again by our Master.

2. Many Disputes arise from *separate and interfering Interests in this World*. Neighbours and Relations quarrel about their Rights and Properties, their Estates and Trades, their Honours and Powers and Pleasures; *Meum and Tuum* are the Great Subject of Dispute, and engage People in endless Strifes. The first Dispute we read of in the Primitive Church was about a Money-Matter: The Grecians quarrell'd with the Hebrews *because they thought their Widows were neglected in the daily Ministration.* Acts 6. 1. Many Disputes of this Kind happen, which will be inquir'd into as well as those about Differences in Opinion, and therefore it concerns us to reflect upon them, that whatever we find to have been amiss in them may be repented of, we may in *godly sorrow* quarrel with *our selves*, and *justly*, for our *unjust* unbecoming Quarrels with *our Brethren*.

Ask then, what was it that you disputed about with such a Neighbour, such a Friend, at such a time; perhaps you *disputed* that which you ought to have yielded without Dispute, a just Debt, or a rightful Possession, which you thought to have carry'd, by Dint of Opposition, against Equity. Perhaps you disputed about something very trivial, and of small Value, which was not worth controverting, but which, if the right were indeed of your Side, you might have receded from it for Peace-sake, without any Detriment to your selves or Families. Perhaps the Dispute might have been *prevented*, or when it was began, might *quickly and easily* have been *accommodated* with a little Wisdom and Love; as the Strife between *Abraham* and *Lot* was soon Gen. 13. 8, 9. ended, and the Matter compromis'd by *Abraham's* prudent Condescension. A little *yielding* would

Disputes Review'd.

would pacify great Offences, and put an effectual Stop to that threatenng Mischief which sometimes a little Fire kindles.

Review your *Law-Suits*, and it may be you will find, that how *stiff* soever you were in the Heat of the Prosecution of them, your cooler Thoughts tell you they were not manag'd as *becomes Christians*; you did not try to end things as you ought to have done in an *amicable Way*; Perhaps they were begun *rashly*, and in Passion, and then no wonder if they be carried on *unfairly*, and that which was a hasty sudden Passion in the Beginning of the Quarrel, is in Danger of *ripenning* into a *rooted Malice* before the End of it; And they who at first pretended that they design'd only to *right themselves*, at length, as their *Re- sentiments* have grown more and more keen, are not ashamed to own that they are resolv'd to *revenge themselves*.

These Disputes, as they are most *common*, so they are most *scandalous* among Relations, and those who are under particular Obligations to love one another; and whatever it is that keeps Brethren from dwelling together in Unity, is very provoking to Christ, who hath made Brotherly Love the Livery of his Family; And it is very hardly removed; for a *Brother offended is harder to be won than a strong City, and their Contentions are as the Door of a Castle*; witness *Jacob and Esau*.

3. Some Disputes, and hot ones too, arise merely from *Passion* and *clashing Humours*, where really there is nothing of Judgment or Interest in the Case. Some indulge themselves in a *Crossness* of Temper that makes them continually uneasy to their Relations, the nearest, the dearest, and to all about them. They love to thwart and disagree, and to *dispute* every thing, tho' never so *plain*, or never so *trifling*. Many make their Lives, and the Relations wherein they stand

Disputes Review'd.

17

stand uncomfortable by this, especially when both Sides are of such a Spirit; One will have their Humour, their Saying, and the other will have their's, and so they are ever and anon disputing which shall be greatest, and instead of aiming to please, are contriving to displease and contradict one another.

But do such consider that they must give an Account to Christ for all these Disputes among themselves by the Way, that they will all be call'd over again? How ill doth it become the Disciples and Followers of the humble Jesus to carry Things with a high Hand, imperiously and with Rigour towards their inferiour Relations, not suffering them to speak for themselves, nor willing to hear reason from them! How ill doth it become the Worshippers of the God of Love to be envious and spiteful and ill-natur'd, and quarrelsome with all they have any Dealings with! The Father of the Prodigal, when his Elder Son was out of Humour, angry, and would not come in, did not dispute with him, chide him and threaten him, Luke 15. 28. tho' he very well deserv'd it, but he went out and intreated him, spoke him fair, and so brought him into good Temper again, which is written for our Learning, that we may go and do likewise, but withal for our Shame that we have not done so. By the Account which the Scripture gives of some peevish passionate Disputes, it appears that Notice is taken of the Height to which the Ferment of the Spirit riseth at such a Time; When the Men of Ephraim quarrell'd with Gideon Judg. 8. 1. upon a Point of Honour, it is left upon Record, that they did chide with him sharply, tho' by his exemplary Mildness, as well as by his eminent Services, he deserv'd better at their Hands— When, in a like Case, Judah and Israel fell out, it is observ'd that the Words of the Men of Judah 2 Sam. 19. 43. were fiercer than the Words of the Men of Israel. And if it be so indeed, that an Account is kept

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of

Disputes Review'd.

of the *Sharpness of our Chiding*, and the *Fierceness of our Words*, we are concern'd by true Repentance to *judge our selves* for it, that we may not be *judged of the Lord*.

And whatever we find has been amiss in our Disputes of any kind, let it be amended for the future.

1. As far as we are able to make a Judgment, let us see to it *that we have Truth and Right on our Side, in all our Disputes*, and not be confident any further than we see *just Cause* to be so. We must not only never contend for that which we know to be *false and wrong*, but not for that which is *doubtful*, or which we do not know to be *true and right*. Let us never wrong our Consciences in any of our Contests, nor say we believe that to be *true*, and therefore *dispute for it*, which really we do not believe to be so, nor demand that as *our own*, which we know or have Reason to suspect we have no good *Title* to, nor deny that to another which we cannot but think is justly *his*.

And if in the Progress of any Dispute or Controversie, it be made to appear to us, at length, that we were *mistaken*, and in the Wrong, we must be ready to *acknowledge* it, thankful to those that have *discover'd* it to us, and not ashamed to *let fall* the Controversy: And we have a false Notion of Honour, if we think this will be any real Disparagement to us, for certainly *St. Paul* shewed more true Courage, and merited more true Praise, when he said, *I can do nothing against the Truth*, than *Goliath* did when he *defy'd* all the Armies of *Israel*.

2. In *Matters of doubtful Disputation*, while we are contending for that which we take to be right, let us at the same Time *think it possible that we may be in the wrong*. When we contend for the great Principles of Religion, in which all good Christians are agreed, we need not fear our being

being in a Mistake, they are of undoubted Certainty, *we know and are sure that Jesus is the Christ.* But there are many things that are not so clearly reveal'd, because not of so much Moment, in which the Truth indeed lies but on one Side, and yet wise and good Men are not agreed on which side it lies; Here, tho' we both *argue*, and *act* according to the Light that God has given us, yet we must not be over-confident of our own Judgment, as if *Wisdom* must die with us; others Job 12. 2, 3. *have Understanding as well as we, and are not inferior to us; nay, perhaps they every way excel us, and therefore who can tell but they may be in the right?* However they *argue* and *act* according to the Light they have, which we ought to pay a Deference to, so as not to condemn all those for *weak Men*, or *ill Men*, that are not in every thing of our *Mind*, and will not *say as we say*—*Job* in dispute is not unwilling to put the Case, *Be it indeed that I have erred.* Job 19. 4.

In Matters of Fact on which Right depends, it is possible we may be mistaken; *Humanum est errare.* Words may be misunderstood and misapprehended, and the wisest and most cautious and observing may be guilty of an *Over-sight*, and may forget something that would very much alter the Case, and therefore it will be no Credit to our Wisdom and Goodness to be too *positive*, too *peremptory*, as long as there is a Possibility of our being deceived. Never let our Assertions go beyond our Assurances, nor let us give that as *certain* and *great*, which was given us as *doubtful* and *little*, but be very wary in what we maintain, not only for our Reputation's Sake, lest our Neighbour *search us and put us to Shame*, but for Conscience-sake, towards God, who hates a *proud Look*, and a *lying Tongue*, two very ill Prov. 6. 17. Things that commonly go together, to support one another.

Disputes Review'd.

3. Let us *keep the full Possession and Government of our own Spirits in all our Disputes.* Let us carefully suppress all *inward Tumults*, whatever Provocation may be given us, and let our Minds be *calm and sedate*, whatever Argument we are engag'd in. Let no Contradiction put us into a Heat or Disorder; for when *Passion* is up we are not so capable as we ought to be either to *bear Reason* or to *speak* it, nor is it likely we should either *convince* or be *convinc'd* of Truth and Right: Meekness and Quietness of Spirit do as much *benefriend* a Cause as they are the Beauty and Ornament of its Advocates.

If we contend for that which is *wrong*, the more *passionate* we are, the greater is the Sin of the Contention, and the more there is of the Image of the Devil upon it, who is not only the *Father of Lies* and Fallhood, but a *Red Dragon* and a *roaring Lion*. But if we have *Truth* and *Right* on our Side, that needs no *intemperate Heats* and *Passions* for the Support of it, nor can have any real Service done it by them. The *Cause of Heaven* can never be pleaded with any Credit or Success by a *Tongue set on Fire of Hell*. The *Wrath of Man works not the Righteousness of God*. Parties may be *serv'd* by Fury and Violence, but the Common Interests of Pure Christianity will certainly be *prejudic'd* by it. Christ was therefore *fit to teach* us, and we are invited to *come and learn of him*; it is not said because *in him were hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*, tho' that is certainly true, but *because he is meek and lowly in Heart*, and can have *Compassion on the Ignorant*, and herein all that undertake to instruct others, must study to imitate him. And this is the likeliest Way to gain our Point, if indeed we be in the right, for *the Words of the Wise are heard in quiet, more than the Cry of him that rules among Fools*.

James I. 20.

Mat. II. 29.

Eccl. 9. 18.

4. Let

4. Let us never lose the Charity we ought to have for our Brethren in our Disputes of any kind, nor violate the sacred Laws of it. Our Lord Jesus foresaw and foretold that the Preaching of his Gospel would occasion much Division, that it Luke 12. 51. would set Men at variance, and be the Subject of much Dispute: And therefore he thought it very requisite to bind the Command of mutual Love so much the more strongly upon his Followers, because there was danger lest that should be lost in these Disputes: He makes it one of the fundamental Laws of his Kingdom, the new Commandment, that we love one another; and the Livery of his Family, by which all Men might know who are his Disciples. See how these Christians love one another.

Let us therefore in all our Disputes keep our selves under the commanding Power and Influence of Holy Love; for that Victory is dearly purchas'd, that is got at the Expence of Christian Charity. Let us honour all Men, and not trample upon any, nor set those among the Dogs of our Flock, whom for ought we know Christ hath set with the Lambs of his. Let us never bring a railing Accusation against any. Michael the Arch-angel, tho' he was sure in the Dispute he had Right on his side, and the Glory of God was nearly concern'd, and it was with the Devil that he contended, yet he would not thus attack his Adversary. The Scourge of the Tongue hath driven more out of the Temple, than ever it drove into it. Let us always put the best Construction on Mens Words and Actions that they will bear, not digging up Mischief, as evil Men do, nor rejoicing in Iniquity, but rejoicing in the Truth, hoping the best as far as we can. Let us not aggravate Matters in variance, nor by strain'd Inuendo's and Misrepresentations make either side worse than it is; for that's a Method which may harden one side, but can never convince the other, nor can

Disputes Review'd.

can be us'd with any other Design but to make the contending Parties *hate one another*; And whose Kingdom that serves the Interests of; 'tis easy to say, not Christ's I am sure. Let us not judge of *Mens spiritual and Eternal State*, and send Men to Hell presently as Reprobates, because they are not in every thing of *our Mind*, or cannot fall in with *our Measures*. They that do usurp a Divine Prerogative, take the *Keys of Hell and Death* out of the Hands of Christ, and shew themselves to be as destitute of the Fear of God, as they are of Love to their Neighbour.

5. Let us often think of *the Account* we must shortly *give* to our *Great Master* of all our *Disputes* with our *Fellow-servants by the Way*. Let us consider how our *Disputes* will look in that *Day*, and what our own *Reflections* will be then upon them. When the Apostle asks, *Where is the Disputer of this World?* Perhaps (saith the Excellent Archbishop *Tillotson*) he intends to insinuate,
 “ That the wrangling Work of Disputation hath
 “ place only in this World, and upon this Earth,
 “ where only there is a Dust to be rais'd; but
 “ will have no place in the other, where all
 “ things will be clear, and past Dispute: And
 “ (saith he) a good Man would be loth to be
 “ taken out of the World reeking hot from a
 “ sharp Contention with a perverse Adversary,
 “ and not a little out of countenance to find
 “ himself in this Temper translated into the
 “ calm and peaceable Regions of the Blessed,
 “ where nothing but perfect Charity and Good-
 “ Will reign for ever.

Phil. 4. 5. Let our *Moderation* therefore *be known unto all Men*, Moderation in all *Disputes*, because *our Lord is at hand*, nor let us *grudge one against another*, because *the Judge standeth before the Door*; and we may tremble to think what our *Doom* will be, if we be found *smiting our Fellow-Servants*; and how we shall answer it, if it be prov'd upon

upon us, who have had so much forgiven us by our Master, that for a small matter we have *taken them by the Throat*. But seeing we look for a Day of Account, in which there will be a Review of Disputes, let us give Diligence, that we may be *found of Christ in Peace*. When Job and his Friends had *maintain'd* a long Dispute, in which many hasty peevish Words were *exchang'd*, God at length *interpos'd* as Moderator, and gave Judgment upon the Debate, that they were all *to be blam'd*, and had taken a great deal of Pains (as most Disputants do) to *make work for Repentance*; and therefore the contending Parties must ask Pardon of God and one another, must forgive and forget, and live in love for the future. And this is the best *End of Controversies*, happy were it if they were all brought to this Issue now; for to this Issue all the Controversies that are among *Good Men* will be brought at last, when they shall meet in the World of everlasting Light and Love.

For the Fourth. Of all Disputes Christ will be sure to reckon with his Disciples for their Disputes about Precedency and Superiority; that was the Dispute here, *Who should be greatest*: And Christ doth not determine the Matter, as it might justly be expected he should have done, if he had intended that *Peter*, or any other of them, should have a Primacy and Supremacy above the rest; no, he is displeas'd with them for starting such a Question, and disputing about it, because it was an Indication that they *all* aim'd at being great in the World, and were *ambitious* of it, and whenever Preferments were to be had, they would *quarrel* among themselves, which should get *the best*; notwithstanding the *Meanness* of their *first* Education, when they were bred *Fishermen*, which might have done *something* to curb *aspiring* Thoughts; and the *Goodness* of their *late* Educa-
tion,

tion, when they were train'd up to be *Apostles*, which might have done *much more*.

Now there are five Reasons why this Disposition of theirs was very displeasing to our Lord Jesus.

1. Because it came from a mistaken Notion of his Kingdom, which they had learn'd at the Feet of their Scribes, and had not yet unlearn'd, tho' they had sate so long at Christ's Feet, so hard is it to conquer the Power of Prejudice. The Jews *misunderstanding* many of the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which spake of the *Messiah* and his Kingdom, expected him to appear in *external Pomp and Splendor*, and to exercise a temporal Jurisdiction, to break the *Roman Yoke* from off their Necks, and give them Dominion over the neighbour Nations. The Disciples had suck'd in this Notion with their Milk, and did *imagine* (as should seem by many Instances) that our Lord Jesus, tho' he appear'd meanly *at first*, would in a little time bring it to *this*, and that this was the *Kingdom of Heaven*, which they were to preach as at hand: And this they had an eye to when they strove *who should be the greatest*.

Now this was a great Mistake; and the constant Tenor and Tendency of Christ's Life and Doctrine might have convinc'd them that it was so; that Christ's Kingdom was *not* to be of *this World*, but was intended to be all spiritual, the Laws and Powers of it, the Rewards and Punishments of it all spiritual, the Weapons of our Warfare *not carnal*; that the Messiah was to rule by *his Spirit* in the *Spirits of Men*: The Design of it was to *refine* Men from the Dross and Dregs of Worldliness and Sensuality, and to *raise them* up to a holy, heavenly, spiritual and divine Life, and to teach them to *look down* upon all earthly things with a *gracious* and *generous* Contempt; such as this was the Constitution and Comple-

xion of Christ's Kingdom, and therefore it could not but be *displeasing* to him, for them to *dote* on earthly Greatness.

2. Because it was *directly contrary* to the two great *Lessons* of his School, and *Laws* of his Kingdom, *Humility* and *Love*. It is against the Law of *Humility* to covet to be *great* in this World, and against the Law of *Love* to strive who shall be *greatest*. Had not Christ taught them both these Lessons, both by Precept and by Example? Had he not made it the first Condition of Discipleship, that *whosoever would come after him must deny themselves*? Doth not the great Law of Love oblige us *in Honour to prefer one another*, and to give place to our Brethren? What *unapt* Scholars then were they who had not learn'd such *plain* and *needful* Lessons as these! How well is it for us that we have a kind Master, who doth not expel out of his School dull Scholars, but gives them his Spirit to *open their Understandings*, and *bring things to their Remembrance*. Mat. 16. 24.

When we are *eager* in our Pursuits of the World, and *seek* and *aim* at *great* things in it; when we are *quarrelsome* with our Brethren, and carry'd out into Indecencies by our *Contests* and *Passions*, let us think how *unbecoming* Christians this is, how contrary we walk to the Laws of that *Holy Religion* we make profession of: And can we *glory* in the Honour of it? can we with any confidence *plead* the Promises of it, or *please* our selves with the Privileges of it, or *feed* our selves with the Hopes of it, when we have so little regard to the *Precepts* of it? Will those be willing to lose their Lives for their Religion, that cannot deny themselves the Gratification of a foolish Lust or Passion for it?

3. Because it was *utterly disagreeable* to the *Example* which Jesus Christ himself had set them, and the *Copy* he had given them to write after. The Word of Command which he gave them

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when he call'd them to be his Disciples, was, *Follow me; Do as you see me do*: But when they were disputing who should be greatest, and each setting up a Title to worldly Pomp and Power, they were far from resembling him, who *was among them as one that served, and came not to be ministr'd unto, but to minister*. The same Mind should have been in them, that was in him, who was so great an Example of Humility and Love, Condescension and Affection, who *emptied himself, and made himself of no Reputation*; who not only in the general Scheme of his Undertaking, but in the particular Passages of his Life, gave such Instances of Self-denial, as justly are the Wonder of Angels, who to teach them this Lesson, and oblige them to learn it with this very Argument, not long after this, *wash'd their Feet*, and bid them *do as he had done*; could the Followers of such a Master contend for Precedency, and not blush at the Reflection upon their own Folly and Unworthiness.

Luke 22. 27.

Mat. 20. 28.

Phil. 2. 5.

John 13.

1—15.

Let us *shame our selves* out of our Pride, and Passion, and Affectation of worldly Honour, and inordinate Pursuit of worldly Wealth, with this Consideration: Shall I set my Heart upon that which my Master was *dead to*, and *deny'd* himself in, and for *my sake* too? Am I not a Christian? a Follower of Christ! I must then either change my Name, or recover a better Temper. Ought I not to walk *in the same Spirit, in the same Steps*?

4. Because it would *render them very unfit for the Services which he had appointed them to*. It was very absurd for them to strive *who should be greatest*, who should live most *at ease*, and most *in state*, who should have the most Power and the largest Command, when they were all to *labour and suffer Reproach*, to live in Meanness and Poverty, to be loaded with Disgrace and Ignominy, and *counted as the Off-scouring of all things*; nay, to be *kill'd all the Day long*, and devoted to Death,

1 Tim. 4. 10.

as Sheep to the Slaughter, and rul'd with Rigour : Such Dispositions and Expectations as these would be but a bad Preparative for Sufferings. They that would approve themselves good Soldiers of Jesus Christ must endure Hardness, and not affect *2 Tim. 2. 3. Greatness.*

And therefore tho' this Indisposition, and the Mistake it was ground'd upon, seems by many Instances after this to have continued as long as they had Christ's bodily Presence with them ; yet before they launch'd out into the Deep of their Service, they were perfectly cur'd of it, by the pouring out of the Spirit upon them, after which we have them no more dreaming of a Temporal Kingdom, nor striving who should be greatest ; for those whom God designs to imploy in any Service for him, he will either find them fit, or make them so : And as the Day, so shall the Strength, so shall the Spirit be. And if we would be ready for all the Will of God, and stand compleat in it, so as not to be driven from our Work by the Difficulties we may meet in it, we must be dead to worldly Wealth and Grandeur, and live above them, as those that look beyond them.

5. Because it was a corrupt Temper that would be more than any thing the Bane of the Church in after-times ; would be the Reproach of its Ministry, an Obstruction to its Enlargement, the Disturbance of its Peace, and the Original of all the Breaches that would be made upon its Order and Unity. Our Saviour foresaw this, and therefore took all Occasions to check and repress it in his Disciples, for warning to all others ; that all who are called by his Name, and profess Relation to him, may be jealous over themselves with a godly Jealousy, and may look diligently lest this Root of *Heb. 12. 15. Bitterness* spring up and trouble both themselves and others, and thereby many be defil'd and disturb'd.

When we see how early in the Primitive Times the *Mystery of Iniquity* began to work in Strifes among Ministers, who should be greatest, in Diotrepbes, who lov'd to have the Preheminence, and in the *Man of Sin*, who, by Degrees, under the Influence of this Principle, came to usurp an Universal Headship, and to exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. Let us see with what good Reason Christ so often caution'd his Disciples against this, and lament the Mischief that is done by it to the Church. It must needs be that such Offences would come; and we are told of them before, that we may not be stumbled at them, but woe to those by whom they do come. The Prevalency of such a Temper as this, as far as it appears, is very threatening. But when the Spirit shall be poured out upon us from on high, there shall be no more such Disputes as these, and then the Wilderness shall become a fruitful Field.

3 John. 9.

2 Thes. 2. 4.

Isa. 32. 15.

Upon the whole Matter, therefore, Let our Strife be who shall be best, not who shall be greatest.

1. Let us never strive who shall be greatest in this World, who shall have the best Preferment, who shall be Master of the best Estate, or make the best Figure, but acquiesce in the Lot Providence carves out to us, not aiming at great things, or striving for them.

Consider what worldly Greatness is:

(1) What a despicable thing it is to those that have their Eye upon another World. All that by Faith have seen the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, that are acquainted with the Grandeur of the upper and better World, and are conversant with that World, have laid up their Treasure in it, and set their Hearts upon it, and hope shortly to share in the Enjoyments of it, what a poor thing are the Poms and Pleasures of this World to them! how easily can they write
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Vanity upon them! for they know *better Things*: What's Purple, and Scarlet, and fine Linnen, and faring sumptuously every Day, to one that's cloth'd with *the Robes of Righteousness* and *Garments of Salvation*, and has a continual Feast upon the Promises of the New Covenant? What are Titles of Honour, or splendid Attendance, to one that is *call'd* a Friend of God, and, about whom the Holy Angels encamp? What are the fading withering Glories of Time, in comparison with the *far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory* that is *to be reveal'd*. Let us be asham'd then to strive, or *seem to strive*, for that which, if we act as becomes our Character, we cannot but look upon with a holy *Contempt* and *Indifferency*.

(2) What a *dangerous thing* this worldly Greatness is *to those* that have *not their Eyes upon another World*, how apt it is to draw their Hearts away from God, and from the Consideration and Pursuit of a future Blessedness, and to fix them to this World, and make them willing to take up with a Portion in it; And especially what a *strong Temptation* it is *to break through* all the sacred Fences of the Divine Law *to compass* it. The Devil would not have tempted Christ *to worship him*, with a Promise of *all the Kingdoms of the World, and the Glory of them*, but that he had caught many a one with that Bait. As *they that will be rich*, 1 Tim. 6. 9. so they that will be *great*, and cannot think themselves happy, unless they be, *fall into Temptation, and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts*. Let us therefore never court our own Trouble, nor covet to enter into Temptation, as they do, who, when they are as great as God saw fit to make 'em, yet are still aiming to be *greater*, and striving to be *greatest*.

2. Let all our Strife be *who shall be best*, not *disputing who has been best*, that's a vain-glorious Strife, but *humbly contending who shall be so*; who

- who shall be most humble, and stoop lowest, for the Good of others, and who shall labour most for the Common Welfare. This is a gracious Strife; a Strife that will pass well in our Account, when all our Disputes will be review'd. If we
- 1 Cor. 12. ult. will *covet*, let us *covet earnestly the best Gifts*, covet to be rich in Faith, and rich in good Works: If
- 2 Cor. 5. 9. we will be *ambitious*, let it be the Top of our Ambition to do good, and therein *to be accepted of the Lord*. If we will *aim to excel*, let it be in that which is virtuous and praise-worthy, and in a holy Zeal for the Honour of God, and the Advancement of the true Interests of Christ's Kingdom.
- Herein let us strive to *excel others*, and to do more good *than they do*, not that we may have the Praise of it, but that God may have the Glory of it, and that we may *provoke others to Love and to good Works*; not that we may be *many Masters*, but that we may make our selves *Servants of all*. Let us *go before* in Zeal, and yet be willing to *come behind* in Humility and Self-denial; do better than others, and yet, in Love and Lowliness of Mind, *esteem others better than our selves*.
- Heb. 10. 24. But especially let us strive to *excel our selves*, and to do more good *than we have done*. Let it be a constant *Dispute* with our own Souls, why we do not lay out our selves more for God. And when we *remember the Kindness of our Youth*, and the *Love of our Espousals*, instead of *leaving that first Love*, and cooling in it, let our *advanced Years contend earnestly* to excel our *early ones*, that our *last Days* may be our *best Days*, and our *last*
- Phil. 2. 3. Works our *best Works*. *Forgetting the Things which are behind*, let us still *press forward* towards Perfection, *press forward towards the Mark*, for the *Prize of the High Calling*, that at length we may have not only an Entrance, but an *abundant Entrance* ministred to us into the *Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.
- Phil. 3. 13, 14. 2 Pet. 1. 11.

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