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SINNERS saved by JESUS CHRIST, as
preached in Holy SCRIPTURE: But
CHURCH, and FATHERS, and CLERGY,
are no sure GUIDES to Heaven.

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the
Arch-Deacon's VISITATION,

HELD AT

St. MARTIN'S,

IN

O X F O R D.

On Saturday, October 9, 1756.

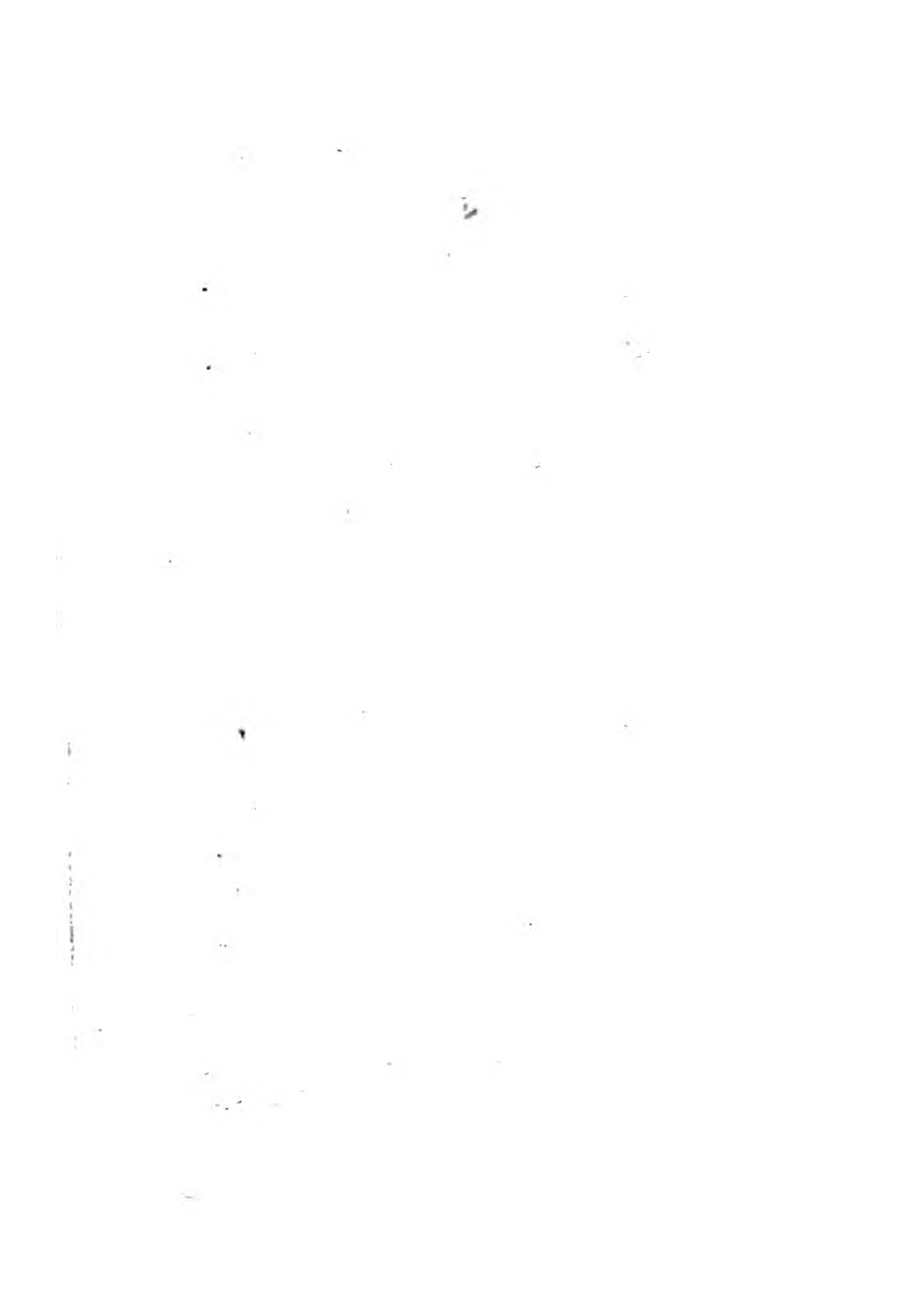
By EDWARD LEWIS, M. A.
Rector of *Waterstock*, and *Emington*, in *Oxfordshire*.

*To the Law and to the Testimony: If they speak not according
to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them.*

ISAIAH viii. 20.

L O N D O N:
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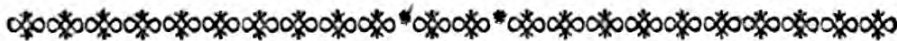




A
V I S I T A T I O N
S E R M O N,

Preached at
St. M A R T I N's

I N
O X F O R D.



I T I M. i. 15.

*This is a faithful Saying, and worthy
of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus
came into the World to save Sinners.*

WOULD we but consider the Materials of our Composition, and the Majesty of him that reduced them into Form, we should find Reason to be surprized at the wondrous Condescension of so tender a Regard for Mankind.

That an eternal and all-sufficient Being should raise a Creature out of the Dust, and make it an Inhabitant of Paradise: That this Creature, thus raised and situated, should despise

rise its Maker, transgress his Laws, reject his Authority, and transfer its Allegiance from its natural Lord, and the Fountain of Joy, to the Contriver of its Wo, and the only Adversary of its Benefactor! What, but infinite Mercy, could restrain almighty Power, from exerting the utmost Vengeance, against the so gross Abuser of such extraordinary Favours? But true are the Words of the Prophet (a), *My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways my Ways, saith the Lord.* For when no Punishment could be adequate to our Offence, and he could, without Trouble, either subdue, or destroy the feeble Adversary; he with amazing Indulgence, offers Terms of Reconciliation, and sends his Son with the gracious Message. For a Truth it is, and a Truth to be received with the highest Gratitude, *that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.*

Now to save Sinners, implies as well to save from Sin, as to save from Punishment. And my Endeavour shall be to shew, how *Christ Jesus* does both. And,

First how he saves from Sin.

Before the coming of that holy Person, the World was over-run with Superstition; Iniquity was established by Law; Morality was depraved; and Religion made to consist in Forms that were useless, or ridiculous, or impious. But *Christ* cleared it from that Rubbish,

(a) *Isa. lv. 8.*

Rubbish, fixed its Rules, and reduced it to what was reasonable, and wise, and to the Glory of God : And promoted the Peace, the Welfare, and the Happiness of Men.

And such is the Christian Religion as taught by its divine Founder, and as contained in holy Scripture. But if you descend *one Step* lower, the Inventions of Men appear, of Men half learned, half heathen, superstitious, factious, designing. And that primitive Purity we have so often heard of, and which makes us regret these evil Days we are fallen into, that primitive Purity, upon a very diligent and impartial Enquiry after it, will be found never to have existed any where, but in the *ideal World*.

Nor does it seem likely that it should. For as the Church of Christ, or Believers in the Messiah, was a Society gathered out of all other Societies, Nations, Sects, and Religions, it is highly reasonable to think, these several Converts would carry along with them the Prejudices of Education, a sort of native Fondness for those Tenets and Practices they had been used to and brought up in, and would retain as many of them, as they could, by all manner of Distinctions, reconcile to, and make consistent with, their new Religion.

And this, in fact, was the Case. Men believed in *Jesus Christ*, yet left not the Paradoxes of *Zeno*, nor deserted the Principles of the *Academy*. And thus was Heathenism superinduced upon the Religion of *Jesus*. And
in

in a few Centuries we hear of *sacred Images*, that worst Part of Heathenism, in the Christian Church: And of Men branded as Hereticks, bereaved of Fame and Fortune, consigned to Satan, and deprived of Life, for not yielding a ready Submission to that *execrable Idolatry*.

If any Religion could have been kept pure and uncorrupt by Tradition, or an uninterrupted Succession of Men, without having Recourse to its first Principles or original Founder, it surely must be that of *Moses*, calculated for one State, a little one, and that separated from all others by its Laws and Ordinances; the High-Priesthood confined to one Family; the Priesthood hereditary, their Support, Credit, and Power, depending on the due Practice, teaching, and enforcing of it. Yet all this Care proved ineffectual to preserve its Purity. *The People served the Lord all the Days of Joshua, and all the Days of the Elders that out-lived Joshua, who had seen all the great Works of the Lord that he did for Israel (b)*. But after their Decease, *there arose another Generation after them, which knew not the Lord. And the Children of Israel did Evil in the Sight of the Lord, and served Baalim*. A plain Declaration that the Jewish Church, even in the *second Century* of its Establishment, did not serve the Lord. Was not a proper Pattern for succeeding Ages. Was probably as far from

(b) Judges ii.

from Truth and Righteousness, as when God set every one against his Neighbour, and finally delivered the whole Community to the ravage of the *Romans*.

But it is said, the Christian Church is favoured with Promises of a superior Evidence, a more peculiar Protection. It is indeed so said, but perhaps was never proved.

When the Question was put to the Disciples by their blessed Master, *Whom do ye say that I am (c)?* Simon said, *thou art the Christ.* Jesus answered, *thou art Peter, and upon this Rock will I build my Church, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.* Our Saviour here resembles the Society he was about to establish to a Building; Simon to a Stone in it: The Foundation whereof was to be this eternal Truth, *Jesus is the Christ.* And the whole, stript of Metaphor, would run thus. The fundamental Principle of my Religion is, that I am the *Christ*: And whatever Havock Death may make; whatever Shape of Horror Death may put on; still shall Men survive professing this Principle, *Jesus is the Christ.*

This is that salutary Principle, to establish which St. *John* wrote his Gospel. *These are written, saith he (d), that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have Life through his Name.* The same Apostle declares, that *whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of*
God

(c) Matt. xvi.

(d) John xx. 31.

God (e). St. Paul saith, *I have laid the Foundation (f)*. Now it is most certain that *Paul* never laid *Peter* for a Foundation, nor ever thought him such. He mentions him slightly as one that seemed to be a **PILLAR (g)**. But peremptorily affirm, that *other FOUNDATION can no Man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ, or Jesus is the Christ, which, I believe, is the true Meaning of Ιησους ο χριστος (h)*. When therefore this Apostle says we are built upon the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Eph. ii. 20. he must mean, that we are built upon the Foundation, which the Apostles and Prophets have laid: Not that the Apostles and Prophets themselves were that Foundation. For clear and full is the Declaration, that *other Foundation can no Man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (h)*.

And indeed, which ever Way we turn our Eyes, we may see the whole Scheme of Christianity terminate upon this Principle. Prophecy points out the *Christ*: Miracles prove *Jesus* to be him. Hence his Right to command: And hence our Duty to obey. We hope, we fear, we believe in *Jesus*. But why are we so affected by one of his Nation, and in his Circumstances, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted

(e) 1 John v. 1. (f) 1 Cor. iii. 10. (g) Gal. ii. 9.
 (h) 1 Cor. iii. 11. See John iv. 42. vi. 69. xi. 27.
 xvi. 27, 30. xvii. 8. Acts viii. 37. ix. 20. 1 John
 iv. 15.

acquainted with Grief, chastised, bruised, wounded, slain? The Reason is apparently this. He has given sufficient Evidence of a divine Commission; of an Unction from the holy One; in a Word, of his being the *Christ*. This is that *Rock* of Truth that will stand fast for ever. Upon *this* is the *Church* of *Christ* built: Not upon *Peter* confident and frail, a mere Heap of Sand or common Dust, puffed away by the Breath of a poor dependent Maid.

All therefore that can be gathered from this *oft distorted Passage* amounts to no more, than that a Society shall ever subsist, that will acknowledge *Jesus* to be the *Christ*. How great or how small; how pure or how corrupt in Faith and Practice that Society was to be, is not mentioned. Of the Duration of it we are secure: Of its Purity we have no Assurance. For the *Gates* of *Hades*, or of *Hell* as we translate it, do not signify the Powers of *Satan*, but the Powers of *Death* (*i*). Death cannot destroy the Church of *Christ*, but the Devil may corrupt it, as we see he has, without any Violation of this Promise.

But does not the Apostle call the Church *the Pillar and Ground of Truth*? They say he does, because so they would have it. But this likewise is a Matter that has not yet been

B proved.

(i) Thus εν πυλαις αδη is rendered to the Gates of Death, Isa. xxxviii. 10. αιδαο πυλησιν, Homil. ix. 311. τω θανατω περιφρωσικως faith the old Scholiast, pag. 178.

proved. The Words appealed to are in 1 Tim. iii. 14, 15. *These Things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thy self in the House of God, which is the Church of the living God, the Pillar and Ground of the Truth.* The Meaning is, as it is thy Duty to understand and support Religion, even as a Pillar with its Basis is the Support and Strength of a Building; I have sent thee these Instructions, to qualify thee for that profession thou art engaged in, and to teach thee how to behave, so as to save thyself, and those committed to thy Care. The Pillar therefore and Ground of Truth, was not the Church but *Timothy*: Nor was *St. Paul* guilty of such Impropriety, as, in the same Breath, to call the same Thing an House, a Church, and a Pillar: But his Design in writing to *Timothy* was, in figurative Language, to make him an ornamented Pillar in the House of God: That is, in plain Speech, an able Minister in a Christian Congregation. And to call a principal Person a Pillar, is a Way of Speaking not unusual in other Places of Scripture. Thus *James, Cephas, and John, seemed to be Pillars (k)*. And *him that overcometh will I make a Pillar in the Temple of my God (l)*. The same Appellation, so applied, frequently occurs in other Writers.

But

(k) Gal. ii. 9.

(l) Rev. iii. 12.

But should it still be insisted on that the Church was that Pillar; that Truth really had its Residence in, and Support from, the Church; and that she was truly infallible in her Determinations. Where then could *Timothy* find so able an Instructor as the Church? Or how can the good Apostle be acquitted of Impertinence, in, as it were, thus intercepting her kind Intentions to his *Son Timothy*, and in presuming to force his own Advice upon him, rather than counsel him to follow hers? How not be guilty of Undutifulness to his holy Mother the Church; in thus intruding upon her prerogative?

But not to contest this Matter any farther. Let it be the Church that is this Pillar and Ground of Truth. The Question will then recur, what Church is it to which these Privileges belong? The Answer is easy, it doubtless must be that of *Ephesus*, the only Church *Timothy* had any Concerns with. But feeble was that Pillar, and built upon the Sand. For in the *first Century*, we find this Church of *Ephesus* upbraided by our Lord, for having left her *first Love*, with this Admonition and Threatning annexed; *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first Works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy Candlestick out of his Place, except thou repent, Rev. ii. 5.*

But as this Church of *Ephesus*, this Pillar and Ground of Truth, was in a ruinous Con-

dition in the Apostles Days, where *since* has Truth fixed her Residence, where is this Treasure to be found?

The Church of *Rome*, with her usual Confidence, asserts it to be her Inheritance by an indefeasible Right. Now as she bears Witness of herself, we know her Witness is not true, nor, upon her own Assertion, should any Regard be paid to that *Mother of Abominations*. But as she pretends to Reason, Reason merits Attention from whatever Quarter it proceeds. For it is not *who* speaks, but *what* is spoken, that ought to be regarded.

The Church of *Rome* then proves her Right to Truth, and her actual Possession of it; because *Peter* was at *Rome* —. Because *Jesus* said he had prayed that his Faith should not fail (*m*). And because he has given him Orders to feed his Sheep (*n*).

And true it is, that *Peter* is said to have been at *Rome*. And true it likewise is, that a SHE POPE (*o*) is said to have been there by no less than *Seventy one* canonized *Greek* and *Latin* Authors. Nor was its Truth called in Question

(*m*) Luke xxii. 32. (*n*) John xxi. (*o*) A German Wench called JOAN English. A Whore. Not guilty of spiritual Whoredom only, that is Idolatry, as the whole *Bead-roll* of Popes have been for many Ages: But a real Whore, and according to the Letter, who in an *holy Procession* was delivered of a Child in the Streets, which cost her *lewd Ladyship's Holiness* her Life.—A Story so circumstanced, if not true, yields good Grounds for *historical Scepticism*. Sed videas Platin. vit. Johan VIII.

Question for five hundred Years (*p*). Possibly these two Facts may be equally credible, and equally true. But most certain it is, that *Peter's* Faith did not fail. He denied his Master thrice, perhaps cursed him, and swore he knew him not, but this he did against Conscience, his Faith did not fail, but, though his Mouth was thus full of cursing and lyes, he all the while in his Heart believed, that Jesus was the Christ. Upon his sincere Repentance therefore his Master took him into his Service again, and, as he had thrice denied him, ordained him thrice, or gave him a triple Commission to feed his Sheep.

Let us then set the whole together, take it in one view, and make the most of it. Reduced into Form it will stand thus. *Peter* was at *Rome*; yea let him be Bishop there, *Peter* believed one Thing and practised another; repented of his Fault; was pardoned, and again commissioned to preach the Gospel. Therefore — what? Therefore the Church of *Rome* is infallible. But where is the Connection? Is this to reason with or to insult Mankind? Insolence indeed it is, but suited to a *Faction*, whose Leaders cannot invent a Lye, which its Followers will not believe.

This *Roman* Right to Truth then being only imaginary, and without Foundation. It may not be amiss, to take a View of another Way to attain it, pointed out to us in very early Times,

(*p*) See Blondel de Joan: Pap. and Missions's Voyages.

Times, even before *Rome* itself had laid in her Claim to the *Monopoly*. The Director is *Ignatius*, Saint and Martyr, of the *first Century*, Bishop or Patriarch of *Antioch*, *St. Peter's* Successor, and, as some say, ordained by him.

“ Let all, saith he, follow the Bishop as *Jesus Christ* does the Father ; and the Priesthood as the Apostles ; and reverence the Deacons as the Command of God (*q*).” And again, “ What the Bishop approves is pleasing to God (*r*).” And in another Epistle. “ My Soul for theirs that are subject to Bishop, Priests, and Deacons: And may my Portion in God be with those that are so (*s*).”

Instructions to the same Effect are given us in the *second Century*, by *Polycarp*, Saint and Martyr, a Disciple of the Apostles, and made Bishop of *Smyrna* by those that had seen the Lord (*t*). His Words are, “ BE SUBJECT TO PRIESTS, AND DEACONS, AS TO GOD AND CHRIST (*u*).”

Cyprian, Saint and Martyr, and Bishop of *Carthage*, at the Beginning of the *third Century*, in a Letter to *Pupianus*, a Bishop and Martyr, who had so bad an Opinion of *Saint Cyprian's* moral Character, as to think him unworthy of a Bishoprick, and to excommunicate him, declares, that to judge of a Bishop is to be an Infidel to God, and a Rebel to Christ and his Gospel ; telling him moreover, that

(*q*) Epist. ad Smyrna. (*r*) Id. Ibid. (*s*) Epist. ad Polycarp. (*t*) Euseb. L. 3. C. 32. (*u*) Epist. ad Philip,

that he ought to know, " THAT THE
 " BISHOP IS IN THE CHURCH, AND
 " THE CHURCH IN THE BISHOP (*w*)."

So that this Doctrine of absolute *blind Obedience* to our spiritual Guides, appears to be an ancient Doctrine : But not ancient enough. It has Antiquity to plead : But not primitive Antiquity. It may be deduced from Apostolic Men, and Apostolic Sees : But not from the Apostles, not from *Jesus Christ*.

For the Advice of *Jesus Christ*, as well to the Multitude as to his Disciples, is *call no Man your FATHER upon the Earth : For one is your Father which is in Heaven. Neither be ye called Masters [or GUIDES] : For one is your Master [or GUIDE Καθηγητης] even Christ. And all ye are Brethren (x)*. He likewise gives us a particular Caution to *beware of false Prophets, which come in Sheeps Cloathing, but inwardly are ravenous Wolves (y)*. And is so far from this Doctrine of an *unlimited Submission* to Bishops, Priests, and Deacons ; that he gives us a Rule, whereby to judge of our Teachers of every Denomination. *By their Fruits ye shall know them (z)*.

And then the Apostle, in his inimitable *Charge* to the Bishops, or Priests, or Elders, that met him at *Miletus*, says, *Of your own selves shall Men arise speaking perverse Things,*
 to

(*w*) Unde scire debes Episcopum in Ecclesia esse, et Ecclesiam in Episcopo. Epist. 66. Ed. Oxon.

(*x*) Matt. xxiii. (*y*) Matt. vii, 15. (*z*) Matt. vii. 16.

to draw away Disciples after them (a). He warns the Corinthians not to glory in Men (b). And puts them in mind of false Apostles, deceitful Workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light. Therefore it is no great Thing, if his Ministers also be transformed, as the Ministers of Righteousness (c).

These last Words merit more than a transient Thought. Let them not therefore be passed over without Reflection. False Apostles appear as the Apostles of Christ! — The Devil as an Angel of Light! — His Ministers as the Ministers of Righteousness! — All which are Observations not less true than useful. Nor has there been hardly any Thing more destructive to Religion in all Ages, than the want of attending to these useful Truths. For the “having Mens Persons in Admiration,” and the thinking of them more highly than they ought to be thought of, gave birth to heathen Gods, and the Worship of Dæmons: Has turned the HEADS OF FACTION INTO SAINTS, and authorised, and given a Sanction to, much Nonsense, Superstition, and Impiety (d).

Would

(a) Acts xx. 50. (b) 1 Cor. xi. 21. (c) 2 Cor. ii. 13, 14, 15.

(d) For the four first Centuries, the FATHERS were looked upon as common Men: And their Authority nothing. Nor did

Would we then not be imposed upon; would we not be led into Error, we should consider Men as Men; as of weak Heads and bad Hearts: Imperfect in Judgment, and that influenced by every Passion; as not better in *Council*, than separate; as distinguished by *Churches*, than alone. For however varied, still is it all but Man repeated; Man depraved and fallen.

Our Business is, and our Resolution should be, to "hold the Head," even *Christ*. And to have our Eye fixed upon the Rule he hath given us, that only primitive, true, original Rule. For a *voluntary Humility*, may become blameable, and be carried to a Degree beyond Reason and Religion. That those that *labour* in the Word and Doctrine are worthy of double Honour, or *double Pay* διπλη τιμης, is

did it enter into any Bodies Head to refute Heresy, or to confirm any Point of Doctrine by Sentences extracted from their Writings, before the Time of *Theodosius* the Great, to whose Approbation and penal Laws at the Conclusion of the fourth Century, does that *evil Custom* owe its Origine. Vide *Sozomen*. Hist. Eccl. L. vii. C. 12. Et *Pearson*. Vindic. Ignat. Part I. Page 96. 197. 207. 203. In the fifth Century, an Age wherein the *Mystery of Iniquity* had made a large Progress, that fatal *Practice* became common. Yet then did that Oracle of the *Western Church*, that highly venerated FATHER *Augustine* declare, "That their Testimony was not decisive; but that we might justly dissent from their Opinions where their Opinions were at Variance with Truth." Non sic leguntur tanquam ita ex eis testimonium proferatur, ut contra sentire non liceat; sicubi aliter sapuerint quam veritas postulat. *August*. Epist. 48. Ad vincentium.

is an Apostolic Truth (e) not to be contested: But to exercise no Judgment of our own in regard to those *labours*, to submit to the *labourers* as to God and Christ, is an indefensible Excess: Is a going beyond all Bounds of Moderation. And the great Antiquity of the Precept shews the great Antiquity of Error, and the Propriety and Truth of our Saviour's Parable concerning the Tares and Wheat, *When the Blade was sprung up, then appeared the Tares also* (f). So that Solomon's Advice is never out of Season. *Say not thou what is the Cause that the former Days were better than these, for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this* (g).

For it is but a fond Conceit, to imagine that Persecution itself can subdue Men's Wills: Or make their Actions perfect. They will not deny Christ: But they will indulge the darling Passion. *Cyprian* laments the Crimes, the capital Crimes of Confessors (b): And those Sufferers for Religion would take Bribes from the *lapsed*, to restore them to the Church's Peace (i). Whilst the Rod of Power was over them they would plague one another (k): And the persecuted would persecute (l).

And, to shew that Man in his best Estate is altogether Vanity, the celebrated *Augustine*, who was a Heretick of the worst Sort to the

Prime

(e) 1 Tim. v. 17. (f) Matt. xiii. 26. (g) Eccl. vii. 10.
 (b) Cyp. Ep. 13 14. (i) Id. Ep. 14. (k) Id. Ep. 34.
 (l) Id. Ep. 41.

Prime of Life, in the *Decline* of it became a Persecutor of Hereticks, and the Patron of Persecution. Whose *feeble Arguments*, equally suited to *every Faction* in Power, have ever since, been the principal Weapons made use of in defence of that *Antichristian Practice*.

Augustine indeed had been unmolested in his Heresy. Had therefore not learned Compassion, by what he suffered. But those well intentioned Men, who happily, through God's Grace, delivered us from *Popish Tyranny*, Superstition, and Idolatry, though they had themselves endured Hardship, and seen every Kind of Cruelty exercised upon the sincere and good, who were determined, at all Events, "to obey God rather than Man," yet were they unable to conquer their Prejudices against LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

When they had the most fierce, most bloody, most artfully contrived Kingdom of this World that ever was raised in it, to struggle with for Religion, for Liberty, for Life; even then was their *Eye evil* against *their Brethren*, and they would burn others, who were themselves afterwards burned.

In mitigation of their Fault, let it be considered, that they had been long drenched in the Bitterness of a *Popish Zeal*. That such had been, by the Instigation of the *evil One*, the Practice of *holy Church* for Ages, countenanced, patronized, and established, by Fa-

thers, Popes, and Councils. That Compassion for Hereticks was looked upon as the Dregs of unmortified Nature. And that, in this Kingdom, *our* Bishops, and Sheriffs, and other Magistrates were sworn, were obliged to call God as a Record upon their Souls, that they would persecute, and destroy them, with all their might (*m*).

THE ACT OF PARLIAMENT FOR BURNING HERETICKS, that is, all that are not *Papists*, ought never to be forgot by *Englishmen*. As it merits your Attention, I shall take the Liberty to present you with a Part of it; the Words are these. “ That no
 “ Person shall presume to preach, hold,
 “ teach, or instruct openly or privately,
 “ or make, or write any *Book* contrary to
 “ the *Catholick Faith*, or Determination of
 “ the *holy Church*; or of any *Sect* make *Con-*
 “ *venticles*, or hold and exercise *Schools*. And
 “ if any Person of whatever Kind or Estate,
 “ do any thing against this Statute, or is evi-
 “ dently *suspected* thereof, his *Diocesan* may
 “ cause him to be *arrested*, and under safe
 “ Custody in *his Prisons* to be *detained*, till
 “ he purges himself and *abjures*. And if any
 “ Person or Persons refuse to abjure, or after
 “ legal Conviction and Abjuration, do relapse,
 “ then the Sheriff of the County, or the
 “ Mayor, or Bailiffs of the Place to which
 “ the

(*m*) Burnet's *Hist.* of the Reformat. abridg. Page 334, and P. 26. Second Edit.

“ the Party belongs, shall be present in pre-
 “ ferring Sentence, when required by their
 “ *Diocesan*, or his Commissaries, and after
 “ Promulgation of the Sentence, receive, and
 “ do [or cause] them to be *burnt*, before the
 “ People, in an high Place (*n*).”

And as *Hereticks* were thus used, it was not fit the *Bible*, that made them *Hereticks*, should escape uncensured, nor indeed did it, For by

AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT AGAINST READING THE BIBLE, passed in the Reign of *Henry V.* 1414. It is enacted, That “ Whoever read the Scriptures “ in English, should forfeit Lands, Chattles, “ Goods, and Life. Should be condemned as “ *Hereticks* to God, *Enemies* to the Crown, “ and *Traitors* to the Kingdom. Should not “ have the Benefit of any Sanctuary. And, “ if they continued obstinate, or relapsed after “ Pardon, should first be *hanged* for *Treason* “ against the *King*, and then *burned* for “ *Herefy* against God (*o*).”

Now had the Bible been the wickedest Book that ever was wrote, the most lewd, the most seditious, the most blasphemous, how could the reading it have been prohibited by Penalties more severe?—Seize the miserable

(*n*) *Rustal's Statutes Henry IV.* 1401. *Rapin's Hist.* Vol. I. Page 491. Notes. Ed. Fol.

(*o*) *Bale*, Fol. P. 7. *T. Elmham*, P. 33. *Livius foro*, P. 7. in *Rapin's Hist.* Vol. I. P. 509. Ed. Fol.

miserable Wretch and all he has! — Blacken; — Hang. — Burn him. — But why? — What Evil hath he done? — He reads a Book confessedly Divine; — The History of the noble Acts of the Lord; — A Transcript of his Will, and of our Duty. — And for this, O ye gentle-natured Herd of *Rome!* does your *Interest* and *Charity* require, that he should suffer all that Man can make him suffer.

I could wish my Countrymen in general, would sometimes reflect upon these Things with that Seriousness they deserve; and thereby learn to be thankful, for these Days of *Light* and *Liberty* we have the *Happiness* to live in; wherein every one may “serve God “without Fear,” and in a Way he believes, he will accept; and is *delivered* from *those Enemies*, that would compel him to offer Sacrifices to the King eternal, and the Judge of all, which he is persuaded he detests, and are an utter Abomination to him; wherein he may, in Safety, enquire what the Will of God is, in the Book of God; that is, may receive Directions what he should do to be saved, “by the Mouth of his holy Prophets “which have been since the World began;” by that of his Son *Jesus*; and the Apostles of his Son; all which he knows are able and faithful Counsellors, and have *no Views* but for *his Good*.

But as Things derive their Importance from the Concern ourselves have in them, we, of these

these Times, are not sensible of the Blessing of *serviving God without Fear*. But should he ever, in his sore Displeasure, permit us to be deprived of it, we should then, with deep compunction of Soul, confess, that sad is the Dilemma; truly deplorable the Case, when, if I adore, Horrors of Conscience must be my Portion: If I do not adore, I must fall a Victim to the Vengeance of relentless Men.

The Result of what has been said is this: The Doctrine of Christ is divine: But the Church of Christ is human. A Mixture of Tares and Wheat. *A Society of Men, as prone to Vice, and as liable to Error as the other Sons of Adam*. Not the whole Church therefore, nor any Part of it, in any Age, is to be of any Regard, in Points of Religion truly so called, unless it can be made appear, that those Points were taught by Jesus Christ. That Commission granted the Apostles themselves, was to teach as they had been taught, was given with this express Limitation, *Teach all Nations,—to observe all Things, whatsoever I HAVE COMMANDED YOU* (p). In Things they have *no Commands* about, no greater ought to be their Authority, than that of any other sensible, well disposed Men.

Where then is this Doctrine of Christ to be found?

Where

(p) Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

Where indeed? but in those Books, wherein the History of his Life and Actions is contained.

How are those Books to be interpreted?

Not by fanciful Types, and Allegories. Not by an imaginary Law of Nature. Not by Analogy of Faith (*q*); or by the Tenets, Maxims, or Principles (*q*) of a Party. But as all other Laws, Writings, and Discourses are, and ought to be, interpreted, and understood; that is, according to the common Sense, and usual Acceptation of the Words; and the Tenor and Series of the Discourse.

But

(*q*) As a Specimen of this Way of interpreting Scripture, take the following Instance. *Augustine* lays it down as a Principle, that “*The Operations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are inseparable.*” *This is his because the Catholick Faith.* De Trin. L. I. C. IV. Armed with this Principle, he attempts this Passage in Mark xiii. 32. *Of that Day knoweth no Man, no not the Angels, NEITHER THE SON, but the Father.* The Son, saith *Austin*, knew it not, *so as to tell his Disciples.* Id. ibid. C. XI. which implies, that he did know it, gives our Saviour the Lye, and is not to exhibit the Sense of Scripture, but to wriggle, and writhe, and twist, and bend it to a Sense of his own, a Sense which the Words are utterly averse to. I say to a Sense of his own. For with all this seeming Submission to *Catholick Faith*, the good FATHER is *ultimately*, as really determined by *private Judgment*, as I am. His own private Judgment directs him to the Sense of his Principle, and to an Analogy with that Principle, does he *wire-draw* this *plain Scripture*. So that the only Difference between us, is, that I *view* it at *Hand*, and in its *true*, and *genuine Light*: He *peeps* at it, at a *Distance*, through the *false Medium* of *Catholick Spectacles*. Both judge for ourselves. I, according to the *common Sense* of the *Words*, and *Tenor* of the *Discourse*: He, as they can be *wrested*, to a *Consistency* with that *ill-devised Principle* of a *Party*.

But who is to interpret and be the Judge of them?

Every Body, as it is every Bodies Concern. And so plain in them, are all Things necessary to Salvation; all Things relative to our Duty to God, our Neighbour, and ourselves; and so often inculcated are they, and in such a Variety of Expression, that nothing more is requisite to the understanding of them, than due Attention.— And common Sense.— And an upright Mind.—

In matter of little Moment, such as Genealogies, Chronology, Accomplishment, or Meaning, of many of the Prophecies, or even of *St. Paul's* Debates with Jews and Gentiles: In these, and such as these, Men's Sentiments may differ, and each may abound in his own Sense, without Infringment upon Property; without Injury to another; hurt to himself; or Dishonour to God. And if the only infallible Judge of Controversies shall vouchsafe, at the last Day, to determine the Matters in Debate, then will it be soon enough. Would we but, in the mean Time, mind our *unquestionable Duty*; would we but live up to the Rules that are there *plainly* delivered; when the number of our Days is fulfilled, we may depart hence in Peace, and with well-grounded Hopes of a joyful Resurrection.

The *Bible* then, the *Bible*, is the *Religion* of *Protestants*; is the *Code* of the *Laws* of *Heaven*; and contains the *whole Doctrin* of *Christ*. Is able to make us wise unto *Salvation*: Is given by *Inspiration* of *God*, and is profitable for *Doctrin*, for *Reproof*, for *Correction*, for *Instruction* in *Righteousness*: That the *Man* of *God* may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good *Works*. 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16, 17.

In this Respect therefore, in a certain Degree, may *Jesus Christ* be said to save *Sinners*, in that he has pointed out to them the *Way* of *Duty*; has given *Directions* how they ought to behave in every *Relation*; has taught what they must do to be saved.

But to shew the *Way* would have had little *Influence*, unless he could have shewn it was a *Way* that *God* approved. And this likewise was made apparent by the *Miracles*, *Signs*, and *Wonders* which *God* wrought by him.

But though the *Way* we knew was right, and a *Way* approved by *God*, yet if no *Profit* or *Loss* occurred to those that did or did not walk in the *Paths*, little still would it have been regarded. For slow to act are we, when not impelled by *Pain* or *Pleasure*. *The slothful Man saith there is a Lion in the Way, a Lion is in the Streets* (r). An invincible Reason for sitting still, when such was his *Inclination*;
though

(r) Prov. xxvi. 13.

though not the Lion, but his Love of Ease determined him. So in the present Case, we might confess the Way plain enough, and that we had Directions from above to walk in it. Yet still should we enquire what Advantage thence to me? Will it not be vain to serve God? Or what the Penalty if I take my own Course, and please myself?

The Answer is, that from Disobedience will ensue the Loss of the Soul, Tribulation, Anguish, never ceasing Pain. If we follow the Rule prescribed, endless Happiness awaits us; what exceeds Imagination in *the Price (s) of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus; and we shall receive the Crown of Life, which the Lord hath promised unto them that love him (t).*

But what Security have we that this Promise will be made good to us? Is it not rather an Amusement? Hath any one returned back through the Gates of Death, after once he had passed them; or ascended from the Grave where all Things are forgotten?

Yes. The Author of our Religion did so. *God raised him up, having loosed the Pains of Death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (u).* The Witnesses to this Fact were Men that perfectly knew him before he suffered, that saw him after his Passion, not

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in

(s) Phil. iii. 14.

(t) James i. 12.

(u) Acts ii. 14.

in the Dark, but by Day-Light (*w*); not at a Distance, but in the same Room (*x*): eat with him (*y*); drank (*z*); and conversed with him (*a*). The Nature of the Fact required no other Qualities in the Witnesses, but Eyes to see, and Honesty to declare what they saw. The Men appear to be not defective in Understanding, not Enthusiasts, in Life irreproachable: Continued stedfast and uniform in their Testimony, God also bearing them Witness, both by Signs and Wonders, and divers Miracles, and Gifts of the holy Ghost (*b*). He therefore came from God, spake the Truths of God, and may infallibly be depended on. Is not only an Instance of the Resurrection, but thereby establishes that comfortable Truth that we also shall be raised. And, if our Lives correspond with his Doctrine, shall partake of such Joys, as Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor have entered into the Heart of Man to conceive (*c*).

But though the Way is plainly marked out, and our Reward for walking in it assured beyond Dispute, is it not impossible? Could we but hear of any one that had gone before us in it, more effectual might be his Example, than either his Precepts or Advice.

And in this Respect likewise does Jesus Christ save Sinners. We have him for an Example,

(*w*) John xxi. Luke xxiv. 29. (*x*) John xx. 19. 26.
 (*y*) John xxi. Luke xxiv. 43. (*z*) Acts x. 41.
 (*a*) Acts i. 3. (*b*) Heb. ii. 4. (*c*) 1 Cor. ii. 9.

Example, "Who did no Sin, neither was "Guile found in his Mouth;" who laid no Burdens upon others Shoulders, which he himself refused to bear; whose Rules are not more strict, than his Life was holy; and whose Precepts run parallel with his Conversation.

And amongst the other mighty Blessings that accrued to the World by his coming, this of exhibiting a perfect Pattern of Life, is peculiar to him. In the Old Testament we meet with no finished Character. And amongst the Heathen, most abandoned were their Gods. Their Priests worthy of such Gods. Their Philosophers, in Life how vitious? In their Writings how obscure? What Discord, what Contradiction? A Contest for Glory, not an Enquiry after Truth (*d*).

But supposing they had been wholly right, clear, full and unanimous in their Directions. What Proofs could they give that it would be pleasing to God to follow them? What Motives that could reach the Conscience? What Evidence of Reward or Punishment after Death? What Assurance of a Resurrection and a Judgment to come? No. It is "by the Gospel only that Life and Immortality is brought to Light;" that the Means to render them happy are explained; and Motives

(*d*) See Diogenes Laertius.

tives to excite our Endeavours are illustrated and enforced.

But is not this Example of a Nature too high for Man to reach? Is it not Presumption to think of resembling him who had “ the Spirit without Measure? ”

Our gracious Master enjoins no impossible Task, but proportions Duty to Ability. Inasmuch that though we are weak in ourselves, and have mighty Adversaries to contend with, yet still can we not be vanquished, but by our own Fault: Because we *can do all Things through Christ that strengthens us (e)*. And because *greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the World (f)*. If we ask, seek, and knock, that is, if we earnestly, and with Affection, desire it, the holy Ghost, the Spirit of God and of Christ, is ready, and pleased, to aid and assist us in repelling every Temptation, and discharging every Duty.

These then are some of those great Things Christ Jesus has done to save Sinners. He has pointed out the Way to true Religion. — Has demonstrated that it is a Way approved by God.—Has proposed the noblest Rewards for treading in its Paths. And denounced the heaviest Punishment upon all that take another Course. — Has given abundant Proof that his Promises and Threatnings will be faithfully performed and executed. — Has walked

(e) Phil. iv. 13.

(f) 1 John iv. 4.

walked in that Way himself, giving us an Example that we should follow his Steps.— And lastly, to obviate any Difficulties that may occur, has declared that, upon our humble Petition, the Holy Ghost will be ready, and pleased, to go along with us, and to support us, in our Passage.

And having thus explained, how Christ Jesus saves from Sin: The next Thing I have to do, is to shew how he saves from Punishment.

Since God created us we were originally his, and of common Right, was due to him, on our Parts, Love, Gratitude, Reverence, and Service. Instead of which, seduced by Views of greater Knowledge and Power, we revolted to the Father of Lyes, and thereby forfeited that Freedom we enjoyed in our Father's House; became Slaves to our Lusts; and Servants to him whom we obeyed, that is the Devil. Thenceforth Sin became our Profession; Sin was our Business, and its Wages Death. Proper Business, and suitable Wages, in the Service of such a Master. And such is the natural State of Man when fallen from God. Nor is there, *in Man*, a Possibility of recovering *himself* from such a State. He may cry out in the Bitterness of his Soul, *I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of Men? Why hast thou set me as a Mark against thee, so that I am a Burden to myself (e)?*

But

(e) Job vii. 20.

But what can remove that Distress, or restore him to a State of Innocence, or appease an offended God? Can Sacrifices and Offerings do the mighty Feat? What, in Truth, have any of them, in their own Nature, to recommend them? Can he offer to God any thing that can turn to his Profit, any thing that was not his before? Or is he that swore falsely, not perjured? He that stole, not a Thief? He that defrauded another, not a Cheat, because a Ram is slaughtered (*f*)? The sinful Act remains, nor has the Ram, naturally, any Influence, any Sort of Connection with it: And if the Guilt be removed, if the Punishment be remitted, are we to impute such a Blessing to the dead Ram, or to boast in our Works, as if we had paid an Equivalent, and the Debt was discharged? It is doubtless the Mercy of God that puts a Value upon it: It is his Grace that signs the Pardon. And thus it is, that *by Grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves: It is the Gift of God. Not of Works, lest any Man should boast* (*g*). Not but that all such Works as he enjoins ought to be performed, as the necessary Means whereby he conveys that salutary Grace. And to *exalt* Grace, or Faith, or *Christ* himself, at the Expence of good Works, or moral Duties, is to put asunder that which God hath joined; is to destroy the very End and Intent of our Saviour's

(*f*) See Lev. vi.(*g*) Eph. ii. 8, 9.

viour's coming into the World ; is to weaken the Powers of natural Conscience, that Arbitrer of God in the Breast of Men, and to make Religion hurtful.

And as Sacrifices are thus defective, so neither can Repentance, *in itself*, make perfect, *as pertaining to the Conscience*. Little more indeed does it amount to, than uneasy Reflections upon our own Imprudence ; than a sad confession that *one has been a Fool*. It will not give back the Fortune that has been idly squandered ; not restore Health, Reputation, Innocence. Not revoke an hasty Word, or an unguarded Expression ; much less will it bring to Life again a Person murdered. *David's* Repentance was sincere. His Sorrow from the Heart. And he did so no more. And his Confession, and strong crying for Pardon, is still upon Record (*b*). And is, perhaps, the finest of his Compositions. He thereby does *Penance* daily, *publick Penance*, and before Millions. This was all he could do. But did *Uriah* live thereby, or *David* cease to be a Murderer ? A Murderer must he ever remain, though he was to grieve for ever, and for ever suffer the Vengeance of eternal fire. Nor is it any thing but infinite Power, and infinite Mercy, that can wipe away the Stain, remit the Punishment, and administer Ease to the guilty Mind. From God does Repentance derive its Virtue, and is therefore valuable because he is

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(*b*) Psalm. li.

pleased to accept it. And to assure us that he would accept it, was one principal Point in the Commission of Jesus Christ. *I came, saith he, not to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance (i).* *The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus—to give Repentance unto Israel, and Forgiveness of Sins, say his Disciples (k).* Who likewise glorified God, when they understood that he had *also to the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life (l).*

And thus has our Saviour Jesus Christ offered himself, as a faithful Pilot, to steer us through the dangerous Ocean of Life, to the Haven of eternal Felicity. And if we perversely refuse his gentle Guidance; or, through an Inattention to his Directions, suffer *Shipwreck*: Still is there a *Plank* at Hand, which, if we lay fast hold of, will support and carry us to Shore.

In short. He has taught us the way of Life. To walk in, it is our Duty. But if we deviate, Repentance is required, and Repentance will be accepted. But as our Repentance is not so hearty, sincere, and uninterrupted, as it should be, *the Father of Mercy, and the God of all Comfort* will make up all our Deficiencies and Imperfections, by the perfect Innocence, and undeserved Sufferings and Death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. This is our final Consolation, that we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ
the

(i) Luke v. 32. (k) Acts v. 30, 31. (l) Acts xi. 18.

the Righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our Sins (*m*). By him hath God, of whom are all Things, reconciled the World unto himself, not imputing their Trespases unto them, having made him to be Sin for us who knew no Sin, that we might be the Righteousness of God in him (*n*).

(*m*) 1 John ii. 1, 2.

(*n*) 2 Cor. v. 18, 19. 21.

F I N I S.

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