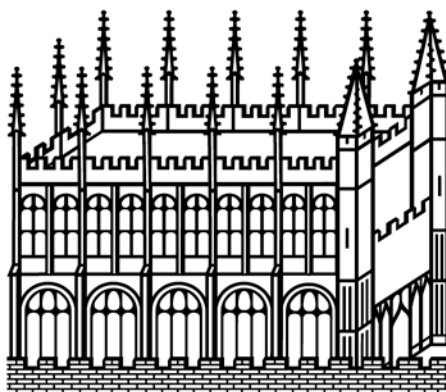




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*Of the Sin against the
Holy Ghost.*

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd in

CRUTCHED-FRYERS,

April 27. 1718.

By W. HARRIS.



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T O T H E
R E A D E R.



THE following Discourse was the Close of a Course of Subjects upon the reigning and mortal Sins under the Gospel, which our Lord thought fit particularly to warn his Disciples against, and which I doubt is not become less necessary now; as Ignorance, Unbelief, Hardness of Heart, Formality in Religion, Hypocrisy, Covetousness, Intemperance, Sloth, Pride, rash Anger, the Fear of Man, &c. I had no more Design of publishing This, when I first composed it, than any of the rest; tho I had the Satisfaction to be heard all along with a particular Regard, and have reason to hope not without Effect. I am free to own, I have yielded to the Importunity and Advice of some particular Friends, whose Judgment I value, and to whom I owe a great Regard.

To the Reader.

I am sensible I shall need both the Candour and serious Attention of my Reader, to make due Allowance for the Conduct of the Discourse, and form a right Judgment of the Matter of it: I would be willing however to compound with him for his own Advantage, and give up any Circumstance in the Management, to engage a greater Regard to the main Importance of it. The Argument is somewhat Speculative and Nice, but very Awful: a vain and light Mind, which is never becoming about serious Matters, would be peculiarly out of season here, and prevent any Hope of Benefit and Success. I hope it will be allow'd a pardonable Fault, if I have any where express'd my self to a degree of Warmth, in Zeal for the Honour of the Gospel, and real Concern for the Good of Men. I give it up with this solemn Wish, That every Reader may be able to find himself stand clear of this Guilt, and be effectually warn'd against it; That it may always remain a Caution, and never become a Charge upon any.

W. H.

M A T-



MATTHEW XII. 31, 32.

Wherefore I say to you, All manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men; but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men: And whosoever speaketh a Word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, neither in the World to come.

THE Occasion of the Words was this :
Our Lord had healed a Man possessed Ver. 22.
with a Devil, blind and dumb, insomuch
that the Blind and Dumb both spake and
saw. At this the People were ama-
zed, and said, *Is not this the Son of David?* The — 23.
Sight of the Miracle wrought a Conviction in
the unprejudiced Multitude, that he was the true
Messiah. But the Pharisees, envious at his Cre-
dit among the People, and jealous of their own;
blinded with a Prejudice and Malice, worse than
the Blindness of the possess'd Man, They said,
This

- 24. *This Fellow casteth out Devils by Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils. Our Lord argues with them against this Charge upon common Principles of*
- 25, 26. *Reason; That a Kingdom divided against it self is brought to Desolation: And, If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; and how then shall his Kingdom stand? i. e. he knows his own Interest too well to oppose and destroy it with his own hands. He puts it to themselves, and argues with them ad Hominem: If I by Beelzebub cast out Devils, by whom do your Children cast them out? therefore they shall be your Judges. If they of your own Communion, your own Disciples and Followers, who have at any time pretended to cast out Devils by the Name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and exorcise those who were posselt, were never censured for Confederacy with the Devil; it must needs argue a malicious Partiality, to charge me with so great a Wickedness upon no other account.*

On the other hand, he tells them; *But if I cast out Devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come among you. If it really is by the Power and Presence of the Divine Spirit, then this is a plain Evidence the Gospel-Dispensation is set up among you, and that I am the true Messiah. Which he further illustrates by the Example of one entring into a strong Man's House, and spoiling his Goods; which implies the strongest Opposition, and superior Power and Authority. And then lays down this general Maxim: He who is not with me, is against me; and he who gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad: i. e. the Opposition between us is so great, that it admits of no Neutrality. Every one is on my side, or on the Devil's; and he who refuses to join with me in destroying his Kingdom, does really support and promote it. Then follow these remarkable*

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able Words ; *Wherefore I say to you, All manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven, &c.*

The Sin against the Holy Ghost here described, is of a peculiar kind, directly mention'd only by three Evangelists : The whole Account of its *Nature* must be fetch'd from them, and confin'd to what they have said of it. I shall consider it under these four Heads briefly.

I. Open the Nature of it, and shew wherein it consists.

II. Represent the great Evil and Heinousness of it.

III. Consider the Punishment here threatned.

IV. Apply it.

I. As to the *Nature* of it : 'Tis represented here by the Evangelist two Ways.

(I.) 'Tis *distinguish'd* from every other Sin, and made wholly peculiar, and different from all the other Kinds. So much our Lord's Expression here plainly imports : *All manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men.* And Mark says, *All Sin shall be forgiven unto the Sons of Men, and Mark iii. Blasphemy wherewith soever they shall blaspheme.* All 28.

other kind of Sin whatsoever, tho of the highest Nature, and in the greatest Instance, as Calumny and Reproach of any one, may be forgiven upon the Terms of the Gospel-Covenant, sincere Repentance, and Faith in Christ. Yea tho it be Blasphemy against the Son of Man : *For whosoever speaketh a Word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him ; i. e.* any vile and reproachful Expressions of his Personal Conduct, and outward Appearance, as a private obscure Person preaching a new Doctrine, and conversing freely with all Men, which might proceed from Ignorance, and mistaken Apprehensions of the Messiah ;

siah; but did not relate to the Miracles he wrought for the Proof of his Doctrine, which was more directly against the Holy Ghost, and proceed from Malignity of Heart: so when they
 Mat. xi. 19. called him, *A Man gluttonous, a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners.* And the Apostle
 1 Tim. i. 13. says of himself, *I was once a Blasphemer*; which, considering his sober Character before his Conversion, can refer to nothing but the Dishonour and Reproach of the Lord Jesus Christ; and which he expressly says, he did *ignorantly, and in Unbelief.*

Or else it must refer to the proper Dispensation of the *Son of Man*, or the Course of his Ministry here on Earth, during his low and humble State, in distinction from the After-Dispensation of the divine Spirit. And this Account of every other Sin, is agreeable to the general Declarations of the divine Mercy, every where in the
 Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Scripture: That he has *no pleasure in the Death of a Sinner*; that *the Lord will have mercy, and abundantly pardon*; and that the *Blood of Jesus Christ,*
 Isa. iv. 7. *the Son of God, cleanseth from all Sin.*
 1 John i. 9.

(2.) 'Tis describ'd here in these formal Words, of *blaspheming against the Holy Ghost, and speaking against the Holy Ghost*; so in both the other Evangelists. Now it will easily appear, by considering the Circumstances of the Case, wherein the general Nature of it lies, if you compare the 24th and 25th Verses of the Chapter together: In the former we find the *Pharisees* saying, *This Fellow casteth out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of Devils*; in the latter our Lord says, *If I cast out Devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come among you.* He really cast out Devils by the Power and Presence of the Spirit of God, as the great Proof of the Truth of his Doctrine, and Mission from Heaven: They, instead of yielding

yielding to the mighty Evidence, and falling under conviction, charge him with casting them out by the Power and Help of the Devil; so that 'tis precisely, ascribing the Miracles wrought by Christ, for the Confirmation of the Gospel, by the Power of the Spirit, to the Help of the Devil; and thereby defeating the great Proof he gave of being the Messiah, and making him an Impostor, and Confederate with the Devil.

This, I say, is the General Nature of it: But if we would consider it more distinctly, there are several things that concur to make the Idea of it compleat.

1. 'Tis made to lie, not in Thought or Actions only, but in *Words*: for 'tis expressly call'd *blaspheming* or *speaking* against the Holy Ghost; and our Lord speaks of *denying him before Men*. *Lukexii.9.* There must be an express disowning and denying the Power of the Holy Ghost, in the Miracles wrought by Christ; and the Malignity of the Heart must rise so high, as to vent it self in open Expressions. *Simon Magus* seemed to have as injurious and unworthy *Thoughts* of the Holy Ghost as could well be conceiv'd: *When Simon saw Acts viii. that by the laying on the Apostles Hands the Holy Ghost 18, 19. was given, he offer'd them Money, saying, Give me also this Power, that on whomsoever I lay my Hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost: as if it were only a more powerful Magick, and a saleable Gift. And yet we find he calls upon him to repent: Repent — 22. therefore of this thy Wickedness, and pray God, if so be the Thought of thy Heart may be forgiven thee. And the Apostle makes the Uncleaness of the Thessalonians a despising of God, who had given them the Holy Spirit; and yet supposes Repentance of such Wickedness in the Corinthians: where he expresses his Fear lest when he come, he should find them who 2 Cor. xii. had not repented of the Uncleaness, and Fornication, 21.*

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and *Lasciviousness* which they had committed. I chose to keep to the *Form* in which 'tis represented ; tho' how far a settled Malice of Heart may reach this Guilt in the sight of God, or Actions may express the Sense of the Mind, where there are no formal Words, I will not undertake to determine.

2. 'Tis not every Blasphemy, or speaking against the Holy Ghost ; but *ascribing his Works to the Power of the Devil*. So 'tis represented here : *This Fellow doth cast out Devils by Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils*. And in *Mark* ; *He hath Beelzebub, and by the Prince of Devils casteth he out Devils*. —30. And, *Because they said he hath an unclean Spirit*. And we find this Circumstance upon another occasion in *John* ; *The People answer'd and said, thou hast a Devil*. They made him act in all the Miracles he wrought, in combination with the Devil, whose Kingdom he came to destroy, and notwithstanding all the Marks of Holiness in his Life, and the Frame and Tendency of his whole Doctrine.

So that 'tis not merely malicious speaking against the Holy Ghost, and the Truth of the Gospel, as some have formerly thought ; but doing it in such a degree, and so circumstanced : Not only denying the Power of the Holy Ghost in the Miracles wrought by Christ ; much less grieving him by inward resisting his Operations in our Souls : but ascribing and imputing them to the Agency of the Devil, and so defeating all his Pretensions, and all his Designs in coming into the World : Making him the great *Deceiver* of the People, and to act in concert with the Devil in all he did. And it necessarily runs into this in its final Consequence ; for it must be either by the Power of the Holy Spirit, or of the Evil Spirit, that such Miracles could be wrought.

3. This

3. This was done by those who saw the Miracles wrought, or had an *immediate* opportunity of knowing them. Our Lord wrought many Miracles before their Eyes, in every Place where he came, and of the highest kind. This sometimes extorted Acknowledgments from them, tho with great reluctance: *The Chief Priests and Pharisees* John xi, *said, What do we? for this Man doth many Miracles.* 47. *If we let him thus alone, all Men will believe on him.* So they said of the Apostles when they cured the impotent Man: *What shall we do to these Men? for* Acts iv. 16. *that indeed a notable Miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.* Our Lord had just then wrought a Miracle before their Eyes; for he *healed a Man* — 22, *possess of the Devil, blind and dumb; so that the Blind and Dumb both spake and saw.* And tho 'tis said here, the *Pharisees only heard it*, yet they had opportunity of immediate Knowledge from Eye-Witnesses, and had probably been Eye-Witnesses themselves at other times.

There was no room left to doubt the Truth of the Fact, or deny the Works which were done. They were certainly convinced that he wrought the Miracles, and had no other way to evade the Force of them, *i. e.* owning the Truth of his Doctrine, but by this unreasonable and absurd Pretence, That he did them by the Power of the Devil. Hereupon,

4. This could proceed from nothing but the Power of *Prejudice* and *Malice* of Mind. The unreasonable Prejudice in their Minds concerning the Person of the Messiah, as a *Temporal Prince*, who was to appear with an outward Glory, and deliver the *Jewish Nation* from the *Roman Yoke*, against the plain Descriptions of the Prophets of his Sufferings and humble State; blinded their Minds to all the Miracles he wrought him-

self and all the Circumstances in which the Prophecies were accomplished.

And the Power of *sinful Habits* in their Minds, joined to mistaken Apprehensions, was the Root of that high Aversion they express'd against him. The *Pharisees* were plainly jealous of his growing Reputation among the People, when they said,

— 23. *Is not this the Son of David?* And he tells us in Mat. vi. 5. another place, they did every thing *to be seen of Men*. And, *How can you believe, who receive Honour one of another, and seek not the Honour which cometh from God only?* And, *They loved the Praise of Men, more than the Praise of God.* This was a tender Point to a proud Mind. They were afraid of being eclipsed in their own Glory, by the Rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon the World; and losing the Reverence and Esteem of the People. And the Purity and Strictness of his heavenly Doctrine, the Self-Denial and Suffering to which it might expose them, in the Circumstance they were in; the Nature of his *Spiritual Kingdom*, stripped of all external Pomp, and *worldly Power*; and the Hazard of their *worldly Interest*; which was dearer to them than their Souls, lay directly cross to all their Notions of things, and the prevailing Biases of their Minds, who are every where represented as remarkable

Mat. xxiii. 14, 15. for *Oppression and Covetousness*, and said to be *full of Hypocrisy, and all Iniquity*: And instead of disposing them to own such a Person, and receive

— 28. his Doctrine, as the Upright and Unprejudiced every where did, filled their Minds with Jealousy and Enmity against him. *The World hateth me because I testify of it, that the Works thereof are evil.* They rose up in malicious opposition against all the Evidence he produced, and refused Conviction, not thro Fear or Surprise, but thro the Power of Pride, and a carnal and worldly Mind.

5. This

5. This Sin was highly aggravated by the greater Powers of the Holy Ghost after our Lord's Ascension. Some * have thought this Circumstance so considerable, as to make it necessary to the *formal* Nature of this Sin, and that it was not committed by the *Pharisees* while our Lord was upon Earth; and so understand the Words here rather as a *Caution* against it, than as a *Charge*. But with Submission I rather think it has one *common Nature* before and after our Lord's Ascension, and differs only in the *Degree* of it. If it lies in ascribing the miraculous Works of the Spirit of God to the Power of the Devil, and refusing the highest *kind* of Evidence to the Truth of the Christian Doctrine; it should seem the *Pharisees* were then capable of committing it, and every thing concurred in their Case, which was *essential* to the Nature of it. So much seems to be imply'd here at *ver. 25. And Jesus knew their Thoughts, i. e.* the present Temper of their Mind, in the heavy Charge they laid upon him; and is more directly express'd in *Mark*, where the Threatning turns upon this Reason, *Because they* Mark iii. *said he hath an unclean Spirit.* But then, no doubt, 30, it was a higher and more aggravated *Degree* of the same Guilt, after the Descent of the Holy Ghost, and fuller Confirmation of the Gospel by his extraordinary Gifts and Operations in the Apostles. The Case here was this: In consideration of our Lord's Appearance in an humble State, and under great Disadvantage in the Days of his Flesh; and of the strong Prejudices and great Mistakes concerning the Messiah, under which the *Jews* had long laboured; he promis'd the Holy Spirit in a more eminent mea-

* Vid. Dr. Whitby's *Appendix to the Gospel of Matthew.*
 fure,

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sure, after his Departure, to his Disciples; and refers to it as the greatest Evidence of his Pretensions, to the World: Infomuch that we read,

John vii. 39. *The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified; i. e. in the most eminent and*

extraordinary manner: The proper Dispensation of the Spirit did not yet commence. And he promis'd the Comforter to reprove or convince the

John xvi. 8. *World of Sin, and Righteousness, and Judgment; i. e. to yield a further Evidence, and more powerful*

Influence for their Conviction. And accordingly we find the Holy Ghost was given at

the time of Pentecost in extraordinary Gifts and Operations to the Apostles, which was the fullest

Confirmation of the Truth of his Promise, and of his Exaltation and Glory at the right

Hand of God. So the Apostle tells the Jews;

Acts ii. 33. *Therefore being by the right Hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the Promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which you now see and hear.*

Now to reject the final Evidence of the Spirit in his Gifts and Operations after his eminent Descent upon the Apostles, and the compleat Evidence of the Christian Doctrine, was to be sure, an higher Degree, and further Instance of this Sin. Thus when the Apostles preach'd at Antioch, and the whole City came together, 'tis said,

Acts xiii. 45. *The Jews were filled with Envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. They opposed the Truth of the Christian Doctrine after all the Miracles wrought by Christ and the Apostles, for the Confirmation of it, thro Envy, and with Blasphemy.*

I shall only further observe under this Head, That whatsoever was the Case of the Pharisees in our Lord's Time, 'tis only in this Consideration of it, that we are now concern'd in it, or any capable

capable of committing it; that is, after the full Evidence and Attestation of the Holy Ghost.

6. The highest Instance of all, is in those who were *convinced* of the *Truth* of the Christian Doctrine by the Miracles which were wrought, and had *Experience* of the Power of it; who were brought to acknowledge the Truth of the Gospel, and make an open Profession of it, not only by seeing the Miracles wrought by Christ, or the extraordinary Gifts of the Apostles, but by receiving the Power of Miracles, and extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit themselves. We read of wicked Men pleading at last for themselves; *We have prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name cast out Devils, and in thy Name done many wonderful Works*: If they who profess'd to believe in Christ, and cast out Devils in his Name, should after come to ascribe their doing so to the Power of the Devil; would not that be the highest Instance of proper Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost?

The Apostle is speaking of Apostacy from Christianity to the Jewish Synagogue, or the Heathen Idolatry; and of *the Sin unto Death*, possibly in the same sense: for it follows the particular Account of the *Witness* God gave his Son; and is follow'd with a solemn Caution, to *keep our selves from Idols*. This, strictly speaking, is of distinct Consideration from the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. The Sin of the *Pharisees* seems properly refusing Conviction of the Christian Doctrine upon the highest Evidence offer'd; but the Apostacy of the Jewish Christians was revolting from it, after Conviction of the Truth of it, and notwithstanding former Experience. They are, no doubt, distinct Conceptions, to persist in a State of Infidelity thro wilful Blindness of Mind against the clearest Evidence, and to revolt back into

into it after their Knowledge and Profession of the Truth. So that *mere* Apostacy, and consider'd only as such, is not the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

But then it must be consider'd, that Apostacy may be so circumstanced, as to amount to this Sin, and not only take in the *formal* Nature, but be the very *highest* Degree of it. When 'tis not simply forsaking the Christian Doctrine, suppose thro' present Doubt, or Dissatisfaction of the Truth of the *Facts* by which it was proved, and is only a negative Infidelity; but a renouncing it, while the *Facts* are acknowledged with malicious Opposition and Contempt, as a false Religion, and a Delusion of the Devil. For if they who only saw the Miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles, were guilty of this Sin, for ascribing them to the Devil; certainly they who wrought Miracles themselves, or had extraordinary Gifts, would be so in a higher degree, supposing them to do the same thing. And of this kind the Apostle seems to make it, when he supposes the Case of those who were *once enlightened, and had tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost; i. e.* were brought to solemn Profession of the Christian Doctrine, and had the Gifts of the Holy Ghost themselves, by which it was confirm'd; and had *tasted of the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come; i. e.* had some Experience of the Goodness and Power, as well as the Truth of the Christian Religion: of their *falling away, and sinning wilfully, after they had received the Knowledge of the Truth; which he makes to be a crucifying the Son of God afresh, and treading under foot his Blood, and doing despite to the Spirit of Grace; i. e.* a total Apostacy from the Faith, and Profession of the Gospel, join'd with Marks of the highest Contumely and Reproach

Reproach of the Author of it. We find both the Jews and Heathens required of those who left the Christian Profession, not only an express renouncing, but direct *blaspheming* of Christ. The Apostle Paul compelled them to *blaspheme*, and speaks Acts xxvi. of calling Jesus accursed. And Pliny * tells the Emperor Trajan, That they required them not only to worship the Heathen Deities, and the Image of the Emperor, but to curse or *blaspheme* Christ. So that the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is distinctly a malicious ascribing, in express words, the Miracles wrought by Christ, and after by the Apostles, for the Confirmation of the Gospel, to the Power of the Devil, whether in those who saw the Miracles wrought, or had the Gift of Miracles themselves.

Whether the Divine Spirit may not wholly withdraw his gracious Influence, after a long Course of resisting his common Operations, in those who have not blasphemed the Holy Ghost, so as to put an end to their Day of Grace in this World, and render their Condition desperate; is a matter of another Consideration still: I shall only say, I could heartily wish, for the sake of many, it were not so; but there is great reason, from several Intimations in the Scripture, to fear it may, tho perhaps it may not be possible certainly to know it in this World either of our Selves or Others, as it could be of no real Use to Either, because we have no Rule sufficient to measure the Divine Proceedings in this Case, or govern our Enquiries about it. I proceed,

II. To represent the great *Evil* of it. It must needs have a peculiar Guilt, which is represented

* Omnes & imaginem tuam, deorumq; simulacra venerati sunt: Ii & Christo maledixerunt. Plin. Ep. Lib. 10. Ep. 97.

in so high Terms, and threatned with so great a Punishment.

1. 'Tis a Sin against the *highest Evidence* which could be given to the Truth of the Gospel: 'Tis a great Instance of condescending Goodness in the blessed God, to reveal his Will to the Sons of Men, and propose the Rule of their Duty, and the Measures of their Acceptance with him.

Luke i. 78. *'Tis thro the tender Mercies of our God, whereby the Day-spring from on high hath visited us.* And the

2Pet. i. 19. Apostle tells us, *The sure Word of Prophecy is a Light shining in a dark Place:* Like the refreshing Beams of the warm Sun, rising upon the Earth after a cold and gloomy Night.

But then, to prevent Imposture and Abuse, the wise God has all along given sufficient Proof of every Revelation he has made. The Old Testament was confirm'd by Miracles wrought by *Moses* and the Prophets, and was entertain'd by the whole *Jewish Nation* upon that foot, *They knew* this way, *that God spake unto Moses*; which render'd their Infidelity the more unaccountable. And when God thought fit to make a new and further Discovery of his Will by the Lord Jesus Christ, he sent him fully empower'd to work Miracles, and give sufficient Evidence to convince and satisfy the Minds of Men, and support their Faith and Hope in him: For we find him working more and greater Miracles than ever were done before; as curing all manner of Diseases, casting out Devils, governing the Course of the Sea and Wind, raising the Dead, &c. which seem the greatest Proof of any Doctrine which the Divine Wisdom could contrive, or the Divine Power effect, and sufficient to satisfy the most jealous Minds, and dispose them to entertain it.

Now the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is opposing the clearest Evidence, and strongest Proof

Proof which could be given: 'Tis the highest Job xxiv. Instance of *rebellling against the Light*, and *resisting* ^{13.} *the Holy Ghost*: Yea, 'tis in reality rendering the ^{Act.vii.51} whole Gospel-Revelation, after the fullest Confirmation, entirely useless to its End, and making the greatest Expression and Instrument of the Divine Mercy to the World, a grand Imposture, and diabolical Delusion; which who can think of without feeling himself struck with Indignation and Horrour of Soul!

2. 'Tis sinning against the *last* Dispensation of the Divine Grace to the World. The seal'd Gospel is the last Method of Mercy to fallen Man, and is eminently the Dispensation of the Spirit; not only confirm'd by the Miracles and Gifts, but under the peculiar Influence and Agency of the Divine Spirit in the Hands of the ascended Redeemer. This is plainly intimated in the Parable: *But last of all, he sent unto them his Son, saying, they will reverence my Son.* And the Apostle, ^{Mat. xxi. 37.} distinguishing the Dispensation of the Law and Gospel by several Characters, among the rest, says, that 'tis the *Ministration of the Spirit*, which is *rather glorious, and excels in Glory*; and that ^{2Cor.iii.7.} *the former is done away, but the latter remains.* — 11. And more expressly in the Epistle to the Hebrews: *God who at sundry Times, and in divers Manners,* ^{Heb. i. 1.} *spake unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son.* So in another place; *In that he saith a new Covenant, he hath* ^{Ch.viii.13.} *made the first old; now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away, i.e. to make room for one which shall always continue.* And he speaks to the same purpose out of the Prophet: *And this Word once more signifieth the removing of* — ^{xii. 27.} *those things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken, may remain: And we receive a Kingdom which cannot*

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be moved, &c. The Gospel fully compleated and confirmed, by the Miracles wrought by the Person of Christ, and the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost, after his Ascension; is the last Dispensation of Divine Grace, and is to continue to the end of the World.

So then the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is sinning against the proper Dispensation of the Spirit, and the last Relief and Remedy to the fallen World. It stands in direct opposition to the only Means of a Sinner's Recovery, and beyond which there is no other to be expected. As there is *no more Sacrifice for Sin*, there is no further Revelation of Divine Mercy to the World, or higher kind of Evidence than what has been already given. 'Tis casting away the last Plank in a Storm, and letting go the only Hold to save our Lives. The Condition of those who have no Opportunity of knowing the Christian Doctrine, is out of the present Case, and, no doubt, will be much better than theirs, who treat it in such a manner. Hereupon,

3. It argues the highest *Malignity* of Mind. To oppose, in this manner, the clearest Evidence of Divine Truth, and the last Efforts of Divine Mercy for our Recovery; the greatest Proofs of his reveal'd Will, and the highest Displays of his Grace at once; argues the greatest Disorder and Depravation of a reasonable Soul, which can be conceiv'd.

The Doctrine of the Divine Grace in the Gospel bears such lively Signatures of the Divine Perfections upon it, is so admirably adapted to the Relief and Comfort of Mankind, so every way suitable and effectual in all the Circumstances of our Guilt and Misery; that any reasonable Man would even wish it to be true. 'Tis so much for the true Interest of Men every way,
that

that one would think they should be prejudiced in its favour, and disposed to admit any reasonable Evidence of its Truth; that all the Fear and Distrust should rather lie on the other side, lest it should not be true. And to a Mind so disposed, I think 'tis scarce possible it should not appear convincing, and sincerely question whether any Instance can be assign'd, wherein, sooner or later, it did not: Otherwise, how could they be blamed at present, or condemned hereafter, for rejecting it?

But now the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost supposes the most unreasonable Prejudice which the human Nature is capable of; for 'tis denying the plainest and most certain Truth in which we are most of all concern'd, against the highest Kind and greatest Degree of Evidence which was ever given to any Truth, or perhaps is possible to be given; and that with such Malignity of Heart, as to ascribe the greatest Work of God to the Power of the Devil, who is his greatest Enemy, and most directly opposite to him. This is certainly in its own nature the greatest Perversion and Abuse of all our reasonable Powers, the noblest Gift of God to any of his Creatures. To this purpose we find Expressions in the Scripture, which import the greatest Malice of Heart, and Defiance against God: 'tis call'd *fighting against God*, and *resisting the Holy Ghost*, and *doing despite unto the Spirit of Grace*; *treading under foot the Son of God*: Expressions of the highest Opposition and Contempt. And *crucifying to themselves the Son of God*, and *putting him to an open Shame*: *Triumphing over the Ruins of a crucified Saviour*, insulting him as an Impostor, and one who was justly put to death; approving the Sentence past upon him, and applauding the Execution. We do, as it were, act the bloody Tragedy over again,

Acts v. 39.

—vii. 51.

Heb. x. 29.

—vi. 6.

again, and are *consenting unto his Death*. And what can be conceiv'd beyond that?

4. It renders *Repentance* impossible. This Sin induces such a Temper and Habit of Mind, as does not admit of a saving Change: It seems to be such a *resisting* of the Holy Spirit, as issues in an absolute *quenching* him, and amounts to a total Forfeiture of his renewing Influence. It renders the most powerful Means by which he works, uncapable of any Effect: The Gospel, the great Means of Faith, and Instrument of Regeneration, is rejected and disown'd; and he cannot be thought to work by an immediate and extraordinary Influence under so great an Affront and Despite. The Consequence is, That they are *concluded* in Unbelief, and can never by any means be brought to Repentance. So the Apostle speaks of the Jews, who rejected the Gospel: *God hath*

Rom. xi. 8. *given them the Spirit of Slumber; Eyes that they should not see, and Ears that they should not hear to this day.*

And when the Apostle speaks of the Apostacy of the Jewish Christians, he says, *For 'tis impossible for them who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, &c. if they should fall away, to renew them again unto Repentance; i. e.* according to the stated Rule of the Gospel, and the moral Reason of Things, how possible soever it may be to God, and in the more absolute Consideration of the Case. The reason is, they have sinned away all the *appointed* Means of it, forfeited the Influences of the Divine Spirit, and disabled all the Motives and Arguments to it. They have sinned against the clearest Light, and most powerful Means already; and there is no higher Evidence, or more effectual Means, to work Conviction, or induce a Change, to bring them to believe and submit to the Gospel. And tho the same

same Means sometimes prove effectual at one time, which did not at another, and a fresh Consideration of the same Arguments may make them be seen in a better Light, and might possibly work Conviction; yet that cannot be supposed under a judicial Blindness, and entire Absence of the Divine Grace: and certainly if any thing in all the World can be thought to provoke it, this must needs be the Case. But this naturally leads, and will help to account for the third thing;

III. To consider the *Punishment* here threatened: The Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost *shall not be forgiven to Men; and it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, neither in the World to come.* I shall settle the Meaning of the Expressions in two Observations.

1. Some have thought they ought to be understood in a *qualify'd* Sense. A certain great * Critick pretends they must be taken in a Sense comparative to any other Sin, and are only design'd to mean, That it will be *more difficultly* forgiven than any other; and to represent a peculiar Greatness in this Sin, but not any proper Impossibility of Forgiveness. But 'tis not easy to conceive any stronger and more direct Expressions could be used; and 'tis not safe to make bold with the Letter of the Divine Laws, and construe away the plain and proper Importance of them.

Another learned † Man qualifies it thus, Not without a particular Repentance. But then that is no more than is necessary too, in the Case of many other Sins, as well as this; as any Acts of

* Facilius est quicquid criminum unquam patrari poterit, atque adeo calumnias etiam omnes, quæ in criminibus primum facile locum obtinent, remitti quam ut remittatur ea calumnia, quæ adversus Spiritum Dei committitur. *Hug. Grot. in loc.*

† Vid. Dr. Hammond in loc.

great and wilful Sin at least: and so would destroy the Distinction here made, and leave no Difference between this and many other Sins, when 'tis plainly mark'd out from every other, as that which shall never be forgiven.

2. It seems therefore reasonable to understand it *Absolutely*, and in the direct and proper Sense. 'Tis the Language of a plain and express Law: a single Exception to the Mercy of the Gospel, the great Act of God's Grace, and our Indemnity; and properly excludes from the Hopes of Mercy in either World. It binds down all their Guilt upon them, and cuts them off from the Reliefs of Mercy.

So it is express'd here with the strongest Emphasis; *It shall not be forgiven*: And, *It shall not be forgiven, neither in this World, neither in the World to come*. Not as if any Sins were pardoned in the other World, which are not pardoned in this; but according to a usual way of Expression among the Jews, it only signifies a proper Impossibility, and that which shall never be done at all. It will never be forgiven while they live, nor aton'd by their Death. No Act of Pardon can pass in this World, or be pronounced and confirmed in the other. They cannot have the Sense of Forgiveness in their own Conscience: *Surely this Iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die*. And their Sin will not be blotted out when the Times of Refreshment shall come from the Presence of the Lord: Nor can they find mercy of the Lord at that Day. They fall under the full Weight of all their Guilt, and lie under it all for ever. In Mark 'tis express'd both in the negative and positive Form; *He hath never Forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal Damnation*: obnoxious or liable to it; it becomes his proper Punishment. And the Apostle speaks of the Apostates; *If we sin wilfully after we have receiv'd*

Isa. xxii.

14.

Acts iii. 19.

2 Tim. i.

18.

Heb. x 26.

ceived the Knowledge of the Truth, there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful looking for — 27, 28. of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries. There is no other Atonement for Sin, but that which they have rejected; and no other Expectation, but that of Judgment and Destruction. This is like *sinning presumptuously*, and with an *high hand*, under the Law of Moses, to which the Apostle there refers; as by renouncing the God of *Israel*, and revolting to the Heathen Idolatry; for which no Sacrifice or Atonement was appointed: and they were expressly required to be cut off from among the People. And the Apostle John says, *There is a Sin unto Death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.* So desperate is the Case, where it can be known, that there is no Warrant for Prayer, or Hope of Success. John v. 16.

The Reasonableness and Equity of so severe a Dispensation must be drawn, not merely from the Threatning of the Gospel, but from the Nature of the Sin. It seems congruous to the Reason of things: for they who refuse Conviction from all the Evidence which can be given, and reject with Scorn the only Means of Relief, cut themselves off from all the Benefit of the Gospel, and perish under the Guilt of their high Contempt. There is no way of Forgiveness appointed under the Gospel but by *Faith in the Blood of Christ*, and Repentance of Sin; and they render themselves wholly incapable of either: and so there is no Pardon, because there can be no Repentance. 'Tis not to be consider'd as an arbitrary Exception out of a General Act of Grace, but as a wise and reasonable Constitution rising out of, and every way agreeable to the Nature of things. I proceed,

IV. To apply it.

1. We learn the high *Honour* put upon the Holy Ghost. I think the *Personality* of the Spirit is fairly to be inferred from hence ; that he is a distinct Person from the Father and Son : for as our Lord was *sent* by the Father, and *did the Works* of his Father, so he wrought his Miracles by the *Spirit of God*, and had the *Spirit without measure, and above his Fellows ; i. e.* all the other Messengers of the Will of God to Men. And he is elsewhere frequently represented by personal *Attributes* peculiar to himself, and distinct *Regards* from us.

It argues the great Excellence and Dignity of the Divine Spirit ; not only that the Miracles wrought by Christ, were by the Power of the Spirit, and his Gifts and Operations in the Apostles were the greatest Evidence of the Truth of the Gospel ; but that the greatest Sin under the Gospel, and only unpardonable Sin in all the World, is made the Sin against the Holy Ghost. 'Tis a great Honour to the Divine Spirit, that a Dishonour done to him is the greatest Sin.

This should teach us to honour the Holy Spirit ; entertain high Thoughts of him in our Minds ; cherish his holy Motions ; carry it suitably towards him by ready compliance with all his Operations in our Souls, and especially by all due regard to the Gospel-Revelation which he has sealed and confirmed.

2. This is proper to yield *Relief* and Comfort to fearful Christians, who sometimes think they have committed this Sin. This is generally owing to Ignorance and Mistake of the Nature of it, and commonly under the disadvantage of a *melancholy* Constitution, and bodily Disorder ; or sometimes perhaps by artful Insinuations and Suggestions

tions of the *Devil*. In this Case no more is needful, so far as they are capable of being reason'd with, than to set the Matter before them in an easy light. Clearer Knowledge and distinct Apprehensions of things would quickly deliver them from the Uncertainty and Perplexity of Mind, which general and confused Thoughts are so apt to give; as the rising Sun gently dispels the Mists of the Morning.

A sincere Christian is sometimes terrify'd with the Fear of the unpardonable Sin, perhaps because of wicked and blasphemous *Thoughts* rising up in his Mind, tho always hated and abhorred by him; or because of *Falls* into Sin, especially of any greater Sin against Light and Conviction, in any particular Instance, which to be sure requires immediate and deep Repentance: And perhaps this Matter has not been always, in practical Writers, clearly stated, or sufficiently guarded. But it plainly appears from hence, that those Persons have not committed the Sin against the Holy Ghost, and cannot possibly do it, who heartily believe the Truth of the Christian Doctrine confirmed by Miracles wrought by the Spirit of God, and who take Christ for their Lord and Saviour, and give themselves up to his Conduct, to teach and guide them in the Way to Heaven. None can commit the Sin against the Holy Ghost, without denying his Agency in the Miracles wrought by Christ, and refusing Subjection to his Authority. They who value and desire the Favour of God above all things, and fear his Anger as the greatest Evil, can never be wholly forsaken of the Spirit, or left abandoned and rejected of God.

'Tis therefore a vain Fright, and unreasonable Discouragement in the Mind of a concerned Sinner, or humble and sincere Believer; a Sug-

gestion which is not true, and cannot come from the *Spirit of Truth*, but from the evil Spirit, who is a *Liar from the Beginning*, and the *Father of Lyes*; is highly dishonourable and displeasing to God, as well as uncomfortable to our selves, and ought not to be cherish'd and entertain'd, but immediately rejected, as much as any other Temptation to Evil.

3. The dreadful State of those who *have* sinned against the Holy Ghost. It has been question'd by some, whether any are now *capable* of committing this Sin, and it is *possible* in our Circumstances: to be sure not in *every* Circumstance in which it was first committed; for they were Eye-witnesses of the Miracles, or had immediate Opportunity of being inform'd, if not possess'd of those Gifts themselves: and 'tis now a great distance of Time since, and the Account has been transmitted down thro many Hands to us.

But then whether there may not be *equivalent Evidence* to the single Circumstance of more *immediate* Knowledge, will deserve to be well consider'd. I confess it seems to me, that the *Resurrection* of Christ from the Dead, by which he was *declared to be the Son of God with Power*, the actual Accomplishment of many *Prophecies* in visible Effects; as the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and Dispersion of the *Jews*: A Series of *Success* in the World against the greatest Opposition, and the wonderful *Effects* of the Gospel-Doctrine upon the Souls of Men thro the Course of many Ages; which is Evidence they could not have, who were Eye-witnesses: I say, all this added to the credible Relation and rational Evidence of the Miracles which were wrought; seem to me to amount to a *like* degree of Evidence in our Days, and able to produce as great a Certainty, as the seeing the Miracles wrought by Christ, or the
Gifts

Gifts of the Holy Ghost in the Apostles: for the Nature of Evidence must be measured not by what is nearest to us, and most sensible, but by the reasonable Fitness to convince the Mind, and gain Consent; when the whole Weight of any Truth laid together is able to weigh down the opposite Scale, and so in proportion to its real Weight.

And tho I would not be confident in so awful a matter, yet if this hold good, that which comes the nearest this Sin, must be the Infidelity and *Deism* of the present Age. When Men reject all the Evidence of the Christian Doctrine, and the Authority of Christ, fairly represented and laid before them, whether this is join'd with Apostacy from a former Profession, which was the Case of the *Jewish* Christians, or without any former Profession and Acknowledgment of it, which was the Case of the *Pharisees*; and arrive to such a Pitch of Impiety, to hate and ridicule the Christian Religion, and either persecute the Professors of it, as the *Pharisees* did, or discourage and stagger the Faith of others, by idle Cavils and profane Jest, and treat it in all respects as if it were only a successful Delusion, and a cunningly-devised Fable.

And how deplorable a Case is this wherever it is to be found, according to this account of the matter, above all Expression and Imagination? To be incapable of Pardon in a State of Tryal; to have the *things of our Peace hid from us*, and our *Minds blinded*, under the *glorious Light of the Gospel*: Not to be pray'd for by others, and incapable of praying with any Hope of Acceptance for our selves; to lie under the condemning Sentence of the gracious Redeemer, *You shall die in your Sins*; to be concluded under Wrath, and only reserv'd for Judgment; to be
in

in the State of the Damned in this World, and as truly past Hope, according to all the known Rules of Divine Procedures, as those who are already in Hell: How awful and affecting is the Consideration! Does not the very Thought of it make a Man's Soul tremble within him, and strike him with Amazement and Horrour?

4. Let us beware of any dangerous *Approaches* towards it, and whatsoever has a *Tendency* this way. There is great need of this Caution where the Danger is so exceeding great. If there were a fatal *Gulph* in a large Spot of enclosed Ground, or some *Beast* of Prey ranged in an open Wood, who certainly devoured all who came that way; who would care to come near that Place, or within the reach of Danger? Every wise Man would think it right, to secure himself by a safe Distance. If it were not possible to assign the very *Point* of Malignity, which is certainly mortal, or describe the Persons who were actually guilty of it; it were nevertheless reasonable to use a great Reserve, and avoid the remote Appearances of it; as there is Danger of Infection in the Neighbourhood of the Plague.

Don't *resist* or *grieve* the Holy Spirit in his ordinary Workings and Operations upon your Soul, exciting good Desires, and stirring up to holy Actions, by careless Neglects, indulged Sensualities, or presumptuous Boldness in any way of Sin: for this naturally tends to alienate the Heart from God, and is the Root of Disaffection to his Truth; it makes it first their Interest, and then their Choice, not to believe it. Beware of making bold with *Truth* in any case, and going against the Light and Conviction of your Mind upon any account. Take heed of breaking in upon the *Honesty* and Integrity of Heart in the Conduct of Life, or any Affair of Importance.

tance. Have a care of the Power of *Pride* and a *worldly* Mind, the Affectation of *Honour* and Preheminance among Men, and unmeasurable *Desires* of outward Good. Watch against partial *Declinings*, and gradual Decays of former Strictness of Life, and Zeal for God. Be sensible of the Mischief of unreasonable *Prejudice* and Curiosity of Mind, especially the pernicious Humour of *cavilling* and quarrelling with Divine Revelations, taking a pride and pleasure in starting Difficulties, and finding Faults, diverting yourselves at the Expence of the most Sacred Truths, and exposing them to the Contempt of others, without attending to the Merits of a Cause, or the main Evidence of Things: A Humour as inconsistent with sober Enquiry and impartial Consideration, as 'tis with serious Piety and true Faith; unless Men pretend to arrive at direct Certainty and full Satisfaction, that Christ is an *Impostor*, and the Gospel a *Cheat*; a Supposition so extremely hard, as ought never to be made where 'tis not expressly own'd. God grant the Consideration of the Nature, Aggravation, and Punishment of this Sin, may teach us a wise Caution, and humble Fear; and make us beware of the first Steps of so great a Guilt, and whatsoever bears any Likeness to it.

F I N I S.

By the same Author.

A Sermon to the *Societies for Reformation of Manners*. Preached at *Salters-Hall*, June 29. 1702.

A Sermon preached on the Publick Fast, Jan. 19. 1704. with a special Reference to the late dreadful Storm and Tempest.

A Wedding Sermon.

The Mischief of Evil Company: A Sermon preached to young People on *Easter-Monday*, April 14. 1707.

A Sermon occasioned by the general Mourning for the Death of the Prince, Nov. 21. 1708.

A Sermon preached in *Crutched-Fryers* near *Aldgate*, Nov. 5. 1713. *Of the Perpetuity of the Christian Church*.

A Sermon preached on the Publick Thanksgiving appointed by Authority for suppressing the Unnatural Rebellion, June 7. 1716.

The Nature and Reasonableness of Consideration: A Sermon preached at the *Old-Jewry* to a Society of Young Men, Dec. 28. 1716.

Self-Dedication, Personal and Sacramental, briefly explained and improved. In Twelves. 1717.

Of the Sin against the Holy Ghost: A Sermon preached in *Crutched-Fryers*, April 27. 1718.

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A Sermon to the Societies for Reformation of Manners. Preached at Salters-Hall, June 29. 1702.

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A Sermon occasioned by the general Mourning for the Death of the Prince, Nov. 21. 1708.

A Sermon preached in Crutched-Fryers near Aldersgate, Nov. 5. 1713. *Of the Perpetuity of the Christian Church.*

A Sermon preached on the Publick Thanksgiving appointed by Authority for suppressing the Unlawful Rebellion, June 7. 1716.

The Nature and Reasonableness of Confession. A Sermon preached at the Old-Jewry to a Society of Young Men, Dec. 28. 1716.

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