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The EDIFICATION of *the* CHURCH of CHRIST.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED

In LAMBETH-CHAPEL,

AT THE

CONSECRATION

OF THE

Right Reverend FATHER in GOD

T H O M A S

LORD BISHOP of NORWICH,

On *Sunday*, Dec. 3. 1749.

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Canon of *Christ-Church*, Fellow of *Winchester* College;
and Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

Published by Order of His Grace the Lord
Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury*.

O X F O R D,

Printed at the THEATRE, for RICHARD CLEMENTS;
and Sold by WILLIAM SANDBY, Bookseller in *Fleet-Street*, LONDON. MDCCL.

Imprimatur,

J. PURNELL,

Vice-Can. Oxon.

Dec. 21. 1749.



I CORINTH. XIV. 12.

Even so YE, forasmuch as Ye are zealous of Spiritual Gifts, seek that Ye may excell to the EDIFYING of the Church.

THESE Words contain a very important Doctrine, I mean, THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. And in order to understand the Argument in it's full Extent, it will be necessary

IN the *First* Place to lay before You the Occasion of this Epistle, and the Situation of the Church of *Corinth*, when it was first written.

AND then *Secondly*, I shall consider the Doctrine of the Text, *Seek that Ye may excell to the EDIFYING of the Church.*

First then, I am to lay before You the Occasion of this Epistle, and the Situation of the Church of *Corinth*, when it was first written.

Now the Author of this Epistle was *St. Paul*, the Great Apostle of the Gentiles. --- The miraculous Circumstances of his Conversion are well
A known,

known, and We are told that in the *Labours* of his Apostleship He was *more abundant*. He had now been in the Ministry several Years, and done infinite Service to the Cause of Christ. He had travelled thro' various Countries, and settled Churches in the Principal Cities of *Asia*; and not only in *Asia*, but likewise in the Islands of the Sea, and the remoter Parts of the Earth.

AT length, with his usual Zeal and Industry, He arrives at *Corinth*. This was a City large and extensive, famed for it's Wealth and Power, and it's happy Advantages in Trade and Commerce. It was now the Metropolis of *Achaia*, and the usual Residence of the Roman Governour. The Inhabitants of this City were *Greeks*; and the Character given of Them is, That They were Men of Parts and inquisitive, but naturally vain and conceited of Themselves. And as They abounded in Wealth and Riches; so They were habituated to a luxurious and wanton Life, the usual Attendants of Ease and Pleasure.

HOWEVER, notwithstanding these Disadvantages, such was the Eloquence of *St. Paul*, and such the Power of the Gospel, that Christianity grew and prevailed amongst Them. The Congregation of Saints was very numerous; and, tho' there was a Synagogue of the Jews, yet it was chiefly composed of Gentile Converts. For the Scripture expressly tells Us, That the Jews *opposed Themselves, and blasphemed*; and therefore (says *St. Paul*) *I go unto the Gentiles*.

OUR Apostle's Residence here was near two Years; which shewed the Importance of the Place, and the particular Attention He paid to this Great City. However, at last He took his leave of the Brethren, and sail'd into *Syria*. From thence He went to *Ephesus*, and other Parts of the World, as He was directed by the Spirit of God. --- But, notwithstanding his daily Progress in the Ministry, He was always attentive to the Churches He had already planted, and loved to know the Success of his past Labours. --- Accordingly He had frequent Advices from the Church of *Corinth*; and at last He received the melancholy Intelligence, that They were in the utmost Disorder, and torn in pieces by violent Factions and Divisions; so as to endanger not only Love and Charity, but likewise the very Foundations of the Christian Religion.

AN Eloquent Father^a of the Church observes upon this Subject, That *Satan*, the Great Enemy of Mankind, stood amazed at the mighty Increase of the Gospel at *Corinth*; He saw it with Envy, and wanted to destroy it. But how should He effect his Purpose? Why (says He) He *divided* Them; He sowed the Spirit of Disunion, and Discord amongst Them.

THIS Disunion was introduced by false Teachers, who affected an high Precedency, and pretended to superiour Gifts and Graces of the Holy Ghost. --- They vainly preached a peculiar Gospel of their

^a *St. Chrysostom.*

Own; and despised the Person, Office, and Ministry of *St. Paul*. This gave Occasion to various Factions and Divisions, and to infinite Corruptions both in Faith and Practice. For We may observe, that They protected Incest and Fornication, *such Fornication, as had not been named amongst the Gentiles*. Their Love Feasts were impure and dissolute; and there was Riot even in the Celebration of the Holy Communion. They made no Distinction of Meats offered to Idols, and scrupled not to give Offence and Scandal to their Weak Brethren. Some proceeded even so far, as to doubt of a Resurrection, and a Judgment to come.

AND that which added to their Misfortune was, The daily Confusion in their Publick Assemblies. — So that the Congregation received no Advantage; and there could be no Hope of Improvement, where there was no Instruction. This arose from the Vanity of their New Teachers, who (as We said before) affected the highest Ministries of the Church, and pretended to more than ordinary Assistances of the Holy Ghost.

THESE Assistances were many and various; and All of Them suited to the several Wants of the Infant Church. Such was *the Word of Wisdom and Knowledge, the Gift of Healing, Miracles, Prophecy, the Discerning of Spirits*, and amongst the Rest, *the Gift of Tongues*, or the Power of speaking in an Unknown Tongue. — We All of Us know the Difficulty of Language, and with what Study and Attention They are All acquired. And therefore these *Corinthian* Teachers were particularly fond of This Talent,

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Talent, and expected to be considered as the immediate Favourites of Heaven. --- Accordingly They went into the Publick Assemblies, and spake with *Tongues*. The Offices of Religion were performed in a Language quite unknown; and All This without Prophefying, without Interpretation. This produced an idle Admiration in the People, but there was no Edification, no Instruction; nothing either to direct their Faith, or influence their Practice.

AN eminent Writer ^a of Our Church supposes this unknown Tongue to be the *Hebrew* Language, which was affectedly spoken by these False Teachers, in order to introduce the Usages of the Jewish Synagogue. --- But, whatever the Language was, it is plain there was no Advancement in Christian Knowledge; it only ended in Confusion, and occasioned infinite Disorders in the Church of *Corinth*.

ST. PAUL was very sensibly affected with these Disorders; and because He could not attend Them in Person, He therefore addresses Them in this celebrated Epistle. --- He begins with asserting his Divine Mission; and speaks to Them with all the Affection of a *Father*, and with all the Authority of an *Apostle*. He recounts their several Factions and Divisions; and begs They would be of the *same Mind, and in the same Judgment*. --- He tells Them, that the Christian Religion was not like the Schools of Philosophy, divided into different Sects and Opinions; but that They had *One Master, even Jesus Christ, That Christ*, who was crucified for Them,

^a Dr. *Lightfoot*.

and into whose Name They were All baptized. --- He tells Them further, that, as the *Kingdom of God cometh not with Observation*, so neither was it to be introduced by Human Policy and Address; that therefore He had taught Them the plain and naked Truths of the Gospel, without any Ornaments of Language, without any Mixture of Human Reasoning and Philosophy. --- *The Jews* (says He) *require a Sign, and the Greeks seek Wisdom. But We preach Christ crucified; unto Us, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.*

IT appears from the Epistle it self, that They had sent Him several Questions, and asked his Opinion and Advice with regard to many Particulars. To all these Enquiries He gives a distinct and regular Answer. --- After having blamed their Conduct with regard to the Incestuous Person, He gives Directions about the Married and Virgin State. He treats of Meats offered to Idols, and the Danger of giving Offence to Weak Brethren. He shews the Generosity of his Ministry, and how He had laboured amongst Them without any Reward. And because They were apt to glory and confide in their Own Strength, and depended upon the Privileges of the Gospel State, He puts Them in mind of the *Jews* of old; who, tho' They were God's peculiar People, yet were destroyed in the Wilderness for their Disobedience.

BUT the Point He particularly labours was their Want of Charity, and the little *Edification* in the Church of God. This (as We said before) arose from Pride, and the Affectation of speaking in an
unknown

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unknown Tongue. By this means the Ignorant were untaught, and the Multitude received little or no Advantage in their Publick Assemblies. And yet *These* were the Majority of true Believers; equally baptized into Christ's Faith, and equally Members of his Church. Like the Hands and Feet of the Body Natural, They were equally constituent Parts of the Body of Christ. --- *I thank my God* (says He) *I speak with Tongues more than You All. Yet in the Church I had rather speak Five Words with my Understanding, than ten thousand Words in an unknown Tongue. For the Manifestation of the Spirit is given to every Man to profit withal; and He, that prophesieth, edifieth the Church. --- Let all Things be done to edifying. --- And then again, in the Words of the Text, --- Even so YE, forasmuch as Ye are zealous of Spiritual Gifts, seek that Ye may excell to the EDIFYING of the Church.*

As if He had said, --- It is true indeed, that God has been pleased to bless You with distinguished Favours, and given You the extraordinary Graces of the Holy Ghost. However You are to remember, that You are only *His* Ministers, and *His* Servants; commissioned and employed by *Him*, for the Honour and Advantage of his Church. Be Ye not therefore *vainly puffed up by Your fleshly Minds*. Affect not Power, and high Precedency; nor seek the unavailing Admirations and Applause of Men. But, if there *must* be Emulation, and Strife amongst You, let it be the GLORIOUS CONTENTION OF DOING GOOD. Strive to excell in Virtue, to improve, to EDIFY, to be Fellow-Labourers, and Fellow-Sufferers with Christ, and to cooperate with Heaven in the Salvation of Mankind. WHICH

WHICH brings Me to the *Second* Thing proposed, I mean, to consider the Doctrine of the Text; *Seek that Ye may excell to the EDIFYING of the Church.*

Now We All of Us know the Majesty and Purity of the Scripture Language, and how the most important Truths are frequently conveyed to Us by expressive and lively Images. Accordingly the Church of Christ is represented to Us as a *City*; an *House*; as the *Habitation of God through the Spirit*; as a *Building fitly framed, which groweth unto an Holy Temple in the Lord.* --- And the *Foundation* of this Building is said to be *the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Corner Stone.* --- The same Sentiment and Language is transfer'd to the Church Triumphant. Hence the New Jerusalem is described to Us as a *City of pure Gold, and the Foundations are adorned with precious Stones.* We know (says the Apostle) *that if our Earthly Tabernacle were dissolved, We have a Building of God, an House not made with Hands, Eternal in the Heavens.* And again, the Patriarch *Abraham* is said to *look for a City, whose Builder and Maker is God.*

Now to EDIFY this Spiritual Building is to strengthen the Foundation, and adorn the Superstructure; to take care of the Materials; to preserve all the constituent Parts, and keep Them in their original Consistency, Beauty, and Order. And because in the present Hurry of the World, and amidst such a Variety of Passions, it is difficult to do *This*; therefore a particular Order of Men is appointed for this very pur-

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purpose; abstracted from the cares of the World, devoted to religious Employments, and separated and set apart for this Service. Our Blessed Saviour has given *Some Apostles, Some Prophets, and Some Evangelists, and Some Pastors, and Teachers; for the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ.* --- And the Business of these Ministers is, to *watch* over the Flock of Christ; to *feed* and provide for the Lord's Family; to support the weak, and instruct the ignorant; to comfort the afflicted, and *bind up the broken-hearted*; to spread a Sense of Religion, wherever They go, and with whomsoever They converse; to explain the Ways of God to the Sons of Men; to point out to Them their best and most important Interest; to shew Them all the Glories of the World to come, and gently lead Them in the Way to Eternal Rest.

TIME would fail Me to enlarge upon this Divine Subject, and to recount all the Duties of the Ministerial Office. They are perfectly understood in *this* Place, and therefore need not be enumerated in this *Great Assembly*. However it can never be improper to recollect Our past Lives, and *to stir up the Grace of God which was given Us by the Imposition of Hands*. The *Good Shepherd* will take a pleasure in such a Review, and will rejoice if He has a well-grounded Hope, that He has been the happy Instrument of promoting Piety and Virtue.

MIRACLES indeed are ceased, and We are not blessed with Signs and Wonders, with *the Gift of Tongues, and the Interpretation of Tongues.* --- These
B were

were necessary for the Foundation and Establishment of the Christian Church. --- However, tho' We are not *Apostles*, We are still *Men*. We have the same natural and acquired Abilities, the same Opportunities of Improvement, the same Time and Talents. All which are equally necessary for the Continuance and Enlargement of the same Church. --- Perhaps there is not a more unhappy Mistake, than that We live in a State of Ease and Inactivity; and that a Minister of the Gospel has Time and Leisure to be *Indolent*. On the contrary, We are engaged in Affairs of the utmost Difficulty, Labour, and Importance. And therefore We must *exert* every Talent, *improve* every Faculty, and *strain* every Nerve of Industry in the Business of Our Holy Profession.

LEARNING is the Armour, with which the *Man of God* is furnished, and without which it is impossible He should be successful in his Christian Warfare. For Knowledge of every Kind is necessary, that the Mind may be exercised; and Reason, the highest Faculty of Man, may be cultivated and improved. --- It is not enough, that We are acquainted with the present Age and Constitution of Things. We must carry our Searches into remote Antiquity, and examine the Monuments, and Records of Time. Languages are the *Shells* of Learning, and convey to Us the Sentiments of our Forefathers; and therefore These must be carefully studied, and critically understood. Add to this, Experience in the Art of Reasoning, Skill in Controversy, the happy Disposition of our Thoughts, and the Talent of cloathing Them in strong and expressive Language. For
Religion

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Religion is founded upon *Truth*; *Truth* is supported by *Argument*; and *Argument* is always adorned by *Eloquence*. --- Besides all this, We must understand the Passions, and know all the Frame and Faculties of the Human Mind. It is of infinite Use to study the Tempers of Mankind, their different Views, and various Inclinations. For This will gain their Affections, give a commanding Influence to our Instructions, and find an easy Passage to their Hearts. --- In short, --- All the *Refinements* of the Understanding, all the *Powers* of the Imagination, all the *Treasures* of the Memory, All that We can do or think, All is little enough to EDIFY the Church of Christ.

WHEN We are upon the Subject of EDIFICATION, We must never forget the *Holy Scriptures*; that invaluable Fountain of Knowledge, and which convey to Us the Promises of Eternal Life. There We have at large the History of the Christian Religion; and from thence We are to draw our Arguments, to enforce it's Duties, and recommend it's Doctrines. And We are to consider these Doctrines, as taught Us by a Messenger sent from Heaven, invested with the highest Authority, who left the Bosom of his Father, and came on purpose to deliver these Eternal Truths. So that every Argument from hence will have the Sanction of a Divine Command. --- And This will be better than to collect Our Duty, -- from *Reason* or *Philosophy*, which is so perplexed; -- from *Tradition* or *History*, which is so uncertain; -- or from the *Suggestions* of our own *Hearts*, where We are sure to meet with so much Impurity, Ignorance, and Mistake.

WHEN Our *Understandings* are thus prepared, We must next descend into Our *Hearts*, and regulate Our Practice. For, whilst We are preaching to Others, We must make no unlucky Discoveries, that We are not *Good* Our Selves. So that We must have no unguarded Moments, or careless Intervals; but must walk before Them with such Purity of Life, and such Sanctity of Manners, that They may say, that *God is in Us of a Truth*. Amidst our other Improvements, We must be sure to refine and purify the *Heart*; for there is the Seat of *Conscience*, that unseen and invisible Witness of all our Actions. — *The Mind of a Priest* (says St. Chrysostom) ought to be purer than a Ray of the Sun; and as We live at the Altar, One would think it should naturally warm our Hearts with Sentiments of Devotion. If We are really in earnest about our immortal State, it will be impossible We should be indifferent and cold about it. We shall not only kindle the *Holy Fire* within our own Breasts; but shall endeavour to convey and propagate it to Others; assisting, instructing, animating, and inflaming all around Us. That this is the Character of a *Good Shepherd* is abundantly evident; for this was the Character of the BLESSED JESUS!

WE live in an Age, which (if ever Any) may be called *the Age of Pleasure*; when there is Such a Contempt of Decency, and Such a general Diffipation of Thought, as is really *incredible*. And tho' We would not run into the idle Extreams of Enthusiasm, yet the View is melancholy. It is enough to make a Wise Man *serious*, and a Good Man
Man

Man *cautious*. — Here therefore We must employ our utmost Industry and Address; to awaken the Attention of Mankind, to rouse Them from their Spiritual Lethargy, and to call Them back by Admonition, by Exhortation, by every possible Method of Perswasion; but above all, by Example, and a *Good Life*.

FOR Men cannot always determine upon Reason and Evidence. They are not All Judges of Our *Opinions*; but All are Judges of Our *Lives*. — Precepts are but the Pictures, the dead, unenlivened Images of Virtue; but Examples are *Virtue itself*, informed, and animated, and exerting itself in all it's Charms and Graces. Arguments may probably be vain and ineffectual: They are often mistaken and misapplied; but nothing can so effectually convince, or so powerfully persuade as *the Life of the Preacher*. This is the *One Thing needful in the Pastoral Office*; and Men's Hearts will perfectly glow with Pleasure, when They see our *Good Works*, and that We endeavour to make Them *better, wiser, and happier*.

IN such a *Cause* as this, I would not willingly suppose, that We can possibly miscarry. — But if it should be otherwise, if We *must* be so unfortunate; yet let Us, with Courage and Resolution, persevere to the utmost. If Religion *must* leave this Country, if We *must* take a View of her last and parting Steps; yet let the Ministers of the Gospel preserve their Integrity, and let it not be said by After Ages, that it was owing to Us, who ought to have been the *Guardians* and *Protectors* of it.

AFTER

AFTER all, We must beg of God, that the Spirit of *Love* and *Union* may descend upon our Hearts. For where there is no *Agreement*, there can be no *Edification*. We should forget the Argument of this whole Epistle, if We did not observe the unhappy Consequences of Discord. We have seen the fatal Effects in the Church of *Corinth*; and by a sad Experience We lament the Same in *Our Own*. We All of Us know the Purity of Our Religion, the Freedom of Our Government, and the natural Alliance between Church and State. And yet by I know not what Fatality We see unreasonable Schifms in the *One*, and peevish Discontents in the *Other*. --- Strange that amidst such a Variety of Blessings, We should forget Our Happiness, and grow weary and wanton in the Enjoyment of it! --- But let it be remembred, that Our Divisions have nothing to do with *Heaven*; but are owing to the *Prince of Darkness*, the Enemy of Mankind. For it is *Satan* that *divides*; but it is the *Wisdom that is from above*, and the Spirit of God that *unites*.

PLEASED with the Prospect of this happy *Union*, let Us chearfully go on in the Discharge of Our Duty. And, whatever Difficulties We meet with, let Us not doubt of Success, in the *Cause* of God, and in a Profession so distinguished by the Care of Heaven. --- There is such a Thing, as steady, uniform, invariable, I was going to say, *unconquerable* Goodness; which even the Libertine cannot choose but reverence and admire. And if there be such Beauty and Comeliness in the Moral Offices of Life; how much more amiable will *Virtue* appear, when
it

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it puts on an higher Dress, and appears in all the *Majesty* of the Christian Religion. Only let *This* be made visible, let it begin at the Altar, and proceed from the Sanctuary; and then We may hope for a happy Reformation and Amendment of the World: --- This will be *Our Glory and Crown of rejoicing*, when We shall be ready to give up Our Accounts with Joy, and may with pleasure look up to *God, the Judge of All, Our common Father and Benefactor, the present Friend, and the future Rewarder* of all Our Labours.

THUS far We have endeavoured to recollect some of the Duties of the *Pastoral Office*; and it will be natural to observe, that we have considered only the inferior Ministries of the Christian Church. But if We may presume to take a View of the higher Offices of Christ's Kingdom, Our Thoughts will be then enlarged, and We shall have the Idea of greater and more extended Good. --- It has been the Wisdom of all Ages, to pay the highest Reverence to their *Spiritual Rulers*, to invest Them with Powers and Privileges, and to make Them venerable by distinguishing Marks of Honour. --- And the happy Consequences have been experienced in the Welfare of Mankind, in the good Government of Communities, States, and Kingdoms. For the Greatness of their Office creates Attention; the Sanctity of their Person gives Authority; and They appear to their People under all the Advantages of superiour Wisdom, more advanced Years, and more extended Experience.

THIS

THIS was evidently the Case of the *Jewish Priesthood*. God was pleased to exalt their Character, by many Instances of Favour, Power, and Authority, by publick Privileges, and Exemptions, and by the Punishment of all, who presumed to invade their Office. Add to this, the Magnificence of the Temple, the Expence of their Sacrifices, the Splendor of their Vestments, the Silence of the Sanctuary, and the Privilege of entring into the *Holy Place*. All which inspired the People with Veneration and Awe of their Ministry.

BUT, as far as the Mysteries of Grace are superior to the legal Sacrifices; so far does *the Ministration of Righteousness exceed in Glory*. Things of an higher and more spiritual Nature, *even the Glorious Gospel of God* is committed to *Our Trust*. And upon the due Execution of *this Trust* depends the Progress of true Religion amongst Us, and perhaps every Happiness We wish to *Our Selves, Our Sovereign, and Our Country*. --- Such has been the Experience of past Ages; --- and when Men of known and confessed Abilities, favoured by the *Great*, and esteemed by the *Good*; when Such as *these* are advanced to Eminence, We have then a pleasing Prospect before Us, and may expect *that Wisdom and Knowledge will be the Stability of our Times*. *When They go up to the Holy Altar, They will make the Garment of Holiness honourable*; --- and whilst *We* have the Benefit of their good Example, *They Themselves* will enjoy that Peace of Mind, *which passeth all Understanding*, I mean, the inexpressible Felicity of converting Sinners, of giving Joy to Heaven, and *adding to the Number of the Blessed*. WHAT