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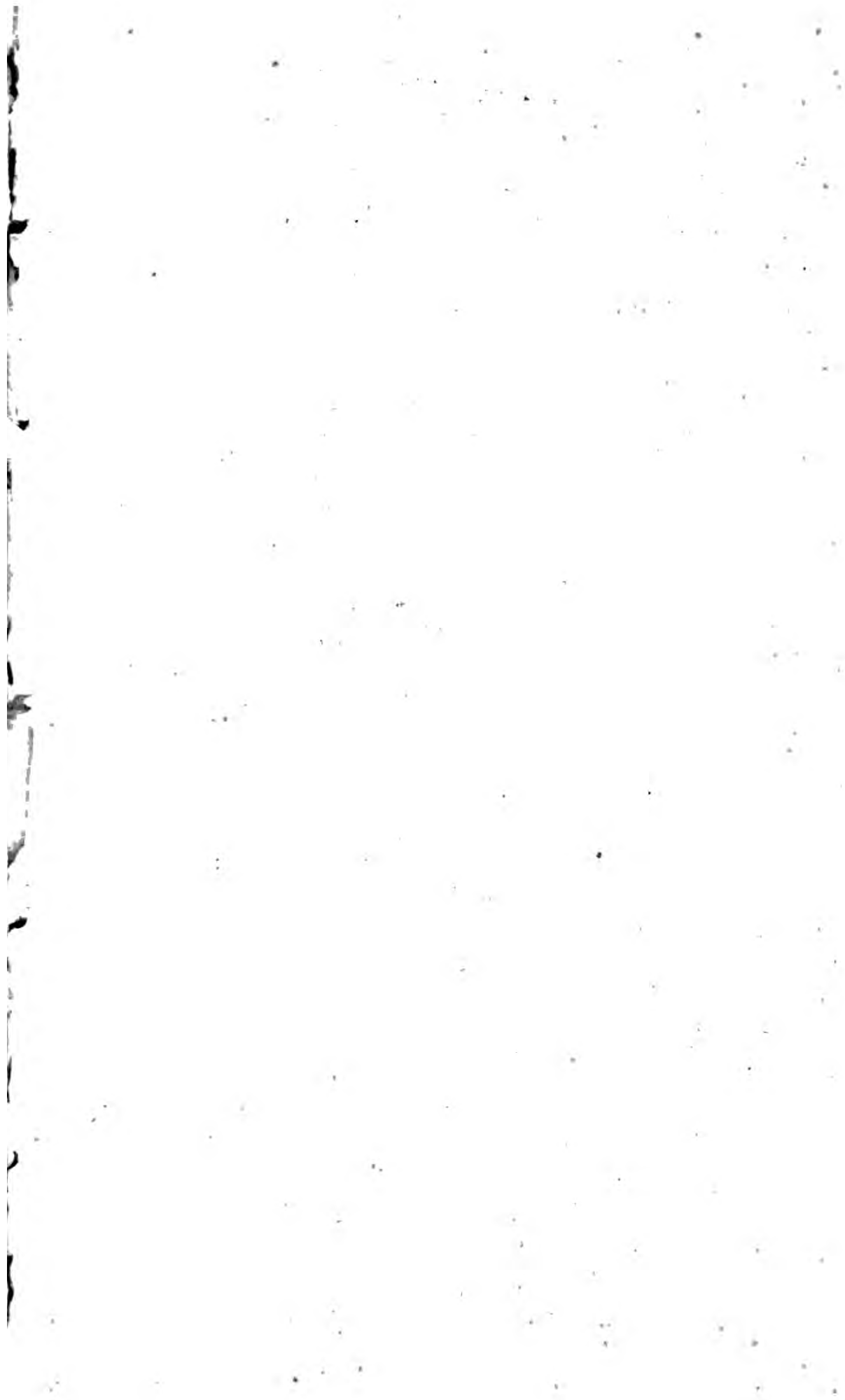
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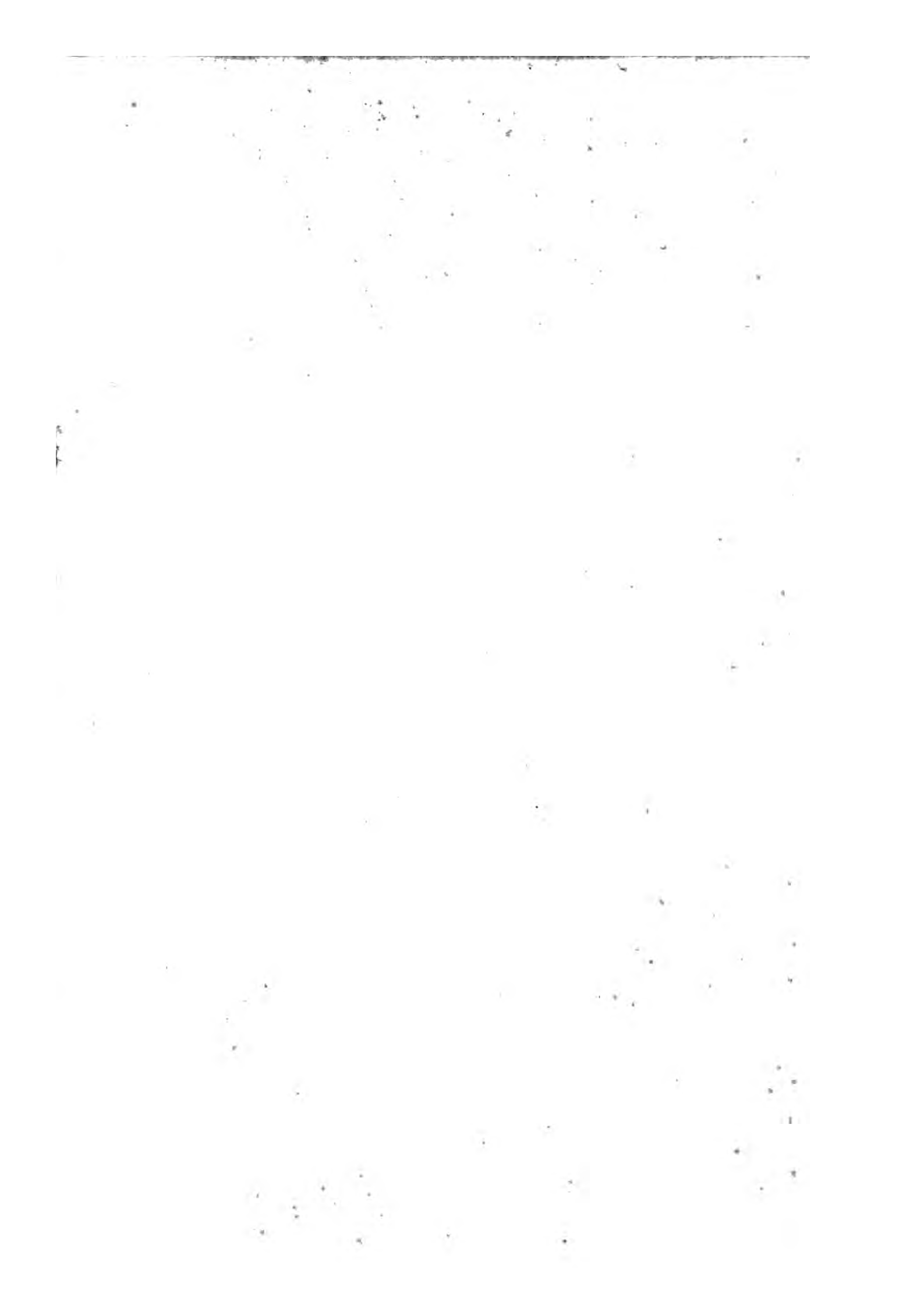
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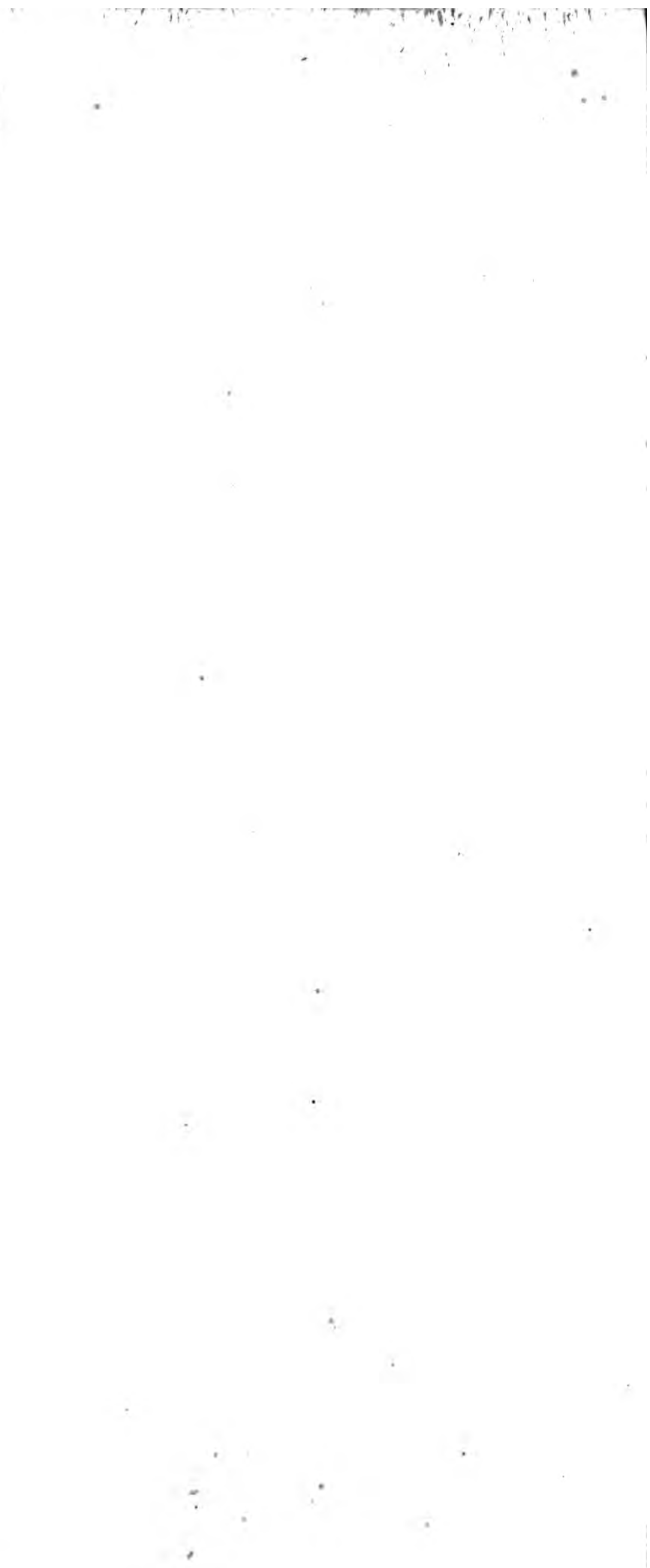
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Our SAVIOUR's
DIVINE
SERMON
ON THE
MOUNT,

CONTAINED

In the Vth, VIth, and VIIth Chapters of
St MATTHEW's Gospel,

EXPLAINED:

And the Practice of it recommended in divers
SERMONS and DISCOURSES.

In FOUR VOLUMES.

To which is prefix'd,

A PARAPHRASE on the whole
SERMON on the MOUNT:

And Two Copious Indexes annex'd; one of the Scriptures
explain'd, the other of the particular Heads treated of in
the Work.

By JAMES BLAIR, M. A.

Commissary of *Virginia*, President of *William and Mary College*,
and Rector of *Williamsburgh* in that Colony.

THE SECOND EDITION.

WITH

A Recommendatory Preface by the Reverend
Dr WATERLAND.

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S E R M O N



S E R M O N I.

M A T. VII. I.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

Ver. 2. For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Ver. 3. And why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brothers Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?

Ver. 4. Or how wilt thou say to thy Brother, Let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye; and behold, a Beam is in thine own Eye?

Ver. 5. Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brothers Eye.

Ver. 6. Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.

The First Sermon on this Text.



I SHALL not need to trouble you with the Connexion of these Words with those that went before, any further, than to acquaint you, that this is another Instance of the Deficiency of the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and of that

Part of Duty, wherein our blessed Lord would have our Righteousness to exceed theirs. As they were a sort of People, who thought themselves capable, and had a Right to admonish and reprove others; in the exercising of this Duty, they fell into some very gross Faults, which our Saviour thought it necessary to prevent in his Disciples; such as a too good Conceit of themselves, and too bad an Opinion of others; and consequent to these, the passing of rash Judgments on others, and taking upon them to correct, censure, and condemn them, when, in the mean time, they overlooked their own Faults, and could not endure to have them in the least observed or reprov'd. So much for the Connexion. I come next to consider the Words themselves. In them we have these *Three Things*.

1. A Prohibition of Censoriousness, or rash Judgment. *Judge not.*

2. An Enforcement of this Prohibition, by several Reasons, such as, (1.) That this Practice exposes us both to the Censure of Men, and the Judgment of God. (2.) That it is a Practice highly unbecoming us, who have so many great Faults of our own, to be so sharp-sighted as to our Neighbours, and so censorious of them. (3.) That we are very unqualified for administering Censure and Correction to others, while we are so guilty our selves, and so blind as to that Guilt. (4.) That this Practice is a clear Proof of our Hypocrisy. (5.) That there are two Qualifications carefully to be observed and complied with, before we attempt the duty of censuring others; one with relation to the Censurers, the other with

I.] *condemned.* MAT. VII. 1. 3

with relation to the Offenders. With relation to the Censurers, That they first find out and amend their own Faults. And with relation to the Offenders, That they be in such a State, as to be capable of receiving Benefit, and not likely to grow worse by our Admonitions and Reproofs.

3. The Antithesis, or opposite Duty to this Censoriousness, or rash Judgment; which consists in these Three. (1.) In a strict Examination and Amendment of our selves. (2.) In a Love and Charity to our offending Brother. (3.) In administering the Duty of Fraternal Correction to our Neighbour himself, in all Humility and Sincerity; instead of exposing him to the Reproach of others.

I. I begin with the Prohibition of Censoriousness, or rash Judgment; which, I suppose, will be sufficient for our present Consideration. But before I speak of the Prohibition, as considered in it self, it will not be improper to consider it as it has relation to the Scribes and Pharisees; both because that is the general Scope our Saviour is pursuing, the raising his Disciples to an higher Pitch of Duty, than that which was taught by the Scribes and Pharisees; and because the keeping them in our Eye, as our Saviour did, affords no small Help towards the Understanding of his Meaning in all these Duties: it being his plain Design in them all, to teach us these Duties in a perfecter Manner than they were taught by those Jewish Doctors. To consider then the Pharisaical Spirit in this respect, there are these following Particulars remarkable in it.

1. They had a great deal of Pride and Self-conceit; as if it had belonged to them to be Dictators to all others, and to be the common Observators and Censurers of others. This Pride was fed not only by a positive Contemplation of their own Virtues and good Qualities, and by a wilful Blindness as to all their own Faults and bad Qualities; but more especially by a comparative Contemplation of their Neighbour's Failings; as is very plain from the Pharisee's Devotion, which is all blended with his Pride, both positive and comparative, Luk. xviii. 11. *God, I thank thee, says he, that I am not as other Men are, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or even as this Publican.* There's his comparative Pride, and rash Judgment of others. Then follows his positive Pride, his Contemplation of his own good Qualities. *I fast twice in the Week, I give Tythes of all that I possess.*

2. They had in their Minds a great Contempt of, and a great Uncharitableness towards all other Persons, that were not of their own Sect and Party. It is plain from the Scope of that Parable, Luk. xviii. 9. that our Saviour spoke it *against some who trusted in themselves as being righteous, and despised others.* And who these were, appears plainly by introducing the Pharisee into the Parable, and representing him as acting such a Part: so that the despising of others was a Part of their Character, as well as the having too good an Opinion of themselves.

3. Agreeably to this inward Disposition of their Minds, they were very censorious of others; that is, they were both very apt to pass a Judgment upon their Neighbour; and likewise to be

severe in that Judgment; making Faults where there were none; and aggravating them where they were.

4. When they had made this rash Judgment in their own Minds, they did not content themselves to contemplate it there, but took all Opportunities to vent it in their Words and Actions; carrying themselves haughtily and superciliously to others: *Stand by thy self, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou*; Isa. lxxv. 5. was the Language of their Tongue as well as their Heart; then they made no scruple most unmercifully to slander, defame, and injure all that were not of their own Kidney; and to oppose them in all their Interests and Pretensions. And often these rash Judgments of theirs proceeded a great deal further, even to the stirring up of violent Persecutions against all that stood in their Way; thinking they did God good Service by so doing.

5. In all Companies they were the Dictators, the Observators, the Reprovers, and Monitors. It was a Crime for a Man to see with his own Eyes, and not with theirs; or to make use of his own Reason to any other Purposes, except to promote their Notions and Interests. They were a violent, unmerciful Party, which carried all down before them; and would cram their Sentiments right or wrong down Peoples Throats, or else there was no Quarter to any one that differed in the least from them.

6. In admonishing and reproving their Neighbour, their Aim was not so much his Edification and Amendment of Life, as the gaining him over to their Party; or if they could not compass that, the running him down, and exposing him.

One Thing perhaps ye may wonder at, in this Description of the rash Judgment of the Pharisees, that it seems to be rather a Description of some personal Faults, than of the Spirit and Principles of a Party; and therefore some may think that it doth not belong so properly to this Subject, where our Saviour is correcting the Pharisaical Righteousness. But I answer to this, that it is not their personal Faults, but the Spirit of the Party, our Saviour is here guarding against; and that all these Things I have mentioned are such, as had the general Approbation and Practice of that Sect; and therefore that it was exceeding proper and pertinent to mention them in this Discourse, where our Saviour is directly faulting that, in which the Scribes and Pharisees placed a great Part of their Righteousness and Holiness, namely, the false Zeal which led them so much to rash Judgments and severe Censures and Condemnations of others; and blinded them so much as to their own wrong Opinions and Practices.

Having thus discovered what Views our Saviour had in bringing in this Discourse against rash Judgments, even the same which he has been regularly pursuing from the 20th Verse of the 5th Chapter, as I have several Times observed, in explaining the particular Branches of that Discourse; namely, the training up his Disciples and Followers to a more perfect Way of Duty than was taught by the greatest Doctors among the *Jews*, the Scribes and Pharisees; this will help us not a little, in finding out the true Meaning of this Precept, or Prohibition, *Judge not*, to which I shall now apply my self; begging
your

your serious Attention, the Subject being full of Difficulty, and of so large Dimensions, that it will scarce be possible to handle it in its full Extent.

To begin then, The Word *to judge*, is one of that sort of Words, which tho' of themselves they are of a middle Signification, yet being frequently abused to wrong Purposes, are come at last, when applied to private Persons, to be understood in an evil Sense. But for finding out the true Sense of it in this Place, we are to consider, that in general an unjust Severity and Censoriousness is here understood, such as is designed to expose, wrong, or rashly and unjustly to condemn our Neighbour. This I gather both from our Saviour's general Intent, to correct the Spirit and Practice of the Scribes and Pharisees; and from his particular taxing of this Practice in this Place, with Blindness, Self-conceit, Hypocrisy, and want of Charity: and from some further aggravating Words joined to it in the parallel Place of St. *Luke*, *Luk. vi. 37.* from which I conclude, that Hardheartedness, Uncharitableness, Cruelty, and Unmercifulness, enter into the Character of the Judging here spoken of. The Words there run thus: *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*

Before I consider the Particulars of the Censoriousness or rash Judgment here prohibited, it will be necessary to remove from it some lawful or commendable Practices, which otherwise might seem to fall under these general Words, *judge not.*

1. *First* then, We are not in the least to understand, that the Office of Judges or Magistrates, was intended to be prohibited by these Words. For, *first*, our Saviour was now preaching to a Multitude of private Persons, shewing them their Duty. And therefore his forbidding them to judge or condemn, makes nothing against the Magistrate's Office it self; tho' no doubt it makes against a censorious or spiteful Execution of that Office: against an employing of publick Justice to the private Ends of Spite, Malice, or Revenge. We shall be the more convinced of this, if we consider, that in other Passages of Holy Scripture, the Magistrate's Office is established, and his Duty directed, that *he is not to carry the Sword in vain*, Rom. xiii. 3, 4. but to use it for the Terror of evil Doers, and for the Praise of them that do well. And we are always to interpret Scripture so, as that one Passage of it may not contradict another. The Quakers and Anabaptists at first made use of this our Text against the very Office of the Magistrate, before they had any City or Country of their own to govern. But now, wherever they have any such, they find a Necessity of appointing Judges and Magistrates: and know by Experience, that no Government upon Earth can subsist without them.

2. Nor is the Authority of any other Superiours over their Inferiours designed to be taken away or encroached upon by this Prohibition; notwithstanding this, Parents may and ought to administer Admonition, Reproof, and Correction to their Children; Masters and Mistresses, and Overseers, may by Authority judge of their Ser-
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vants Actions, and following the Rules of Equity and Discretion, may reward or punish, as before. The same may be said of Teachers and Scholars, Officers and Soldiers, Governours and Governed, who are all to take their Measures as to their Duty, from the known Laws of God and Man, and the laudable Customs of the Places where they live, and not to think themselves prohibited by this Rule, or hindred from judging according to the best of their Skill and Conscience; provided always, in the Exercise of their several Offices, they abstain from all Harshness, and Severity, and Censoriousness; which, as we shall see presently, is the Thing here prohibited.

3. Nor, *Thirdly*, is it designed by these Words, *judge not*, that any Man should not use a Judgment of Discretion as far as relates to the Conduct of himself and his Affairs. I ought, for Example, not to believe every Teacher that pretends to be guided by the Spirit of God as to his Doctrine; but *I must try the Spirits*, as well as I can, *whether they are of God or no*; 1 Joh. iv. 1. and order my own Practice accordingly. Solomon says, *Prov. xxii. 24. Make no Friendship with an angry Man, and with a furious Man thou shalt not go.* And St. Paul says, *2 Theff. iii. 6. We command you, Brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw your selves from every Brother that walketh disorderly.* Now, how can we know *the angry Man*, or *the disorderly Brother*, but by making use of our Judgment, in so far as relates to our own Conduct? And tho' we should happen to be mistaken, yet while our Judgment goes no further than this, that we judge it more proper for us to forbear
the

the familiar Conversation of such a one, till he break off some evil Habits, which we observe or judge to be in him; I say, tho' we may happen to be mistaken, and the Man may have repented, and become a new Man and we not know it; yet while we do not defame and expose him, but keep our Mind to our selves, and act according to the best of our Knowledge and Conscience, we do our Duty, and in that Case do not transgress against the Rule of my Text. Far less,

4. Are they guilty of the Breach of this Rule, who, in the Execution of their Office, do in ever so severe Terms exclaim against Vice in general, without applying to any Man, by Name or by Description, any otherwise than his Guilt may happen to discover him either to his own Conscience, or to others who know him guilty; so that it be done with a charitable Design, not of exposing, but of reclaiming. For this is a sacred Piece of Duty and Discipline often enjoined to them, who have the Charge of teaching and admonishing others. *I charge thee before God,* says St. Paul to Timothy, *2 Tim. iv. 1. who shall judge the Quick and the Dead at his appearing and his Kingdom: preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all Long-suffering and Doctrine.* And to Titus; *Tit. ii. 15. These Things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all Authority.*

5. Nor, 5thly and lastly, are they guilty of the Breach of this Rule, who with a Spirit of Meekness, and from a Principle of Charity, and with a Design to reform, and not to expose, perform the Duty of Fraternal Correction, that is, of admonishing and rebuking the Offending Brother,

Brother, as it is enjoined *Lev. xix. 17. Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine Heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour; and not suffer Sin upon him.* And *Luk. xvii. 3. If thy Brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.* And so in several other Passages of Holy Scripture. But there are so many Rules of Discretion to be observed in this Duty of *Fraternal Correction*, that it is no easy Matter to perform it aright. The Person to whom it is performed, should be capable of bearing it with Patience, according to the Advice in the latter Part of my Text, *Give not that which is holy unto Dogs, neither cast your Pearls before Swine; lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.* The Person who administers it should have no carnal Ends, but altogether spiritual, according to that Advice of the Apostle, *Gal. vi. 1. Brethren, if any Man be overtaken in a Fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one, then the Manner follows, in the Spirit of Meekness.* There must be nothing favouring of Pride, or Passion, or Clamour, or Bitterness, or Resentment; but the utmost Love and Charity employed in this Work; so that it differs exceedingly from the Spirit of Censoriousness and rash judging here prohibited; which now I come more positively and directly to consider wherein it consists.

In general, as I told you, I take it to consist in a *Censoriousness*; that is, a Love to find Fault; and this has commonly some bitter Root of Vice, from which it proceeds; such as Pride and Vanity, Malice and Envy, Resentment and Revenge, Cruelty, or delighting in Mischief, tho' often,

often, I confess, it flows from mere Custom and Thoughtlessness, and it breaks out in such Actions as prove dishonourable to God, and hurtful to our Neighbour, and feed our own Vanity or Uncharitableness.

This Description of the Vice may serve in general; but that we may have a more particular Notion of it, I shall endeavour to instance in the principal Characters and Expressions in which it uses to shew it self; for by them we shall come by a clearer Understanding of it, than by any general Descriptions whatsoever.

1. *First*, In this censorious Spirit there is always a secret Joy and Gladness to find fault; whereas in a good Man there is always the quite contrary Temper. The most charitable Man can't help sometimes his hearing and seeing such Things as tend to the forming a bad Character of his Neighbour; but then he sees and hears these things with sorrow and regret; both for the Dishonour done to God, the Danger to the Offender, and the bad Example to others, and heartily wishes the Repentance and Amendment of the Offender. And the Effect it has upon him, is a great Care and Contrivance to recover his Neighbour, and to stir up himself to a great Caution to refrain from the like Vices, knowing that he is subject to the like Temptations. But now the censorious Detractor looks upon all these things with other Views. He is glad that he can now have the better Opinion of himself, when there is so fresh a Foil to set him off; he is glad that so great a Disgrace and Mortification has happened to any noted Man or Woman of another Party or Interest; nay, his ill Nature doth

doth always secretly rejoice in his Neighbour's Follies and Misfortunes, and is glad to hear him exposed and blackened in his Reputation; and on the other Hand, is uneasy to hear any one commended; or to see any one shine with a Reputation that does perhaps outdo his own.

2. The censorious Man is forward to judge, without any Obligation from his Office; perhaps without any Clearness of Evidences, upon some idle Stories, or bare Suspicions, Surmises, and Suggestions: Whereas a charitable Man is very unwillingly drawn into any such Employ; he hates to encourage Tale-bearers and Busy-bodies, and such as he knows delight in reporting the worst Things, and in giving them the worst Turn they can of their Neighbour.

3. The censorious Man has a strong Bias and Inclination to find his Neighbour guilty; accepts of very slender Proof to any Thing that tends to his Defamation; sometimes makes up what is wanting in Fact, with his own malicious Suggestions and fruitful Invention. To be sure, an ill Story loses nothing at his Hand; he puts the worst Construction upon it that it will bear; and gives no grains of Allowance on the Side of the accused or calumniated Person; doth not so much as suspend his Judgment, or reserve an Ear for the Defendant; but greedily sucks in Calumny, and magnifies and improves it by a fruitful Imagination, till that which in himself would be a Mole-hill, in his Neighbour is a Mountain.

4. The censorious Person usurps the Ascendant in all Companies; vilifies every Man's Reason in comparison of his own, and every Man's Life in Comparison of his; thinks it impossible that

that any Man should be free of those Vices that he himself is addicted to ; values no Expedients but his own ; takes upon him to be the Observer, the Reprover, the Monitor, the Contriver, and Decider in every Thing ; it is a Crime for any other Man to have any Competition with him ; he must be the sole Dictator ; and if he could have his Will, by his own bare Authority would shut up every Body else, that they should have nothing to do, but to dance after his Pipe.

5. The censorious Man allows himself an uncharitable Sharpness in censuring other Mens Faults ; never reflecting on the Frailty of Human Nature in general, nor his own Errors and Follies in particular ; instead of taking gentle Methods with an Offender, such as are apt to lead him to Repentance, he runs him rather into Despair, by his Harshness and Severity. Instead of running out with Joy to meet and welcome a returning Prodigal, he scares him away with hard Words, and ill Usage ; as if he himself were not only free from that, and all other Sin at present, but secure that he should never be drawn away by Temptation hereafter : Whereas the merciful Man handles his Neighbour's Sores with a gentle Hand, and *restores him in the Spirit of Meekness*, Gal. vi. 1.

6. He who is addicted to this *Judging* and *Censoriousness*, is not contented to judge and condemn the evil Actions of his Neighbour ; but he commonly adds some aggravating Remarks and Aggravations of his own, with an intent to shew with what an evil Spirit and Intention he did them. He enters upon God's Prerogative, and judges of his Neighbour's Heart and Thoughts ;
and

and perhaps pronounces Sentence upon him, as to the reprobate State he is in at present; and perhaps too goes further, to judge of his final In-corrigeness and Impenitency; and so damns him to the Pit of Hell. Such a vast Degree of Malice is infused into this Temper, which yet the Person, in whose Breast it lodges, is not sensible of, and how he is in much worse Circumstances himself, than the Person he so liberally censures.

7. Another Character of this judging, censorious Temper is, that the Person in whom it resides, never keeps it to himself; he is impatient till he sets it abroad; not to the Offender, in the Way of Christian Admonition; nor to any good Friend of his, with an Intent that he should make that Use of it; but to his bitterest Enemies, at least to those he is sure will set it a going; and then all their Wits are employed to set it off, with all the Aggravations of artful Malice, suppressing whatever Circumstances might seem to extenuate the Crime, and laying together those that may heighten and blacken it; and contriving to make use of the whole so as to do the most effectual Disservice to the Person, and his Friends and Party, in their good Name, or any other Interest that is most precious and dear to them.

8. Another Character of this censorious Person is, that he endeavours to fix the Crime of every single Person upon his whole Party; and to load any Opinion which he has a Mind to blacken, with all the evil Consequences that can be drawn from the Errors and Follies of any of those that maintain it; which is a very unreasonable,

reasonable, as well as a very malicious, Way of Calumny.

9. And *Lastly*, This Spirit of rash and censorious Judgment, is near a-kin to Schism in the Church, Sedition in the State, and a downright Spirit of Persecution; it is commonly the Parent both of a Tongue and Paper War; it begets and feeds Parties; it is the Cause of an infinite Number of private Animosities, Quarrels, and Murders, and even of publick Persecutions, where the Slanderer has so much Interest with Persons in Power. Of all Men that ever have the Honour to be near to such Persons, they are the most dangerous for both Rulers and People; for if their Advice is followed, every Government will quickly become *an House divided against it self*, and then it is certain, *it cannot long stand*. So that this censorious Slanderer is the greatest Pest of Human Society.

So much for the Characters by which we may judge whether we are guilty of this Vice or no. But are there no Cases in which it may be lawful, even for private Persons, to judge and censure their Neighbour? I answer, That there are some Cases in which it may and ought to be done, but that great Care should then be taken, to do nothing out of Malice or Partiality, but to go by the Rules of Truth and good Conscience, and a sincere Aim at Justice and Charity. No doubt, when we are obliged to give an Account to our Superiors, either upon Oath or Honour, we ought not to deceive them with false Characters on the charitable, no more than the uncharitable Side. When we our selves are falsely accused, and have no other Way to clear
our

our own Innocence, but by discovering the Falshood of the Calumniator, there is not the least Doubt of the Lawfulness of that Practice; as when *Ziba* falsely accused his Master *Mephibosheth* to *David*, 2 Sam. xix. 26. it was, no question, very lawful for him to defend himself, though by exposing the Falshood of that wicked Servant. And this, all Casuists agree, we may do in Defence of the Publick, or of our Friends, as well as of our selves. An Historian, if he cannot do right to the Truth, without exposing Mens Faults, must prefer Truth to any private Regard whatsoever. Yet all this doth not hinder, but that we should be very cautious how we do any thing to hurt our Neighbour's Reputation and good Name; that we are never to do it falsely, or rashly; and even when we have the Truth of our Side, that we are not then to do it, if we can save his Reputation, without Injustice to our selves or others.

Thus now I have endeavoured to give you a Description of this censorious, rash Judging, which we are guarding against in my Text. I find Time will not serve to consider the Reasons of the Prohibition; nor the opposite Duty, which are both handled in the Words; which I must therefore refer to other Opportunities.

Now God bless what we have heard; and infuse into our Hearts this excellent Grace of Charity; I mean, Charity in judging in our Minds, Charity in speaking, and Charity in pardoning; as well as Charity in relieving. Of all which we have a noble Pattern in the Example of our Lord and Master Christ Jesus. To him, &c.

S E R M O N II.

M A T. VII. I.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

V. 2. *For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

The Second Sermon on this Text.

HA V I N G formerly read to you these Words, together with what follows on the same Subject, to the End of the *Sixth* Verse; I divided the whole into these three Heads of Discourse,

1. A Prohibition of Censoriousness, or rash Judgment. *Judge not.*
2. An Enforcement of this Prohibition by several Reasons.
3. The Antithesis, or opposite Duty to this Censoriousness, or rash Judgment, in several Particulars.

Now having at that Time spoke to the *First* of these, the Prohibition of Censoriousness, or rash Judgment, from these first Words, *judge not*; I proceed now to the *Second* Head of Discourse,

course, namely, the Consideration of the Reasons with which this Prohibition is enforced: and they are these *Five*; namely,

1. That this Practice of rash judging exposes us both to the Censures of Men, and to the Judgment of God.

2. That it is a Practice highly unbecoming us, who have so many great Faults of our own, to be so sharp sighted as to every small Fault of our Neighbours, and so censorious of them.

3. That we are very unqualified for administering Censure and Correction to others, while we are so guilty our selves, and so blind as to that Guilt.

4. That this Practice is a clear Proof of our Hypocrisy.

5. That there is an antecedent Duty requisite on our Part, before we take upon us to judge and condemn our Brother; namely, that we first find out and amend our own Faults, before we become Censurers of others. And that there is likewise another Qualification requisite on the Part of our offending Brother, before we take upon us to administer our Censures and Reproofs to him; namely, that he be in such a State, as to receive Benefit, and not to grow worse by our Admonitions and Reproofs.

It is only the first of these Reasons I intend now to consider, *viz.* That the Practice of rash judging exposes us both to the Censures of Men, and to the Judgment of God: for so much is implied in the Threatning annexed to this Prohibition. *Judge not, that ye be not judged*; and that according to our Charity or Severity with Men, God will deal with us, both by the Dis-

penfations of his Providence in this World, and by his final Judgment in the World to come. *For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

This is the first Consideration suggested by our Saviour, and a very terrible one it is, that this rash Judgment we pass on our Neighbour exposes us to severe Judgments on our selves. This Threatning is couched in such general Terms, that I must believe our Saviour meant it in the largest Sense; which accordingly I shall endeavour to explain and enforce; and to shew the Influence it ought to have on our Life and Practice.

I. As to the Sense of the Threatning, I shall comprehend it in these two Particulars.

1. That as to Mens Judgment and Censure, it is commonly severest on them, who are harsh and severe to others.

2. That God, in the Dispensations of his Providence in this World, and likewise in his final Retributions in the World to come, doth order Things so, that they who are forward to judge and condemn others unjustly, meet with Judgments suitable to their Sins.

1. One Thing meant by this Threatning is, that as to Mens Judgment and Censure, it is commonly severest on them, who are harsh and severe to others. It is a certain true Observation, that the keeping of a good Tongue gains many Friends, whereas the allowing our selves the Liberty to be sharp in censuring of others, doth at
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the long run draw down a great Shower of Odi-um upon our selves, and so makes our lives very uneasy. *What Man is he that desireth Life, says the Psalmist, Psal. xxxiv. 12, 13. and loveth many Days, that he may see good? keep thy Tongue from evil, and thy Lips from speaking Guile.* It is very natural for the censorious Man to meet with this Fate threatned in my Text, that is, of being as much censured and condemned himself, as he is apt to censure and condemn others. For, first, if we consider the Persons who are censured, we cannot believe but that it is a very high Provocation to them; and that they will endeavour to justify and defend themselves; and such a Justification is most easily made by detecting the Fals- hood of the Slander; and the very doing of that leaves an horrid Imputation on the Slanderer. And to meddle so far as this defensive Part comes to, even the best of Men think, and think justly, they may concern themselves, in wiping off an unjust Reproach: But the common Sort of Men go a great deal further than this; for they think they do not sufficiently justify themselves, unless they recriminate, and so endeavour to take away all Credit from the Slanderer, by shewing him in his own black Colours. I am far from justifying of this Practice; for this effectually shuts the Door to Reconciliation, and drives every secret Slander to an open Breach; nay, carries on Dif- ferences not by a fair War, but in an unfair py- ratical Way. Yet I must say, the first Aggres- sor in Slanders has of all Men the least Reason to complain of this; for it is but fighting him at his own Weapon. If he will begin and shoot poi-

soned Bullets, he has no Reason to complain that others follow, and do the same by him.

But it is not only the Person immediately injured by rash Judgments and Censures, who thinks himself concerned in this bad Usage. The censorious Slanderer is generally reckoned an Enemy to Mankind. Every Man is quickly sensible, how soon it may be his own Case; and how liable he is to be abused, in a Way against which there is no Guard or Defence. And therefore the Slanderer is very inconsiderate and short-sighted, if he thinks his Injury will only reach the Person against whom it is immediately intended; it reaches all Men in general; and it will certainly reach himself at last, and be paid Home with Interest into his own Bosom. As if a dishonest Trader should not make an universal Practice of cheating every Body, but only here and there one, against whom he has the fairest Opportunity; the Effect of this would not terminate in the unjust Benefit he would make of those few; or the just Odium he would incur from them: but he would quickly find, by the Decay of his Trade, that he has got the general bad Character of an unfair Man in his Dealing, and that all People are upon their Guard against him; and would suspect him, even when he uses them well. It is no hard Matter to apply this that I have said of the unfair Dealer, to the Slanderer; how he will quickly lose himself, and be reckoned a common Enemy of Mankind, and his false Characters will lose all their Venom; for in a little Time no Body will believe them; not his true ones neither. He will find at last that Mankind are agreed in nothing more about him,
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than to believe nothing that he says; and that in Justification of this, finding he is a Man of a prostitute Reputation in many Things, they will suspect him to be so in every Thing; and then he will find by Experience, that there was some Truth and good Sense in the Threatning of my Text; *Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

2. Another Thing meant by this Threatning in my Text is, that God, both in the Dispensations of his Providence in this World, and in his final Retributions in the next, will so order Matters, that they who in their Judgments and Censures are harsh and uncharitable to others, shall meet with Judgments suitable to their Sins; that is, such as have a greater Mixture of Severity than Mercy.

(1.) I begin with the Dispensations of Providence in this World. It is true, God does not always punish Sinners visibly in this Life; but the Wicked often prosper in this World; for if all had their visible Punishment here, there would be little Occasion for a solemn Day of Judgment hereafter; yet God thinks fit often, for the Vindication of his own Honour, to make Examples of Sinners in this World; and such Examples, that their Sin is legible in their Punishment. And particularly in this Sin of rash judging or condemning, all Histories are full of Instances of this sort of Sinners exemplarily punished in their own Way. This *Adonibezek* confessed, when he came to have his Thumbs and great Toes cut off in his Captivity, *Judg. i. 6. Three-*

score and ten Kings, having their Thumbs and great Toes cut off, gathered their Meat under my Table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. Haman had misrepresented and slandered the Jews to King Abasuerus, to that degree, that he had obtain'd a cruel Edict to murder them, and particularly he had prepared an high Gallows for Mordecai; but it pleased God to reverse all these wicked Designs, and to bring them upon his own Head. He was forced to do Honour to Mordecai; and the Jews had the Slaughter of their Enemies; and he himself was hanged on the Gallows he had prepared. But it is needless to multiply Examples. This was so common an Observation, that it is frequently used as a Proverb in the Jewish Writings, that *With what Measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again.* And, *He that digs a Pit to catch another, commonly falls into it himself.* The Lord is known by the Judgment which he executeth, says the Psalmist, Psal. ix. 16. *The Wicked is snared in the Work of his own Hands.* It is very rare, I believe, that the censorious Detractor and Slanderer escapes severe Punishment in this World; for I know not any thing whatsoever that makes more Enemies, or stirs up more lasting Resentments, or is followed with more fatal Consequences. And it is often observed, that if an Enemy is ever so despicable at present, Providence so orders Matters, that some time or other it is in his Power to retaliate and make his Friendship valuable. The World is so full of Changes and Revolutions, that there is no Man or Party ever so much depressed, but that the Face of Affairs has its Changes, and it is in the Power of the same Persons to revenge them-

themselves of all the Affronts and Injuries that have been offered them by all the most railing *Rabshakebs*. And therefore it is a Part of Wisdom, to restrain that Wantonness of Wit or Malice, which inclines us to play with Mens Names and Reputations, either in the Way of Calumny, Satire, or Ridicule; for besides the Sin of it, it is much safer and more prudent for our own Interest, to put the best and most candid and charitable Constructions on all our Neighbour's Actions, assuring our selves, that whenever we do otherwise, we are only laying Snares, which some time or other will entrap our selves. But this is not the worst of it: For,

(2.) The terrible Retribution which shall be made to this Sin in the future Judgment, is a much greater and more terrible Consideration to scare all People from the Commission of it. And this is what I think, is principally meant by this Threatning in my Text: *With what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again;* q. d. if ye are so severe and uncharitable to others, ye shall meet with the same Judgment without Mercy, at the Hands of Almighty God; according to that Observation of the Psalmist, *Psal. xviii. 25. With the Merciful, thou wilt shew thy self merciful; with an upright Man, thou wilt shew thy self upright; with the pure, thou wilt shew thy self pure; and with the Froward thou wilt shew thy self froward.* Meaning, that God will repay Men in their own Coin; either in this World, or in the World to come. And therefore as many of this, and all sort of Sinners, as die impenitent, without being punished in this Life, we
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may be sure such shall not escape unpunished in the World to come.

But because some may be apt to think that this Sin of rash judging is so common and trivial, that it is not probable it is of the mortal Kind; I shall therefore here consider some of the chief Aggravations of it, which, if they were more duly reflected on, Men would change their Opinion of the innocent Nature of this Sin, and count it one of those that is threatned with Damnation.

I. *First* then, Let us consider, that by this rash judging and condemning of our Neighbour, we invade God's Prerogative. This sort of Judgment belongs properly to Him, and his Vicegerents, the Ecclesiastical and Civil Judges and Magistrates. And to them it belongs only, when the Things judged come to be Overt-acts, well attested and proved, and they are regularly fitting in Judgment upon them, and give the Defendant a full Hearing; which has no Relation to these rash Judgments condemned in my Text. These are Things commonly for which they are answerable only at God's Tribunal; being usually of such Things, as either human Laws have taken no notice; or if they have, that there is not sufficient Proof to make them answerable at their Tribunals; or perhaps, the rash Judgment relates to the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart, which are immediately under God's Inspection. And therefore the Apostle's Question, *Rom. xiv. 4. Who art thou that judgest another Man's Servant?* is a very proper Reprimand. And as he is only answerable to God, so the Person guilty of this Sin doth rashly likewise anticipate the Time of that answering; God is pleased to wait
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the proper Time; doth not take Advantage of us upon the first Trip, but gives us time to consider and repent. And certainly this is another Aggravation of this Sin, that we treat our Neighbour more severely than God thinks fit to do. He commands us *to judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come*, 1 Cor. iv. 5. And there is a great deal of Reason why this Hastiness to judge should be avoided. That which we may think a grievous Fall, may be nothing else but some stumbling or staggering; and God is able to make him stand for all that; and will do it too, if he is not wanting to himself in begging and making use of the Grace of God. This the Apostle teaches in that forecited Place, *Rom. xiv. 4. To his own Master*, says he, *he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand.* Then there are some Things which God has expressly left to himself, as knowing our Insufficiency for such Judgments, and that if we attempted them, we should do a great deal more Harm than Good; as in the Parable of the Tares, *Mat. xiii. 29.* The Servants are forbid to gather them up, for a very good Reason, *Least while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up also the Wheat with them. Let both grow together until the Harvest: and in the time of Harvest I will say to the Reapers, Gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them, but gather the Wheat into my Barn.* But we being much more forward for this Work of judging and condemning than God, though so ill qualified for it, are for passing our rash Judgments and Censures at present, and by so doing, as our Saviour foretold, through our Rashness and Unskilful-

skilfulness, do a great deal of Prejudice to the good Corn it self.

2. Let us consider, That by this rash judging and censuring, we are guilty both of Injustice and Uncharitableness towards our Neighbour.

It is unjust to usurp a Jurisdiction over others, without lawful Authority. It is unjust to determine in such Causes, the Equity or Iniquity of which depends upon an Inspection into the Heart and Thoughts; a Thing of which we are not capable. It is unjust to make so light of one's Reputation and good Name, which is a Thing that all good and wise Men set a great Value upon; and which commonly has a principal Influence in the making or marring one's Fortune in the World.

And as this Practice of rash judging is highly unjust, it is no less uncharitable. The better half of Charity, I think we may safely say, consists in thinking and speaking well of our Neighbour; for the other, of relieving him in his Wants and Necessity, is much more limited both by the Object, the Necessitous being but a small Part of the Whole; and by the Subject, the Narrowness of our own Circumstances. But this other Charity, in thinking and speaking well of our Neighbour, is altogether boundless and unconfined; for as to the Object, it takes in all Men and Women, of whom we have any occasion to think or speak; they are all somehow or other Objects capable of this sort of Charity; and then for the Subject, it is altogether inexhaustible. Let us bestow ever so much of it on some Objects, we are never the poorer; but

but have still as much left for others. Now that this censorious judging, and rash condemning of our Neighbour, is inconsistent with that grand Duty of loving our Neighbour as our selves, there cannot be the least doubt. For Charity disposes us to be gentle, meek, patient, kind, and merciful in all our Dealings with our Neighbour; it inclines us to hide and smother, to lessen or excuse, to pass by and pardon our Neighbour's Faults and Failings. Charity seeketh no Mischief; it covereth all Things; it beareth all Things. It regardeth our Neighbour's Credit, Interest, Convenience, and Satisfaction, and all his other Advantages; and therefore will inflict no Censure, will impress no black Character, more than Duty and Necessity do absolutely require. But now the censorious Person in my Text, makes it his Business to do all the Hurt he can to his Neighbour's Reputation and other Interests himself; and to stir up as many others as he can to be of the same Spirit and Temper; and so is in an high Degree answerable for all the bad Effects of Malice and Hatred in them, as well as in himself. And this last is a terrible Aggravation; for suppose he should repent himself, he may endeavour to do Justice to the Person he has injured, by undeceiving those who have been led into Error and Uncharitableness through his means; but how much further the Mischief may have spread through their means, that he misinformed and seduced; and their means that they have seduced; and so on *in infinitum*, is a most dismal Consideration.

3. Let us consider that in respect of our selves, we betray a great many bad Qualities, when we habituate

habituate our selves to this Vice. To instance in a few: This argues a great Pride and Self-conceit; for this Humour of prying so wistfully into, and censuring so severely our Neighbours Faults, is not more owing to any other Cause, than that we are willing and desirous to preserve in our own Minds the highest Idea of our selves that may be. And because we have not good Deeds enough of our own to raise it to this height, we take all the Assistance we can from the bad Qualities and Actions of our Neighbours, to increase and feed a comparative Pride in our selves, and a vilifying Contempt of them.

This Temper likewise argues a great Disingenuity and want of Candour and Sincerity in our own Spirits; for these Persons are under a strong Bias to interpret their Neighbours Actions in the worst Sense, being blinded with Pride, Malice, and Envy.

This Temper likewise argues Abundance of ill Nature, and delighting in Mischief; for it is a great Satisfaction to that Sort of People to make and find out Faults. They are of a vulturous Disposition, exceeding sharp scented to smell out Carrion, and then they delight to feed upon it, till they are quite glutted; and then rest a little, and at it again.

This ill Nature, and Hatred of their Neighbour, is likewise very apt to break out in all Acts of Cruelty and Severity that are in their Power; and goes often to the highest Acts of Murder and Persecution. And therefore it is no wonder that our Saviour extends the Sixth Commandment, *Mat. v. 22. Thou shall do no Murder*, to a Prohibition of inward Anger and Hatred. It
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is the same Root and Principle, that causes severe Censures in private Men, which produces sanguinary Laws, Dragoonings, and Burnings in Men of Power; and therefore it is no Vice of an ordinary Dye.

Lastly, It is always joined either with supine Incogitancy, or a great deal of Malice. If they see not the evil Consequences of ruining their Neighbours Reputation, it argues a vast deal of Stupidity and Inconsideration; but if they do see these Consequences, and yet will go on with their rash Censures and Calumnies, then it argues, what is a great deal worse, a vast deal of Malice, enough to unqualify them for the Society of the blessed, which requires the quite contrary Temper, the being in Charity with all Men. Thus we see what Reason the Persons who are addicted to this Vice of rash judging and censuring have, without Repentance and Amendment, to expect a severe Reckoning and Retribution in the World to come. For if Pride, and Malice, and Cruelty, and Injustice, and Uncharitableness, and Insincerity, and Impiety, (all which I have shewed to be involved in this Temper,) do not deserve Hell, without Repentance, I know not what does.

I shall not detain you, to shew how Candour and Charity to our Neighbour, may expect to be rewarded with God's merciful Retribution in the World to come. It is enough to acquaint you that this follows by the Rule of Contraries; and that this is likewise included in the Text; *With what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* For it is both a Promise and a Threatning; and therefore will, I trust, both
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work upon our Hopes and Fears, by the one, to draw and invite us to our Duty; and by the other, to scare us from the contrary Practice.

I shall only add a very little by Way of Application, and so have done.

1. Let none of us pretend to remove this Guilt from our selves, and fix it on our Neighbours. This Crime of rash judging, is a Crime alas, of which we are all more or less guilty; we are all too apt to censure our Superiours; to insult our Inferiours; and to envy our Equals. And these bad Inclinations in our Hearts, are very apt to break out in rash Judgments and Calumnies; and therefore the best use we can make of what we have heard, is to let our Neighbours alone, and to judge and condemn our selves, and to set about Repentance and Amendment.

2. Since *Life and Death*, as *Solomon* says, are in the Power of the Tongue, and the good Government of the Tongue is made easy by the abounding of Charity in the Heart, let Love and Charity be one of our principal Studies. Ye know it is the chief Character or Mark, whereby our Saviour would have his Disciples distinguished. *By this*, says he, *shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love one for another.* If this noble Principle governs in our Hearts, it will be fruitful in an infinite Number of good Words and Actions, and put us on our Guard against ill Offices to our Neighbour in both

3. But if we know no good to say of our Neighbour, let us be silent, rather than feed our Malice with discovering his Nakedness, and delighting our selves with his Sin and Folly.

II.] *Censoriousness.* MAT. VII. 1, 2. 33

But if we speak of it at all, let it be with a tender and charitable Design. Let us grieve and mourn when we see his Transgressions; let us pray to God for his Repentance and Amendment; let us contrive by our selves, or others that are more capable, to administer the Duty of fraternal Admonition and good Counsel, if there is any Probability that he is capable of it: at least from his Example let us take warning to our selves, and likewise caution others under our Care, to be guarded against the like Temptations. These are the Christian Uses we are to make of our Neighbour's Failings, instead of proclaiming or insulting over his Sin or Misery.

Now God of his infinite Mercy endow us with this charitable Temper, for his dear Son Jesus Christ's Sake. To whom, &c.



S E R M O N III.

M A T. VII. 3.

And why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brothers Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?

V. 4. *Or how wilt thou say to thy Brother, Let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye; and behold, a Beam is in thine own Eye?*

V. 5. *Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brothers Eye.*

The Third Sermon on this Text.

NOT to trouble you with Repetition; our Saviour is here arguing against the Sin of rash judging; a Sin, which the Scribes and Pharisees of that Time were very guilty of; and a Sin, alas! which is confined to no one Party or Sect; but runs through all Parties, all Ranks, and almost all Persons, in all Ages of the World; but never reigned more than at this Day.

The *First* Reason whereby our Saviour dehorts from this Sin is, that rash Judgments of our Neighbour expose us both to the Censures of
I Men,

III.] *in our Brother's Eye.* MAT. VII. 3. 35

Men, and to the Judgment of Almighty God, both in this World and in that which is to come. *For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* This *First Reason* I considered at the last Occasion; and proceed now to some other Considerations, tending to the same Purpose, contained in the Words I have read, which I shall speak to, as they lie in Order.

II. The *Second Reason* then, for guarding us against this Vice, I observed in the Words, was this, that it is a Practice highly unbecoming us, who have so many great Faults of our own, to be so sharp-sighted as to our Neighbours, and so censorious of them. *And why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brothers Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye?*

This Reason is proposed with diverse sharp, aggravating Circumstances; all which tend to shew the great Unreasonableness of this Vice, which therefore deserve our more serious Consideration; particularly these *Four*: which I design for the Subject of our present Meditations.

1. That the Person addicted to this Sin of rash judging and censuring, is described here to be guilty of greater Faults himself, than are in the censured Person. His Sins are compared to a Beam; the others to a Mote.

2. That he is represented as not endeavouring to see and find out his own Faults, which it is his Duty to do; but over diligent in prying after his Neighbour's, which he neither ought, nor

36 *The Beam in our own Eye ; the Mote* [SERM.
can well discover, while he labours under
such an high Degree of Pride and Self-conceit
himself.

3. The Vice is further aggravated, in regard
of the Person against whom it is committed ;
Thy Brother ; equal in Dignity ; and that ought
to be tender and dear to thee on Account of
that Relation.

4. The Interrogation why he thus pries where
he ought not to look, and looks not at Home,
where he should use a diligent Inspection ; shews
that he has no good Motives and Intentions in
so doing ; for the Interrogation carries the Force
of a violent Negation.

I. The Persons addicted to this Sin of rash
judging and censuring, are represented here as
guilty of greater Faults themselves, than are in
the censured Person. Their Sins are compared
to a Beam ; the others to a Mote. *And why
beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brothers
Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine
own Eye ?* This is one great Instance of that sort
of Hypocrisy, which our Saviour thought de-
served most to be reprov'd in the Doctors of
those Days, that overlooking great Matters, they
spent all their Zeal about Things of little or no
Consequence. They were very nice in Exter-
nals, the ceremonial Part of Religion, but inward-
ly full of Pride, Malice, Cruelty, and Uncha-
ritableness. Now I am afraid, if we enquire,
we shall find a good deal of this Spirit and Tem-
per among all the greatest Pretenders to Reli-
gion, and that both in Doctrinals and Morals.
Is not this too common, and much to be la-
mented in all Parties of Christians, that they
lay

III.] *in our Brother's Eye.* MAT. VII. 3. 37

lay greater Stress upon some of those little Points, in which they differ from one another, than upon the great Points of Christianity in which they are agreed? And consequently they are much more apt to censure and blame one another, for any one of these small Differences, than to love one another for their Agreement in the great Points of Christian Doctrine, and Morals. Then as to Christian Duties, are we not more apt to censure a Man for every the least Failure in a Matter of mere Decency, and Civility, than in a Matter of downright Vice, especially those more spiritual Vices of Pride, Malice, Envy, persecuting Zeal, and the like, which have terrible bad Consequences in the World? But further, that the Vices of Censurers and rash Judges of other People, are more grievous than the Faults of the censured, will appear from these two or three Considerations.

1. That commonly the Causes from which Censoriousness proceeds are very bad, *viz.* inward Pride, Self-conceit, Hatred of our Neighbours, a Malignity of Nature, a Desire to expose others, and to set off ourselves.

2. That commonly it has exceeding bad Effects and Consequences, in fomenting Differences and Divisions, in raising Persecutions, in promoting Acts of Injustice, and in undermining the very Foundation of all Charity, I mean, Love and Charity in the Heart.

3. Because there is often some secret great Sin, which the proud, censorious Person lives in; for the better hiding and concealing of which, he takes upon him to censure and reprove the lesser Faults of other People, on purpose that by that

Means he may divert his Mind from the Thoughts of his own Sins; and be thought a Person of extraordinary Piety by others.

II. This censorious Person is represented here in my Text, as one that doth not so much as endeavour to see and find out his own Faults, which it is his Duty to do; but over diligent in prying after his Neighbour's, which it is not his Business to enquire after; nor can he well discover them, while he labours under such an high Degree of Pride and Self-conceit himself. His not seeing with respect to himself, and his wishful looking with respect to his Neighbour, are both here noted. And indeed, it is no Wonder that the one is the Cause of the other. A Man cannot be both much abroad, and much at home. He that is busy, prying into his Neighbour's Faults, cannot be so well versed in his own Infirmities as he ought. He wants both the Time, and the Attention and Application that are necessary for it. Now what a Degree of Unhappiness this is, let us a little consider. We could soon apprehend the Evil of this in the Management of a Temporal Estate. If a Man never looked after his own Affairs, but busied himself entirely abroad, every one would quickly tell what would become of such a Man. Suppose a Man were so well versed in all the Papers that give any News or Intelligence of remote Countries, that he were fit to make a Secretary of State to the Grand Seignior, if he understood nothing of the Affairs of his own Country, or of his own Estate, would not every one confess that such a Man's Knowledge

ledge and Care are wrong placed? And if this holds true in Temporals, it doth much more so in Spiritu-als. For in the Affairs of this World, a Man may have his Place supplied by Attornies and Deputies; which cannot be in the Concerns of our Souls, which God will require of every Man himself. This careful Inspection into our own Heart and Life, is the Foundation of all our other religious Concerns. And therefore whatever obstructs it, should be very carefully watched and guarded against. And of all Things of that Nature, there is none has a greater Influence on this Neglect of our Souls, than the busying ourselves unnecessarily with that which doth not belong to us, our Neighbour's Faults or Infirmities.

But is it then a disallowable Thing to take any Inspection into our Neighbours Lives and Actions; and particularly to enquire into their Sin and Folly? There is some Difficulty in this Matter; and therefore I think it worth while to consider it a little more particularly.

1. *First* then, There are some Persons, who, by their Office and Station, not only may, but ought to have an Inspection into the Lives and Manners of Men. Parents should have an Inspection over their Children; and Masters and Mistresses of Families over their Servants: Pastors are to have so far an Inspection into their Peoples Lives and Consciences, as to be able to give them proper Advices in publick, or in private, as far as they have Access and Opportunity, in Sicknes or in Health. Magistrates too, have as far an Inspection as relates to the publick Peace and Quiet; and Mens publick Actions, as far as they

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fall within the Cognizance of the Laws, fall under their Care. And the Christian Religion is so far from discouraging Men to act according to their several Stations and Callings, that it greatly encourages a Diligence in every Station and Relation, though still under the Direction of the great Christian Rules of Humility, Prudence, Justice, Charity, and Mercy. But,

2. Besides these Persons, who by their Office have a particular Inspection over others, there is another Christian Inspection, which, if duly limited, must be allowed all Men, both in order to their own Preservation, and in order to the Duty of Fraternal Correption and Admonition. All the Difficulty is, to distinguish right between the prying in my Text, in order to this rash judging, and the other commendable Inspection for our own, or our Neighbour's Edification: And though it would be too great a Digression to handle this Subject here at full Length, it may not be improper to observe these few Bounds of Distinction.

(1.) As ye may observe from what has been just now said, there is a great Difference between the Designs of the one, and the other, in their observing their Neighbour's Behaviour. The one doth it like an Enemy, who searches out the weakest Parts of the Garrison, that at them he may make his Assault; the other doth it like a Friend, who observes them, that he may repair and fortify them better. The one enquires into his Neighbour's Faults, that he may upbraid, insult, injure, or undermine him; the other, like a Physician, that he may cure them, or at least
save

save himself from them, if they are catching and infectious.

(2.) There is a great Difference in the Degrees of their Enquiry; the one diligently pries into all Secrets, spies out every the least Mote, as my Text says, in his Neighbour's Eye, accomplishes a most diligent Search: The other, though no negligent Spectator of what is exposed to publick View, is so much taken up in minding his own Affairs, and the State of his own Soul, that he doth not enquire into the Secrets of other Peoples Lives. *What is that to thee?* said our Saviour to *Peter* (when he asked him, *Lord, and what shall this Man do?*) *follow thou me*, John xxi. 21, 22. And *St. Peter* himself forbids to be *busy bodies in other Mens matters*, 1 Pet. iv. 15.

(3.) A third great Difference between these two Observers is, that the one is censorious, and puts the worst and hardest Constructions on every thing; the other, the most fair and charitable. He is sure to make no Faults where there are none, and to make them no greater than they are, and to ballance Faults with all the Good he can find, to put in the other Scale.

(4.) They are very differently affected with what they observe of their Neighbour. The one rejoices at the Faults, and is displeas'd at the good Things he observes in his Neighbour. The other is of a quite contrary Spirit; he rejoices to find any Good; and is griev'd when he looks upon the Transgressors.

(5.) They make quite different Uses of the Faults they observe in others. The one exposes them, takes all Opportunities to improve them

to

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to his Neighbour's Prejudice, and applauds himself in comparison with him. The other conceals his Neighbour's Faults and Infirmities; prays for, and endeavours his Amendment; and from others, takes Example of such Things as may be of use in the ordering of his own Life and Conversation. Thus much may serve for Explication of our Duty in this Particular; I mean, how we are to govern ourselves with relation to the observing of our Neighbour's Faults.

But then as to the other Part of the censorious Man's Character, his Blindness as to his own Vices, here described by his not seeing the Beam in his own Eye; we are to remember, that there is a much greater Degree of Care requisite to observe our own Faults, with the several Aggravations of them, in order to our Repentance and Amendment. We may be as gentle as we please to the Errors and Faults of our Neighbours; nay, while we consider that no Man is free from Failings, it is commendable to pardon many small Faults in one another. But it is much more allowable, I may say necessary, to be severer to ourselves. We know a great deal worse by ourselves, than we can know by others. We may know our own Hearts; but cannot know the Hearts of other Men. We may know what good Instructions and Admonitions have been given to ourselves, and what inward Checks of Conscience we have had for our Sins; so that we may safely judge and condemn ourselves; but if we should offer to do so by our Neighbour, we should invade God's Property. Besides, there is no great Danger if we should

III.] *in our Brother's Eye.* MAT. VII. 3. 43

should have a better Opinion of our Neighbour, and a worse Opinion of ourselves, than is exactly true and just. An Error herein is the safest of all Errors, as tending to create a more humble Conceit of ourselves, and a more charitable Opinion of our Neighbours. It will be an excellent Preservative against this Sin of rash judging; and will have a great many other good Effects, in pushing us on still more zealously to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling. And I see no Danger, though we should never be undeceived of this Error till the final Judgment. Our Saviour, I think, seems to give us such a Representation of good Men, even at the final Sentence, that they had no good Conceit of themselves; for when they shall be told by Christ, *Mat. xxv. 35. I was hungry, and ye gave me Meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me Drink; I was a Stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in Prison, and ye came unto me:* They are represented as answering: *Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee Drink? when saw we thee a Stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick or in Prison, and came unto thee?* So that ye see these righteous Persons, at the very last, have not so good an Opinion of themselves, as Christ had of them. But, on the other hand, the Wicked are brought in full of Self-conceit, and to the very last, vindicating their own good Opinion of themselves.

III. A *Third* Aggravation of this Sin of rash judging, in my Text, is taken from the Person
against

44 *The Beam in our own Eye; the Mote* [SERM. against whom it is committed, our Brother. *Why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brothers Eye?* There are two Things I would observe from this Word *Brother*. 1. That it implies a Parity or Equality. 2. That it is a Word that imports Friendship. Now both these Considerations furnish us with Arguments against the Sin of rash judging.

(1.) The Word *Brother*, implying Parity or Equality, furnisheth us on that Account with an Argument against the Sin of judging or censuring. For judging is properly the Part of a Superior towards an Inferior. This is an Argument I find used by *St. Paul*, Rom. xiv. 4. *Who art thou that judgest another Mans Servant? to his own Master he standeth or falleth.* It is not for Fellow-Prisoners or Fellow-Criminals to judge one another: If they do, it is a sort of mock Judgment. This the same Apostle urges again at the 12th Verse of that Chapter. *So then every one of us shall give an Account of himself to God; let us not therefore judge one another any more.*

(2.) The Word *Brother*, is a Word that imports Friendship, and for that Reason doth not agree with censuring, which is an Act of Severity. The Word *judging*, is taken here for *condemning*; *St. Luke* puts them both together, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned*, Luke vi. 37. Now as a Brother would be loth to condemn a Brother, and it would be thought a very unnatural Thing; so our Saviour, by giving the Word *Brother* to the censured Person; and by calling it, *the beholding a Mote in our Brother's*

III.] *in our Brother's Eye.* M A T. VII. 3. 45
ther's Eye, signifies to us how improper a thing
it is for us to exercise towards one another.

There is another Aggravation of this Sin insinuated in the Words, namely, our utter Unfitness for this Work of judging; for having a Beam in our Eye, whether that be Ignorance, Pride, Malice, Self-Love, or Partiality; some great Imperfection to be sure it is, which unfits us for that Work; and therefore it is no way proper for us; but because this will come in better afterwards from the 5th Verse, where we are told what we must do in order to the clearing of our Judgment and Understanding, I shall therefore pass it by at present, and come to,

IV. The *Fourth* and last Aggravation of this Sin, *viz.* The Interrogation why the Censurer thus pries where he ought not to look, and looks not at Home, where he should use a diligent Inspection; for this shews that the censorious Man can have no good Motives and Intentions in so doing; the Interrogation having the Force of a Negation. The Import of this Interrogation is, to shew us there can be no good Reason for this Practice; but, on the contrary, very good Reason against it.

(1.) No good Reason for this Practice; and from no good Motives doth it proceed. The Parents that produce it are Pride, Self-conceit, Malice, Hatred, Anger, Inconsideration, Revenge, and such like evil Principles. The Effects are Animosities, Divisions, Discord, mutual Provocations, Parties and Factions.

(2.) The Reasons against it are very many, and very considerable. The Blindness as to
our

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our own Faults stops the Door to Repentance ; hardens us against all the Admonitions we might otherwise receive from the Word of God, or faithful Friends ; it renders us utterly incapable of any Advice, but from Flatterers ; it lays us open to be abused and imposed upon, and soothed in our evil Courses ; it banishes all Freedom of Reasoning, Counsel, and Debate ; it vitiates our Understanding and discerning Faculties to that Degree, that we do no more judge of Things by their intrinsic Worth and Goodness, but by their Agreeableness or Disagreeableness to our own vitiated Palate. It will expose a Man of the best Sense to be a Prey to every the senseleffest Creature, that has but the Dexterity to flatter, and to strike in with his Self-conceit. Then the Sharp-sightedness to others Faults makes us very unfociable, exposes us to all the Effects of the same implacable Dispositions in them, which we feel in ourselves, whenever we are vilified and despised. In short, it settles us in a Course of Injustice, that we see our own and other Mens Actions with quite different Eyes, and are presently for trafficking in the World with different Weights and Measures, one to weigh and measure our own Actions by, and a quite different one for the Actions of all other Men ; so that the golden Rule of doing by others, as we would wish others to do by us, is quite laid aside by this Practice. Then it follows too, that not only themselves, but all that are carried away by their Influence, Authority, or Example, must infallibly be under a wrong Conduct ; for as our Saviour observes, *Mat. xv. 14. If the Blind lead the Blind, they shall*

III.] *in our Brother's Eye.* M A T. VII. 3. 47

shall both fall into the Ditch. And to oppose one of this Temper, you infallibly lose him, and make him your Enemy; so that there is no Choice left, but *Solomon's Dilemma, Prov. xxix. 9. If a wise Man contendeth with a foolish Man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no Rest.* If he laugh by your Assentation, or if he rage by your Opposition, there is no Quiet can follow; by Assentation they are carried blindfold till both fall into the Ditch; and by Rage, they are carried into Contention and all manner of stormy Weather; far from a settled Quiet and Serenity.

To conclude then, let us both endeavour to open our Eyes, and to look at home, that we may readily see every Blemish in our selves, and likewise be moderate in our Judgment and Censure of the Blemishes of others; which is the only sure Way both to a well rectified Judgment, and a good Conduct of ourselves, and Peace and Quiet with others: and above all, to inward Peace and Quiet in our own Consciences, and Peace with God through Jesus Christ our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. To whom, &c.



S E R M O N

S E R M O N IV.

M A T. VII. 4.

Or how wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye; and behold a Beam is in thine own Eye?

V. 5. *Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brothers Eye.*

The Fourth Sermon on this Text.

AS the Christian Religion has carried all Virtue to an higher Pitch of Perfection, than either *Jews* or *Heathens* knew before; so there are no Virtues it more directly aims and labours to perfect, than those of Humility, Peaceableness, and Charity. It was so much the more necessary to press these Duties, because the Scribes and Pharisees, the great Doctors of those Days, were Men of a quite different Spirit themselves, and by their Doctrine and Example were apt to infect others with their proud, censorious, and unpeaceable Temper.

We have heard, from the three preceding Verses, how our Saviour prohibited his Disciples the Sin of Censoriousness and rash judging; and what Arguments he has made use of, to dissuade from

IV.] *of rash Judging.* MAT. VII. 4, 5. 49
from it ; namely, that it exposes us both to the
Censures of Men, and to the Judgments of
God ; and that it is a Practice highly unbecoming
us, who have so many great Faults of our own,
to be so sharp-sighted as to our Neighbours,
and so censorious of them. I proceed now to
Two Arguments more to the same Purpose, con-
tained in the Words I have read.

III. The *Third* Argument then against this
Practice of Censoriousness is, that we are very un-
qualified for administering Censure and Corre-
ction to others, while we are so guilty ourselves,
and so blind as to that Guilt. *Or why wilt
thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote
out of thine Eye ; and behold a Beam is in thine
own Eye ?* This Argument has a particular As-
pect on that sort of censorious Persons, who
not only find Fault, but take upon them to re-
form and mend the World. In this though the
Scribes and Pharisees perhaps are particularly
aimed at ; for they took upon them to be the
great Censors and Reformers of Men ; no doubt
this Character reaches a great many others in all
Ages. For there is always in the World a sort
of Men, who pretend to be Dictators to others,
and usurp an Ascendency over them, who by
the Authority of their Sect and Party take it
very ill, if any of their Notions and Sentiments
are disputed. Our Saviour often guarded his
Disciples against this Spirit and Temper ; forbid-
ding the *Lording over Peoples Faith* ; and the
usurping the Character of *Rabbi and Master*,
Mat. xxiii. 7, 8. yet there is abundance of this
Spirit in the World still ; and every new Sect
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and Party that starts up, takes upon them to reform and amend the World in some Thing or other; in the mean time, being exceedingly blind as to those other Errors in Doctrine and Practice which they introduce. But now how unqualified these Persons are to reform and mend the World, while they themselves are addicted to much greater Faults and Vices than those are which they would reform, is worth while to consider: and therefore how necessary it is that both their Reprehension and Reformation should begin at home. For,

1. It is not easy to be conceived, how they should have any right Notions of Things, or how they should be qualified to instruct or reprove others, who are themselves blinded with Pride, Malice, or any other great Vice. For it is great Vices which are meant by this *Beam* in my Text. And by its being said to be *in the Eye*, is meant the Obstruction it gives to the understanding Faculty. The same evil Principle which makes a Man blind to his own Vices, will byas his Judgment with relation to other Mens. Suppose this evil Principle should be Pride and Vanity, which was the most remarkable Part of the Pharisees Character; let us consider how far this alone would pervert their Judgments in discerning the Truth in other Matters; particularly, both with relation to their own, and their Neighbour's Actions.

(1.) *First* then, It is very easy to apprehend that Pride would occasion the extenuating of all their own Faults, and the magnifying of their Virtues. What do I talk of extenuating of Faults? It is more probable that it will convert all

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all their Faults into Virtues. Their Moroseness and Ill-nature shall go for Gravity and Seriousness; their Partiality against such as are not of their own Party and Interest, and for such as are of their own Side, they will reckon Zeal for a good Cause. Nay, it is possible for them at the same Time that they are gratifying their Malice, Cruelty, or Resentment, to think they are doing God good Service. Now as Pride is capable of blinding Men as to all their own Faults; for the same Reason it will puff them up with a very high Conceit of their own Virtues, be they otherwise ever so inconsiderable. Their *tything of Mint, Anise, and Cummin*, are greater Acts of Virtue in their Eyes, than the most solid Acts of Piety in others. The most formal Compliance with the mere Ceremonials of Religion in any one of their Party, is more regarded than true Devotion, Justice, and Charity in others.

(2.) For the same Reasons that they have so great a Conceit of their own Ways and Actions, they are apt to have the same of their whole Faction and Party; this being a further Instance of their Self-love; for the supporting of their Party, is the supporting of themselves; and the commending and justifying of their Actions, is only a more modest commending and justifying of themselves.

(3.) The same Self-love and Self-conceit carries them to the lessening and vilifying of their Adversaries, lest their Fame and Virtues should obscure their own. Especially if, as is common in all Party-busineses, Malice joins in with Pride, then there is nothing an Adversary can do, tho'

ever so innocent, nay, ever so virtuous and commendable, that they can have a good Opinion of, and that they will not detort to some bad Sense, and endeavour to blacken with some malicious Construction. It is very observable, how wonderful diligent and ingenious the Scribes and Pharisees were in watching and in censuring our Saviour himself; though one would have thought his was a Life and Example not easy to be faulted. His preaching was all Heresy; for they gave it out, that his Design was *to destroy the Law and the Prophets*. His Miracles, he wrought by the Power of Magick; and he cast out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils. A Schismatick, nay, an Impostor they made him, one that deceived the People, and led them away from their Obedience to both Civil and Ecclesiastical Guides. For he valued not the Ceremonies and Traditions of the Elders, and spared not to lay open the Hypocrisy of their greatest Pretenders to a Strictness in Religion. They endeavoured to render him suspected as to his Duty and Loyalty to *Cæsar*, and so to stir up the Government against him. They were continually both putting bad Senses on his Words, and forging all the Calumnies they could invent against his Life and Doctrine; and all was to support their own Reputation, and to nip his growing Fame; for they observed the World went mightily after him. So that there is nothing plainer, than that their Pride and Malice blinded them so, that they could see nothing right, even in the most righteous Person that ever was upon Earth. And if they could not so much as know what was right, and what

I

wrong

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wrong, they were certainly very ill qualified for reforming and amending of others. But,

2. Suppose they knew ever so well what is right and what is wrong; yet while they themselves are guilty of the same, or greater Vices, they cannot, with a just Freedom and Authority, press the Reformation of others. All Reformation from them comes suspected, as if they were not in Earnest; or as if they knew of some easier Way of discharging their Duty; and will therefore be very little regarded by those, on whom they bestow their Advices. Not that our Saviour would have the Duty of Fraternal Correction and Admonition neglected; but that, in order to qualify ourselves for it, he would have the Reformation to begin at home; that being delivered from all Bias of Vice in ourselves, we might both see more clearly how to amend others, and might address ourselves to them in a more effectual manner, than if we ourselves were in the same Transgression. For while we secretly hug the same Vices, our Consciences will fly in our Faces when we go to correct them in others. An Instance of this we have in the History of the Woman taken in Adultery, *John* viii. 7. for so soon as our Saviour gave this Decision of the Case, *He that is without Sin among you, let him first cast a Stone at her*; it follows, *that they who heard it, being convicted by their own Conscience, went out one by one*; and had no more to say. From whence we may observe, that they who do not first take Care to keep themselves clear of Guilt, or at least to repent and amend, will prove but cold Reformers of others. But,

3. Supposing such Persons endued with a good Stock of Assurance, that if they are ever so guilty themselves, they can stoutly reprehend the same Vice in others, and urge the Reformation of it, what Effect can they hope this will have on those they pretend to correct and reform?

(1.) It is most natural to believe, these Persons will not think they are in earnest, knowing that their Life contradicts their Precepts and Advices.

(2.) They may very easily retort upon them that common Proverb, *Physician, cure thy self*; and till they cure themselves, they must have a very mean Opinion of their Skill how to cure others.

(3.) If their Advices succeed not, they have no Reason at all to take it amiss; for what can any Man think, but that all their Advice of that nature is a mere Piece of Formality, like an Actor's Part, which he acts upon the Stage, assuming for a little while another Person than he really is in himself, and than he intends to perform, so soon as he gets off the Stage. And this leads me to,

IV. The *Fourth* Argument here used by our Saviour against this Practice of Censoriousness, namely, that it is a clear Proof of our Hypocrisy. Ver. 5. *Thou Hypocrite*, says he, *First cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye*. What I here observe is, That our Saviour calls this Person thus guilty of censuring or rash judging, *an Hypocrite*. Not that all Admonitions of others are necessarily joined with Hypocrisy; but only such Admonitions of Persons, who, neglecting the observing

observing and amending of their own Faults; spend all their Zeal in reprov-
ing and correcting others. I shall not here take Occasion to speak
of Hypocrisy in general, but only consider this
one Branch of it, the pretending to an extraor-
dinary Strictness in detecting and reforming the
Faults of others, while we use no Diligence, nor
make any Conscience of finding out and amend-
ing our own. This false Zeal has certainly much
of Hypocrisy in it; for the plain Tendency of
it is, to keep up a Reputation of a Strictness and
Exactness in Duty, while, in the mean time,
we secretly indulge ourselves in gross Vices. But
it will be found that this Branch of Hypocrisy
goes a great deal further. For to divert the
Suspicion of their being guilty of heinous Trans-
gressions, they endeavour to place Duty and Re-
ligion in several Things of little or no Conse-
quence, and by shewing abundance of Zeal for
them, would make the World believe, that they
are much more zealous in Matters of greater Con-
sequence. This is what I take to be our Saviour's
Aim in this Place, even to tell the Scribes and
Pharisees, that all their Censoriousness, and pre-
tended Zeal for a Strictness of Duty in others,
was so far from proceeding from true Piety,
that it was only a Cloak, the better to cover their
own Vices. For who would imagine but that
a Man so strict in observing, and reprov-
ing, and censuring every small Error in his Neighbour,
must be a very exact Man as to his own Life
and Conversation? And herein particularly our
Saviour places their Hypocrisy, that it was not
so much the great crying Sins of their Neighbours,
that they spent their Zeal about, as the little

Things, which an ordinary Degree of Charity would have passed by. As our Saviour said of them elsewhere, *they strained at Gnats, and swallowed Camels*, Mat. xxiii. 24. They were sharp upon our Saviour's Disciples, for rubbing a few Ears of Corn when they were hungry, and eating them on the Sabbath-day; or for neglecting to wash before they ate; or for not observing every Tradition of the Elders; while Pride, Covetousness, Malice, Uncharitableness, nay, a general Evasion of the Precepts of the Moral Law, were justified by their Doctrine.

It appears from hence, that the Scribes and Pharisees were very guilty of this Piece of Hypocrisy, in censuring small Faults in others, while they overlooked far greater in themselves. And considering how much our Saviour foresaw of this Spirit in the Christian Church, he had a great deal of Reason to guard his Disciples against it. All Parties are apt to accuse one another of this Vice; but there is scarce any Party clear of it, even in this Particular. How severely have they censured and condemned one another for some small Differences in Opinion, while the great Duties of Christianity have been too generally forgotten and neglected by all? And what Volumes of Disputes have been written about the mere Fringes and Ceremonies of Religion; the circumstantial Part swallowing up that Zeal, which should have been reserved for the substantial Parts of God's Worship, and a good Life? But to pass by the Business of Party in Church or State, which yet, alas, in most Countries eats out Charity, and all other Christian Duties; and to take a View of Mens ordinary Conversation,
how

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how greedily do we hearken to any Censure of our Neighbour? How does every ill Story grow like a Snow-ball the more it is tumbled about? What a Spirit of Censoriousness and Want of Charity reigns in the World? And how many are to be found every where that furnish Fuel to that Fire by their Lies and Calumnies, and their unreasonable mis-construing and aggravating some Truths? If it were not for this rash judging and censuring, Differences would either never rise, or would quickly die of themselves; and then the World would be a peaceable and quiet Habitation.

I should proceed now to the last Argument against this Sin of Censoriousness or rash judging, namely, the Difficulty of the Terms and Conditions requisite both on the Part of the Censurer, and the Offender, before we are fit to judge our Neighbour. On the Part of the Censurer, it is requisite that he have the Humility and the Discretion to begin at home, and first to clear himself of all gross Vices. And on the Part of the Offender, it is necessary that he be so well disposed, as not to abuse the Admonitions, nor the Monitor. But because these are Subjects that cannot be handled with that Care as is requisite, now in the End of a Sermon, I shall refer them to some other Opportunity, and conclude, after a short Exhortation to help you to put in Practice what is recommended from that Part of the Text which we have been now considering.

I. From the first Part of my Text there is a Reprimand given to those who intrude themselves

elves into the Office of reforming others, before they amend and reform themselves. *How wilt thou say to thy Brother, let me pull out the Mote out of thine Eye, and behold a Beam is in thine own Eye?* Two Things seem to me to be reprehended here, in both which let me intreat you to bear with the Word of Exhortation.

1. The first Thing here reprehended is, a too great Niceness in spying out and correcting our Neighbours small Faults; *let me pull out the Mote.* If we would live quietly and peaceably in the World, we must learn to bear with the small Faults or Infirmities of our Neighbour, and not be too forward and zealous to amend them: at least not angry and peevish if we cannot compass it. My Reasons for this Doctrine are these following.

1. The best of Men have their Failings and Infirmities; and God, though he has given us Precepts of great Perfection, yet accepts of our very imperfect Obedience, if it be but sincere. *Like as a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our Frame, and remembreth that we are Dust,* Psal. ciii. 13, 14. If a Child behaves himself dutifully to his Parents, not stubbornly, rebelliously, or disobediently, he is reckoned a good Child, though he is guilty of many Mistakes in his Understanding and Memory, and though his little Passions are easily moved; and especially though his Strength is small, that he can do no great Service. It is his good Will is regarded, and not his Ability. Now like unto this the *Psalmist* saith is God's dealing with his Servants that fear him.

2. We

IV.] *of rash Judging.* MAT. VII. 4, 5. 59

2. We may observe, that all good Men have not Talents alike: One has ten; another two; and a third but one; and yet all these may serve God sincerely and faithfully, according to their several Abilities. A censorious Man would expect and require that every one should excel; and instead of praising God for the lesser Talents, he falls a censuring and disparaging one Man in comparison of another.

3. This censorious, satirical Spirit, is no way consistent with Love and Charity, which is the Spirit of the Gospel. Some of the more forward fiery Disciples, without any Consideration either of the mild Spirit of the Gospel, or of the strong Prejudices the *Jews* and *Samaritans* had against one another, were for revenging an Affront proceeding from a Prejudice of Education, with Extirpation by *Fire from Heaven*, Luke ix. 54, 55. but our Saviour instructed them and us better in our Duty: and taught us to consider all the unhappy Circumstances of Mens Educations, and to make Allowances for them accordingly.

4. Let us consider, that the spending our Zeal about little Things, takes off the Edge of it in greater Things, where it is really wanted. This is the very Thing our Saviour here observes, that while they were so over-diligent in taking out the Mote, they overlooked the Beam, that is, the great Vice, whatever it was, that utterly blinded them as to their own much greater Faults and Errors.

2. The other Thing here reprehended, is too great an Indulgence, or Negligence as to our
own

own great Vices; *first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye.* There are but few that will see their own Faults; and of those who see them, there are but few that repent, and take any effectual Measures towards Amendment. Yet all this is necessary, if we intend to pull out the Beam out of our own Eye. It is necessary that by a thorough Self-Examination we come by a true Sight and Sense of our sinful State; more particularly it is necessary that, by a thorough Acquaintance with ourselves, we discover those reigning, predominant Sins and Failings, which are the true Beams, which, till they are pulled out, we shall neither be able to take any right Conduct of ourselves, or to admonish others. And when we know our Faults, our next Business must be to imploy our Care in the most proper and effectual Manner to remove them. In order to which, there are chiefly these three Means to be used, which I shall but just name, and conclude.

1. Sincere and steady Resolutions, deliberately made, well considered, and frequently renewed.

2. Constant, fervent, and hearty Prayer, joined with the diligent Use of the other Means of Grace, the Study of the holy Scriptures, by reading, hearing, meditating, and digesting it, with the due Use of the holy Sacrament, and the Advices of good Friends and Books, to stir us up and quicken us to our Duty.

3. Vigorous Endeavours both to resist the Temptations to those Sins, and in the Exercise of the contrary Virtues: particularly Humility, which will put us more on the Search after our own Sins, than those of other Men. Especially
let

IV.] *of rash Judging.* MAT. VII. 4, 5. 61

let us study to be as sincere, vigilant, and upright in private, as we are in publick, and not act the Hypocrite, who, though he indulges himself in secret Vice, puts on a fair outward Shew, as if he were an extraordinary Proficient in Virtue, and had a Right to dictate to all others.

- These Things would require a fuller Discussion; but considering that there may perhaps some Opportunity offer from the remaining Part of the Subject, to give them a more particular Consideration, I shall conclude for this Time, with my Prayers for God's Blessing on what we have heard, that it may take Root in our Hearts, and bring forth Fruit in our Lives, to God's Glory, and our own Edification and Salvation, through the Mediation of Jesus Christ our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. To whom, &c.



SERMON

S E R M O N V.

M A T. VII. 5.

Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brothers Eye.

V. 6. Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, Neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine; lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.

The Fifth Sermon on this Text.

WE are now come to the *Fifth* and last Argument which our Saviour proposes against the Sin of rash judging or censuring; which, together with the Antithesis or opposite Duty here insinuated, is all that now remains to be spoke to on this Subject. The Argument is taken from the Difficulty of the Qualifications necessary to this Duty of censuring, both on the Part of the Censurer, and on the Part of the Offender; from the Consideration of which it will appear, that this is not a Duty to be undertaken rashly at all Times, nor by, nor toward all Persons.

First,

First, On the Part of the Censurer, there are *Two* Things seem to be required.

1. One, that he be clear from all gross Vices himself; that he have *cast out the Beam out of his own Eye*.

2. The other, that he set about the correcting of his Neighbour, not from hypocritical By-Designs, but from a sincere Design of discharging his own Duty, and of doing good to his Neighbour. Then on the Part of the Offender, *two* Things likewise seem to be requisite.

1. That he be not of an impatient, fierce, angry Temper, ready to fly like a Dog, at the Throat of the Person who offers to perform that friendly Office of fraternal Correction to him.

2. That he be not of a profane Temper, wallowing in the Mire of Lust, and so apt to trample upon all the sacred Admonitions that are given him. The performing of this Duty to the first of these Persons, as I apprehend it, is here called, *the giving of that which is holy unto Dogs*; and the performing it to the second, is called here, *the casting of our Pearls before Swine*. All which deserves a more particular Consideration.

I. To begin then with the Qualifications for this Duty on the Part of the Censurer.

1. The *first* of them is, *That he cast out the Beam out of his own Eye*; that is, that he be clear from all gross Vices himself. There is some Difficulty in this, why our Saviour, who requires that we observe the good Admonitions of bad Men, in the due Execution of their Office, should

should yet deter bad Men from the Monitor's Office, till they have first tried the Effect of their good Counfel upon themselves. He tells us of these same Scribes and Pharisees, that *they sat in Moses's Seat*, Mat. xxiii. 2. that is, they were the Interpreters of the Law; and from thence he draws this Inference, *All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their Works, for they say, and do not.* But though he advises the People to obey their good Doctrine, as far as it was grounded on *Moses's Law*, altho' the Teachers themselves lived not up to it; yet he discourages here these same Scribes and Pharisees from censuring of others, till first they had reformed themselves. It is very true, whenever in holy Scripture the Pastors are taught their Duty, the greatest Holiness of Life is required of them, and without it they are not encouraged to hope for any good Success of their Labours; yet at the same time, the People are required to obey their good Doctrine, without being scandalized at their bad Lives. And there is no Contradiction between these two. It is possible that the good Admonitions and Reproofs of a bad Man may have good Effect, especially upon such as know him not. But it is most probable that they will do little good upon such as know him, till he repents and amends. Let us consider then, how great Reason there is for this Qualification required here of our Saviour, previously to our performing the Duty of Fraternal Admonition and Correption to our Brother.

(1.) *First,*

(1.) *First*, It is necessary for the Honour of the Truths and Duties conveyed in these good Admonitions; as it is not for the Reputation of good Wine to be presented in a dirty Glass. In that Case Men would be more apt to have their Stomachs turned with the Nastiness of the Glass, than their Appetite gratified with the Goodness of the Liquor. In the same manner it happens with good Doctrine, when proposed by a very ill Man, or a notorious Hypocrite; the Word of God is then blasphemed, or evil spoken of on their Account. And therefore we find the Scripture always requires the greatest Purity and Holiness of them, who are to convey the Knowledge of divine Truths and Duties to others.

(2.) Another Reason why this Qualification is so requisite in them who admonish and censure others, is the great Decency and Decorum of the Thing. As in a Play, the Poet or Author would be much blamed, if he did not make every Person whom he introduces, act the Part which is most suitable for him; *e. g.* if he gave all the Rashness and Follies of Youth to be acted by one who sustains the Person of an old Man; or the Cares and Gravity of Age to be acted by him, who sustains the Person of a Youth; so in the Business of Life, it is fully as improper to bring in a Drunkard giving Precepts of Sobriety, or a lewd profane Wretch giving Precepts of Chastity. This would be only an effectual Way to teach Men Hypocrisy instead of Sincerity in all Duty. And this leads me to,

(3.) A *Third* Reason why we should first amend our own great Faults, before we presume to correct others; namely, because of the bad

Success such Admonitions and Reproofs would probably have in the World. I know no Duty more difficult, or that requires a greater Degree of Prudence to execute it aright, than this Duty of fraternal Admonition and Correction; and if so great a Blunder were committed in the Performance of it, as that the Person who administers it, should himself be notoriously guilty of the same, or worse Faults, his Reproofs would be looked upon as Mock-Reproofs, and he himself as guilty of the greatest Impertinency. The Truth would suffer purely through his Default; and instead of being reformed, Men would be hardened in their Sins, by such a preposterous and ill-contrived Reprehension.

2. The other Qualification required here in the Censurer is, that he set about the Duty of correcting his Neighbour, not from any sinister hypocritical Design, but from a sincere Design of discharging his own Duty, and of doing good to his Neighbour. These Reproofs are apt to be abused, to serve the Ends of Pride, Vanity, Hypocrisy, Insolence, and Imperiousness. But the only true End we ought to propose to ourselves is, that of Love and Charity to our Neighbour; that as we relieve our indigent Neighbour in his Want, so we admonish our erring or sinning Neighbour as to the Evil of his Ways. It is the inward good Motives and Principles in all Duties, which God chiefly regards; and therefore we should watch our own Hearts, lest we set about Duty, I mean, the external Part of Duty, from wrong Principles; for that alters the whole Nature of the Action, and from a virtuous, makes it a vicious one. Now the
Want

Want of these good Principles in this Duty of fraternal Correetion, is that very Thing which our Lord here taxes with Hypocrisy. The bad Principles and sinister Designs of Men in this Affair are very many, and very intricate; so that I cannot pretend to a full Enumeration of them. Only that we may be the better guarded against them, I shall endeavour to point at the chief Heads of the bad Principles, which make this Duty of censuring degenerate into Hypocrisy, when they are intermixed with the Discharge of it.

(1.) *First*, The Duty of fraternal Admonition having some Resemblance with the Dictates of a morose and surly Disposition, which both loves to find Fault, and to censure severely, and punish rigidly, that may easily be mistaken for the Duty itself. But there is a great inward Difference between them; the one from a mere Moroseness of Temper, delighting to find Faults, and to exercise Severity; the other being grieved at the Faults, and applying himself with an unwilling Willingness to the Remedy of Admonition, as a Patient sets himself to take an unpleasant, but necessary Potion of Physick.

(2.) Pride and Vanity finding Nourishment from our Neighbour's bad, as well as from our own good Qualities and Actions, it is an easy Thing for it to counterfeit this Duty of fraternal Admonition, at least in that Part of it which relates to the severe censuring of our Neighbour. It is true, it is as defective in another Part, which is the Discretion and Prudence requisite in carrying the Censure no farther than to the Person himself, who was to be admonished and re-

formed ; for Pride and Vanity is apt to publish it to their Hurt and Reproach.

(3.) When a Man takes upon him to perform the Office of a Monitor to others, who secretly indulges himself in the same Sins, without hearty Endeavour of Amendment, it is much to be suspected that such a Person acts from downright Diffimulation and Hypocrisy ; and that he re-proves the same Vices in others, only that he may the better hide and conceal them in himself.

(4.) There are some, who, from a mere Bigotry, or Addictedness to Party, are apt to censure and reprove such Faults, as are most contrary to the Principles and Practices of their own Sect and Party ; in the mean time overlooking all those other Faults, though ever so gross, which their own Party approves, either by Principle or Practice. Now all such Persons, instead of performing the Duty of fraternal Correction, are only promoting the Business of Faction, and their Censures will be so esteemed of by Almighty God.

(5.) There is a sly sort of Hatred and Enmity, which chuses to vent itself in this censorious Way, and under Pretence of rectifying and reforming our Neighbour's Errors and Miscarriages, only aims at exposing them, with a mischievous, not an edifying Design. These few Instances may convince us, that our Saviour had a great deal of Reason, when he was handling this Subject of fraternal Admonition and Correction, to guard us against Hypocrisy, and all other By-ends in ourselves, and that we should
with

V.] *fit for Censurers.* M A T. VII. 5, 6. 69
with a clear charitable Intention set about this
difficult Duty. But,

II. *Secondly*, Besides Charity and Sincerity in the Censurer, there are other Qualifications required on the Part of the Offender, which the Censurer must carefully observe; and if he finds they are wanting, he is, in Prudence, to defer his Admonitions and Reproofs till he find them. These are contained in the last Verse of my Text; *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs; neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.* In speaking to which Words, I shall endeavour to do these *Four* Things:

1. To shew that they properly belong to this Subject, and that by giving that which is holy to Dogs and Swine, is meant the Administring our Admonitions and Reproofs to unfit Persons.

2. To explain what Dispositions these are in our Neighbour, described by Dogs and Swine, which prohibit our administring this Duty of fraternal Admonition or Correption to him in these Circumstances.

3. I shall consider the Danger of not complying with this Prohibition; from these Words, *lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rend you.*

4. I shall consider the Duty of Prudence to find out and observe, when our Neighbour is in such Circumstances, that we are excused from the Duty of censuring and admonishing him.

I. *First*, I am to shew that these Words do properly belong to this Subject, and that by *giving that which is holy to Dogs, and casting our Pearls before Swine*, is meant the administering our Admonitions and Reproofs to unfit Persons, such as will abuse them, and hate and persecute us for our Pains. I am not ignorant that several Interpreters of good Note make this Verse to be altogether new Matter, and interpret it to be a Caution chiefly to the Apostles and Ministers of the Gospel, not to throw away that precious Pearl of the Gospel upon Persons who abuse it, and raise Persecutions against the Preachers and Professors of it. But, with Submission, though there is some Truth in this Doctrine, I must think the other Sense preferable, I mean that which makes these Words to be an Exception from the difficult Duty of fraternal Admonition and Reproof immediately preceding; and that for the following Reasons.

(1.) Because I am not satisfied that there were any such Officers as Apostles then constituted, when our Saviour preached this Sermon on the Mount; far less that they had then received their Commission to preach the Gospel; and therefore as I have interpreted all the rest of the Sermon in such a Sense as suits all Christians, I think these Words are to be so interpreted too.

(2.) In this Sense they suit much better with the Order and Position in which they are here placed; for as our Saviour was giving Directions concerning the right Way of administering the difficult Duty of fraternal Admonition and Reproof,

V.] *fit for Censurers.* MAT. VII. 5, 6. 71

proof, no Body can deny that this is fit to be made one of those Directions, namely, to forbear it towards them, who both will be the worse for it themselves, and will unmercifully fall a persecuting the Monitors and Reprovers.

(3.) If the Words are applied to the publick preaching of the Gospel, that it is not to be preached to them who abuse it, or persecute the Preachers, I am not satisfied of the Truth of this Doctrine; for I observe both our Saviour and his Apostles, and the primitive Bishops and Ministers after them, preached the Gospel promiscuously to all, good and bad, and ran the Hazard of Persecution. And I think it not improbable that our Saviour expected of the Apostles, and their Successors, the Pastors of the Church, that they should run greater Hazards for the Gospel than private Christians; and therefore he told them, *Mat. x. 16.* that *he sent them forth as Sheep among Wolves*; and indeed it was scarce possible to preach the Gospel to promiscuous Multitudes, as they did, but that there would be some such wicked and persecuting Men among them. And therefore this Precept does not seem to me to relate so much to promiscuous Multitudes, where there is a Mixture of good and bad, as to private wicked Men, or at least to such Multitudes, of whom the far greater Part are of a wicked and persecuting Spirit.

(4.) *Lastly*, It is not the bare preaching of the Gospel, but the Reproofs mixed in with it, which are the cutting Things that stir up Peoples Passions, and provoke their Resentments; and therefore the Words seem much more applicable to this of Admonitions and Rebukes, than to

the publick preaching of the Gospel. Not but that by a Parity of Reason it may be extended to all Rebukes, and all Acts of Discipline and Censure, administred to wicked and persecuting Men. But some perhaps may think that the Word *Pearl*, is not so applicable to private Admonitions and Corrections, as to the Gospel it self. To this it may be answered, that the Words are a common Proverb among the *Jews*, only adapted to this Occasion; and that the throwing away of good Advice and Reproof on obstinate wicked Men, may very well be compared to the throwing of Jewels or Pearls before Swine, especially *Solomon* having used the Comparison in the same Sense, *Prov. xxv. 12. As an Ear-ring of Gold, and an Ornament of fine Gold, so is a wise Reprover upon an obedient Ear.*

II. I am to explain who are here meant by Dogs and Swine. They are certainly Men of cursed Dispositions, there being no Creatures under the Law more stigmatized for Uncleaness. But to answer more particularly; it is not all wicked People who are to be meant by these Compellations, but only such incorrigible Persons, who become worse for Reproof themselves, and are ready, on that Account, to rail at, and persecute others. But more especially there are these two Sorts of Persons to whom this Duty of Admonition and Reproof ought not to be performed, by the Direction of my Text.

I. The Persecutors of the Monitors and Reprovers, who, like fierce Dogs, (when we would beat them from Carrion) grin and threaten, and
at

V.] *fit for Censurers.* M A T. VII. 5, 6. 73
at last, if we come too near them, are ready to
flee upon us, and tear us to pieces.

2. They who blaspheme and rail against our
pious Admonitions, expose, ridicule, and con-
temn them, and wallow more and more in the
Mire of their Sins and Follies.

As to the first of those Persons, *the fierce Dog*,
who is enraged at Admonition and Reproof,
there is a great deal of Reason why he ought
not to be troubled with it, it not being God's
Design to expose good People needlessly, where
there is no manner of Hope that their Pains or
Sufferings will do any good. *Precious in the
Sight of the Lord, is the Death of his Saints*;
and therefore it is not to be supposed, that he is
for throwing away their Lives needlessly for no
manner of Benefit. And besides, a Person of
that fierce Temper towards those who would
perform that charitable Office of fraternal Ad-
monition, is in no manner of right Disposition
for receiving Benefit from it. For all who would
benefit by the Word of God, either publicly
preached, or privately applied, must *receive it in
Meekness*, Jam. i. 21. A Temper directly con-
trary to that of Rage and Fierceness, described
by that of the *Dog* in the Text.

And as to the second Sort of Persons here descri-
bed, *the Swine*, wallowing in Uncleaness, and if
you take never so much Pains to wash them, who
love still to wallow more and more in Filthiness;
it is to as little Purpose to spend Admonitions and
Reproofs upon them; for they are obstinate and
incorrigible in their evil Ways; and the more
Pains is taken upon them, there is only so much
more Contempt thrown upon sacred Things,
and

and the Persons admonished and reprov'd, only have their Sins so much the more aggravated in the Sight of God, and give so much a more scandalous Example to the World.

III. The *third* Thing I am to consider, is the Danger of not complying with this Prohibition, from these Words; *lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.* If we will not then comply with this Advice, we are here told the Danger we incur by our Imprudence.

1. The Danger of having all our good Admonitions trampled upon.

2. Then the Danger of being persecuted our selves by those Scoffers at holy Things.

The first is the greatest Danger, the Contempt of all sacred Admonitions, expressed here by the trampling them under the Feet of these lewd Men. The Expression is metaphorical; but how many of the evil Consequences may fall under it, is not easy to account for, Contempt alone being generally reckoned as the Height of Disobedience. Though a Man, who is strongly under the Power of evil Habits, cannot presently shake them off, and get rid of them; yet if he has a Respect for the Truth, and an Honour for the Persons who administer it, and when he hears it, hears it meekly; there is great Hopes that these good Beginnings, if duly cultivated, will be blessed with a suitable Progress, and at last crowned with an happy Conclusion. But where the Truths of God, instead of Honour and Respect, meet with Hatred and Contempt, such Persons are then in the Condition of a Patient
past

V.] *fit for Censurers.* MAT. VII. 5, 6. 75
past Hope, whose Stomach rejects all wholesome Medicines, and loves nothing but such Trash as is pernicious to it.

But the second Danger is likewise very great, namely, the Odium raised thereby against good Men; which has most pernicious Effects; for it stops the Door to all good Counsel; it prepares the Way for all that Sort of Persons who flatter and sooth People in their Sins; it discourages all Goodness, and makes Wickedness triumphant; in short, it is the readiest Way to set up the Kingdom of Satan, and to pull down the Kingdom of Christ. For an inward Hatred against good Men once raised, is daily sprouting out in the most spiteful Words, and most persecuting Actions against them, and all that favour them; and consequently in running down every Thing that has the Face of Goodness, as being the Character of the Persons whom, of all others, they most hate and abhor.

IV. The last Thing to be considered is this Part of Christian Prudence enjoined in my Text; how we may observe and find out, when our Neighbour is in such Circumstances that we are excused from the Duty of censuring and admonishing him. The Text supposes a Knowledge of Mankind, at least so far as to be able to discern who are capable of Admonition, and who not. For all the Prudence here required is, only to judge aright, whether our offending Brother will be the better or the worse for it; which I confess is a very difficult Piece of Skill, and in the greatest Part of Men perhaps cannot be known but by making the Experiment. Some indeed

indeed are so great Scoffers at Religion and Virtue, especially such Virtues as they do not put in Practice, that one may easily know they are not to be attempted in the Way of fraternal Admonition, without provoking their highest Rage and Displeasure; and therefore, as to them, the Advice of *Solomon* seems most proper to be followed, as we have it, *Prov. ix. 7, 8. He that reproveth a Scornor, getteth to himself Shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked Man, getteth himself a Blot. Reprove not a Scornor, lest he hate thee.* When Men are thus far advanced in Wickedness, they take the Scornor's Chair, and make it their Business to mock every Thing that is sacred and serious; we may well then, without Breach of Charity, judge they are past Advice, unless it shall please God, by some great Sickness, or other Affliction, to humble them, and to bring them to a docile and tractable Temper. And together with the Scoffers, we may reckon such obdurate hardened Wretches, as are Proof against all Arguments and Conviction, who shut their Eyes against the clearest Light, and instead of answering Arguments, or being persuaded, only set their Wits to work, to ruin those who give them good Counsel and Advice. Such were those Rulers of the *Jews*, who, when they could not deny our Saviour's Miracles, gave it out that he wrought them by *Beelzebub* the Prince of the Devils; and the more Convictions they met with, were hardened so much the more to that Degree, that upon our Saviour's raising *Lazarus* to Life, they presently had a Consultation, and resolved to apprehend him, and put him to Death. Whenever we perceive that Men are come to

V.] *fit for Censurers.* M A T. VII. 5, 6. 77

this Degree of Wickedness, it is a dangerous Thing to provoke them by Admonitions and Reproofs. The only Remedy which is then left is, Prayers to God for them, that he who has the Hearts of all Men in his Hands, would by his Grace, fit and prepare them for admitting and receiving Benefit by the Means of Grace. But still great Care is to be taken, that we do not despair too soon of our offending Brother, and that our own Self-love and excessive Fears do not so magnify the Danger, as to discourage us from performing our Duty on such Occasions. It is better perhaps to venture a good deal of their Displeasure, in order to the recovering them to a sound State of Health, than by abandoning them too soon, to despair of the Patient. Even Mad-Men have their lucid Intervals; and therefore a great deal of Prudence is to be used in addressing them at seasonable Times, and by proper Persons, such as they have no Prejudice against, and in the mildest Manner, such as may gain their Affection without provoking their Passion.

I find Time will not allow my meddling with the contrary Duties to this rash judging and censuring at present; and therefore I shall refer that to another Opportunity. Now God bless what we have heard, that it may contribute effectually to our Edification and Salvation, by the Grace and Mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ;

To whom, &c.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N VI.

M A T. VII. 5.

Thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.

V. 6. Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and rent you.

The Sixth Sermon on this Text.

WHEN we first entred on this Part of our Saviour's divine Discourse, in which he guards his Disciples against rash judging and censuring, contained in the first six Verses of this Chapter, I divided the Whole into these three Heads.

1. A Prohibition of Censoriousness, or rash Judgment.

2. An Enforcement of this Prohibition by several Reasons and Arguments.

3. The Antithesis, or opposite Duty to this Censoriousness, or rash Judgment.

Having, in some former Discourses, handled the two first, namely, the Prohibition of rash Judgment,

Judgment, and the Arguments with which it is enforced; I come now to the third and last Head of our Saviour's Discourse on this Subject; namely, the Consideration of the contrary Duty. And this, as I apprehend it, consists in these four Things, which I shall endeavour to explain and recommend to your Consideration and Practice.

1. The first Branch of the contrary Duty to rash Judgment is, to employ our Censoriousness first and chiefly upon ourselves: That we should *first cast out the Beam out of our own Eye.*

2. The second Branch of it is, to look charitably on the Actions of our Neighbour, and not to be too sharp-sighted in spying out his small Faults, not to behold too critically the Mote in our Brother's Eye; not to be too ready to censure him ourselves; or too apt to assent to the Censures of others.

3. A third Branch of the opposite Duty is, That we perform the friendly Office of Monitors to our Neighbour himself, instead of exposing him to others.

4. And the fourth Branch of it is, That in administering these our Admonitions, we use Prudence, not to throw them away, where they will do Hurt; but to contrive to give them, when our Neighbour is in the best Temper and Disposition to receive them kindly, and to make the best Use of them.

I. The *First* Branch of the contrary Duty to Censoriousness and rash judging is, to employ
our

our Censoriousness first and chiefly upon our selves. For we are blamed for not beholding the Beam in our own Eye; and commanded first to cast the Beam out of our own Eye, in order to the disposing us to see clearly to cast out the Mote out of our Brother's Eye. This is a great and important Duty, the Duty of Self-examination, and of strictly censuring and correcting ourselves for our Sins and Follies; a Duty which our corrupt Natures have in as great Aversion, as they are inclined to that of judging and censuring our Neighbour. In this Work of Self-examination, we must endeavour both to find out the several Species or Kinds of our Sins, and likewise the Frequency, and other Aggravations of them; as if they have been committed against Knowledge; upon Deliberation; against Checks of Conscience; against Vows and Promises; against Admonitions and Warnings; against signal Mercies and Judgments; and other extraordinary Means to reform and reclaim us. But you may think, perhaps, how is this such an opposite Duty to the rash judging of others? One may fancy that the sharper we are in discovering our own Faults, we shall know so much the better how to find out those of other Men. But this may be easily answered; for though it may acquaint us better with the Nature of Sin, and the Temptations of Satan, yet this will not incline us to be more censorious of our Neighbour. For, 1. The more Time we spend at home, the less we have to squander away abroad; we shall find such a full Business and Employment in this Work of searching and trying our own Hearts and Ways, that we shall have no
Leisure

Leisure to pry narrowly, and to search wishfully into our Neighbour's Concerns. 2. The better acquainted we are with our own Sin and Folly, we shall be so much the more Charitable to the Errors of others; as being then more capable to judge of the Temptations and Infirmities incident to Mankind. 3. The better we are acquainted with our own Sins, we shall be so much the freer from Pride and Vanity, which is the great Cause of rash Judgments. We shall be apt to think our selves the unworthiest and most undeserving of all others; and so living in Humility, shall have no vain Curiosity, by lessening others, to increase the vain Phantom of our own Superiority and Excellency. This Work then of Self-examination, acquainting us intimately with our own bad Character, and beating down all towering Thoughts and Imaginations, as fast as they rise in our Hearts and Minds, is an excellent Antidote both against positive and comparative Pride, which last is the chief Cause and Occasion of rash Judging and Censuring. By the by, from this Part of the opposite Duty, we may observe a seeming Paradox, that they who least mind their own Faults, are the severest in Censuring the Faults of others, as was plain in the Scribes and Pharisees, who, though very sharp-sighted in spying out *the Motes*, that is, the smallest Faults in their Neighbour's Eye, could not discern *the Beams*, that is, the greatest Faults in their own.

II. A second Branch of the contrary Duty to rash Judgment, is, to look charitably on the Actions of our Neighbour, and neither to be

too sharp-sighted in spying out his small Faults, nor too forward to censure him our selves, nor apt to assent to the Censures of others. It is one Property of Charity, that *it covers a multitude of Sins*, 1 Pet. iv. 8. But that we may be more sensible of this Truth, how Charity prevents rash Judgments, it will not be amiss to consider this Matter a little more particularly. The Occasion of all our rash Judgments of our Neighbour is from these two Causes; our own slight or partial Observation; or the believing the rash Reports of others.

1. As to the first, our own slight or partial Observation, let us consider whether there is not a previous Aversion to the Person on some Account or other, which makes us so ready to form these Judgments. We pretend we see many Things amiss, because we secretly wish that these our Conjectures and Observations may be true; and when we have once made these rash Judgments and Censures, we think our selves obliged in Honour to stand by them, and defend them, and are afraid of every thing that may be offered to undeceive us; so that what was at first a mere Error of our own rash Judgment, occasioned by a Spice of Malice and Aversion to the Person against whom we pass it, comes in Time to be judged necessary to be justified and maintained; because it would be a disreputable Thing to admit into our vain Thoughts such a choking Truth, (far less to let it be understood by the World,) as that we committed an Error in our Judgment, or did any Thing of which we have occasion to repent. I am confident that this unreasonable Admiration of our own Judgment, as

if it were infallible; and of the unbyassed Rectitude of our own Will, as if it inclined to nothing that perverts the Judgment; is one plentiful Source of rash Judgments. To which if we add some of those false Principles of Honour, that it is more reputable to defend than to retract a precipitate rash Judgment once given, this, instead of Remediying, roots this Evil so firmly, that it is really Proof against all Remedies. But because nothing is to be despaired of, through the Grace of God, let us try some Antidotes that Scripture and Reason suggest to this great Evil of rash Judging.

1. *First* then, let me entreat you to consider the most pernicious Consequences of rash Judgments. I will offer you two Instances out of the Holy Scriptures, one in which it is plain what the wicked Consequence would have been, if they who gave the rash Judgment had not been undeceived, and had not retracted it; and the other, in which they were not undeceived till it was too late; but drove on their Prejudices to the Extremity of the fatal Consequences that attended it.

The first is the rash Judgment which the rest of the Children of *Israel* made of the Tribe of *Reuben* and *Gad*, and the half Tribe of *Manasseh*, Josh. xxii. 11, &c. for Erecting an Altar in the Borders of *Jordan*, mistaking and misconstruing their Intent therein, as if it had been with an idolatrous Design of setting up an Idol-altar against the Altar of the true God; whereas it was quite otherwise, to be only a Memorial of their being one and the same People with those that worshipped the true God on the other Side of *Jordan*. Upon this rash Judgment, they de-

signed no less than the utter Extirpation of those two Tribes and an half, and they carried the Matter so far, that they assembled themselves in warlike Manner for that End. But yet they shewed themselves good Men, in that they were not so carried away with their first Prejudices, but that they used Means to be better informed; and after right Information, were as ready to lay down their Arms, as they had before upon a rash Judgment taken them up.

The next was a more fatal Example, namely, the Example of *Rehoboam*, 2 Chron. x. 13, &c. who, by the Advice of some hot-headed young Men, chose to treat the People of *Israel* in a huffy, threatening Manner, when they represented their Grievances to him, and desired some Relaxation of them; which rash Judgment lost him Ten of the twelve Tribes of *Israel*. And tho' he quickly repented of it, and would have made up the Matter, it was then too late; and they were by that Time so incensed, that they refused to hear any offers of Peace, and stoned the Person who was sent to them on that Account. It is really strange to observe, both what dismal Effects rash Judgments have on the Persons guilty of them, and on the Persons against whom they are pronounced; the one, or the other, if not both, proving implacable, and Peace irretrievable. 2. Together with the evil Consequences, let us consider the bad Causes and Occasions of rash Judgments, I mean that Sort which proceeds from our own Observation, both as to the first making them, and our Perseverance in them, and at the same Time think of the Antidotes and Remedies. The Causes of rash Judgments

ments begun and continued, may perhaps be reduced to these three; *First*, The Defects of our Judgment and Understanding, occasioned chiefly by Ignorance, Inconsideration, and Rashness or Precipitancy; then the Defects of our Will, occasioned by Malignity and Aversion to the Person against whom we pronounce the rash Judgments; and lastly, the false Point of Honour in adhering too stiffly to our own Sense and Opinion; all which by due Care may be rectified.

1. The proper Way to cure Ignorance is, by a calm unprejudicate Information as to Matters of Right from the Persons most skilful in those Affairs; and as to Matters of Fact, from the most unbyassed Witnesses. But in these Inquiries we must have a special Care to do nothing to byass either our selves, or those we consult, or those from whom we take our Informations, against their own Skill and Knowledge. In all such Cases we should behave our selves with the Indifference of a Traveller; asking which of the two dividing Paths is the Right, as if we had no other Interest, no other Inclination in our Enquiries, but purely to find out the right Way, and to follow it. But if we come with Prejudices either to the Cause or to the Person, we shall go near to be misled. An Instance of which we have in *Abab*, 2 Chron. xviii. where we have a notable Account how the Prophets were consulted about an Action, which the King was bent upon before, and only desired their Opinions to back his own Purpose; for they knew it was not safe for them to give them against his Inclinations. In the Beginning of the Chapter we find the Resolution taken to go to War against the King of *Syria*,

and King *Jehoshaphat* bespoke as a Confederate, before there was any Talk of Consulting of Prophets in the Matter. But afterwards, to put a good Gloss upon the Business to *Jehoshaphat*, and some other of the People who feared God, it was agreed that the Prophets should be consulted. But whether it was a free, unprejudicate Consultation, we may guess by the Management of one of them, who was by much the best of the whole Tribe; I mean, *Micajah* the Son of *Imla*. For, first, King *Abab*, knowing him to be a Man that never flattered him, contrived to exclude him from this Convention of the Prophets, and called only such as he knew commonly suited their Prophecies, not to what was right in it self, but to what they knew would be most gracious and acceptable to him. King *Jehoshaphat* probably having an inkling of this, insisted very much to know *if there was no other Prophet of the Lord*, besides these that were there present. At last, when it could no longer be hid, *Abab* confessed there was one more; but before he was heard, he gave such a black Character of him to *Jehoshaphat*, that he might not be diverted from the Resolution they had taken, altho' he should be against it, as he expected he would. *Is there not here a Prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him?* said *Jehoshaphat*, 2 Chron, xviii. 7. Yes, replied *Abab*, *There is one Man more, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him, for he never prophesieth good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micajah the Son of Imla.* And when *Micajah*, being sent for, had used Abundance of Freedom, in dissuading from that intended Expedition, we may observe from the
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Treatment he met with, how little Freedom there was in that Consultation; for Orders were given to carry him to the Governour of the City, and to clap him up in Prison, and to feed him with Bread and Water till the King should return in Peace. From this Piece of History we may see how dangerous it is to pretend to inform our selves, and to take Advice of Men skilled in any Profession, when they are not left at Freedom to give their Opinions and Advices, but one Way. And perhaps it was for this, among other Sins, that God permitted a lying Spirit to go forth in the Mouth of all *Abab's* other Prophets. For it is a terrible Rule set down by God himself, *Ezek. xiv. 4.* *Against any that shall set up his Idols in his Heart, and put the stumbling Block of his Iniquity before his Face, and then come to enquire of a Prophet concerning him; that God will answer him according to the Multitude of his Idols.*

2. The proper Way to cure Inconsideration, is, to take care that we be not hurried on by any present Lust or Passion, or strong Prejudice or Byass whatever; but to view Things calmly of all sides, and especially to excite our selves to consider what can be offered for that side of the Question to which we are least inclined; by that Means to bring our Judgments to an equal Poize, that we may maturely and deliberately judge of Persons and Things, without any Imputation of Rashness. And what I say of *Inconsideration*, is as true of *Rashness and Precipitancy*; the proper Remedy of which is, to accustom our selves to go more slowly, and to act with greater Deliberation in our Judgments. Let us consider, that what is true to Day, will be so to Morrow; and there-

fore that it will do no Hurt to take some more Time to deliberate upon it. And therefore it is a good Advice to curb the Impetuosity of our Spirit, and the Looseness of our Tongue, even in Matters that are pretty evident; to accustom them not to precipitate in Things doubtful and obscure.

3. Then the proper Way to cure our Aversion to any Person is, by Considering all the good Qualities more than the bad of such a Person, and of how great Use they might be, if set in a due Light, and not obscured by our Hatred and Enmity. But this is the Nature of Malice, that it either totally blinds us as to the good Qualities of an Adversary, that we think he has none; or if he has any, by diverting our Thoughts from them, and poring continually on the black Side his Character, we totally extinguish any good Ideas of them and his Actions, and suffer none but the bad to remain. And till this Malignity is overcome by the contrary Principle of Charity, we are not like to be in a Capacity to make any other but rash Judgments of such a Person and all his Actions.

Lastly, To cure the false Point of Honour of an Opiniastrete and stiff Adhering to our own Opinion, and to the Maintenance of our own rash Judgments, and as rash Actions flowing therefrom; we should do well to observe the many Mistakes in Judgment we have often been guilty of, and to recollect how often we have been deceived in Men, and Actions, and Events; and likewise how many others, otherwise Men of Worth and Goodness, we have seen carried away with Prejudices; how they have taken Flattery

tery for good Coin, and hugg'd those Persons who had nothing else to recommend them, but that they were always, Right or Wrong, of their Opinion; and how many honest Men they have known slighted and discarded, purely on Account of their Honesty and plain Dealing. But the Misery is, tho' we are ever so sharp-sighted to observe these Things in other Men, we can see none of them in ourselves; the same Pride and Vanity, which discovers to us other Men's Errors, hiding our own. If ever we have made any right Judgments of Men or Things in all our Life-time, we can readily produce the Instances of them, and tell how the Success happened according to our Opinion; but as to all the precipitate, wrong Judgments, and false Steps we have made, which are many more than the other, we have forgotten all such; which, if we had preserved the Catalogues of them, and reviewed them often in our Memories, would be infinitely more useful in keeping us modest and humble, and diffident of our own Judgments, and ready to perceive our Errors, and would help us to come easily off of them; and make us more cautious and deliberate for the future.

So much for the Antidotes to the rash Judgments, which have proceeded from our own Observation. But we are no less apt to be imposed upon, and to be carried to rash Judgments, by believing the Reports of others. For so many of these are altogether false and groundless; so many others are made up partly of Facts, and partly of the Reporter's Observations upon the Facts; and both these blended together, as if it were all Facts; there are commonly likewise so many true
Facts

Facts disguised with false Colours, and clothed with wrong Circumstances ; there are so many Comments too usually intermixed, of the Designs and Intentions, from which the Persons are said to have acted ; single Actions are so often represented as habitual and customary, and gross evil Intentions are so often fixed to innocent Actions, that it is one of the hardest Things in the World to admit Reports, without running the Hazard of making rash Judgments upon them. The Way to cure this is, *First*, Not to lend a pleasant Ear to those Tattlers or malicious Persons, who love to tell ill Stories of their Neighbour, or to colour over innocent Stories with malicious Glosses. Then to suppose, what daily Experience confirms, that there may be some Error or Uncertainty in the Reports, at least, that they may be clothed with other Circumstances than the malicious Reporter represents ; and therefore, that it is much safer to suspend our Judgment, till we have an Opportunity of being better informed. Particularly, we ought not to receive with Aversion, what tends to undeceive us as to any bad Opinion we have taken up, or any rash Information we have admitted of our Neighbour ; but should be glad of the Means it afforded us to have a better Opinion of him than the former bad Character tended to imprint in our Minds. Charity inclines us to be more forward to believe what tends to the Clearing of our Neighbour's Reputation, than what tends to the Blackening of it ; and especially if we can fall on no other Means to clear up our Neighbour's good Character, the best Way is in a friendly Way to impart all to himself, that we may hear what

what he has to say in his own Justification. And this would lead me to

The *Third* Branch of the Antithesis, or contrary Duty to the Sin of rash Judgment; namely, The Performing the Friendly Office of a Monitor to our Neighbour himself, instead of Exposing him to others: Which, together with the Prudence to be observed in Administring our Admonitions and Reproofs to Persons in such a Temper, and at such proper Times, as they are like to be the better, and not the worse for them, and we likewise safe in so doing; are both such important and difficult Subjects, that I dare not attempt them now in the End of a Sermon. And therefore leaving them to be handled more at leisure at some other Opportunity, I shall conclude, after a short Application of what has been said to two sorts of Persons; namely, those that are guilty of rash Judgments, and those that are injured by them.

1. The *First*, are almost all sorts of People; so much Care and Precaution being requisite, that perhaps there is no Duty in the whole Circle of Christian Morals, more difficult at all Times to put in Execution than this. St. *James* says, *If any one offends not in Word, the same is a perfect Man*, Jam. iii. 2. And if it is so difficult to avoid *rash Words*, it is much more so, to avoid *rash Judgments*, which do much more suddenly present to the Thoughts, than Words do to the Tongue. But the Truth is, most commonly they go together, we have no sooner made so much as a Conjecture in our own Minds to our Neighbour's Disadvantage, but we are in Pain till we communicate it to some or other, for their Approba-

Approbation; and most commonly we communicate these things to such as we know are ready to join in with all our Sentiments, at least our most malicious ones. And, which is worse, we take it very ill, if they offer to differ from us in suggesting any more charitable Opinion. But which is strangest of all, there are many Men and Women, who make Conscience of abstaining from other gross Vices, that yet make no scruple most unmercifully, in their common Discourse, to censure and condemn others, especially if they are not of their own Kidney and Party. Nay, most of our both civil and religious Sects and Parties, think they do God and their Country good Service, by putting a bad Construction on the Words and Actions of those who differ from them, and by Exposing and Censuring them most unmercifully; and if it lies in their Power to carry their rash Judgments beyond Words, to more substantial Injuries, they think it no Sin to do it; and their very Minds and Opinions being corrupted, it is much harder to bring them to a Sense of this sort of Sins, or to a true Repentance for them, than for those that are reckoned much grosser Transgressions. All I have to say to such People is, to request them to consider, that this is a most essential Character of the Spirit of Christianity, to have charitable Thoughts, and to use charitable Words of others, and to nip in the Bud all the pernicious Fruits of that uncharitable Temper. Let us believe no Harm of our Neighbour, so as to injure him thereby, either upon uncertain Rumours of others, or as uncertain Conjectures of our own. At least, let us carry these Conjectures and Surmises no further than

than to guard our selves against receiving Hurt from the Persons, supposing them to be such as the wicked Surmises suggest, without Defaming them to others, or doing them any other Prejudice, either in their good Name or Estate.

The other Persons to whom this Discourse is to be applied, are those who unjustly suffer by rash Judgments. And to them I have to offer, *First*, That they would consider, tho' they have not deserved these rash Judgments, whether they have not by their Imprudence given Occasion for them, by doing something which, if it is not evil, has at least the Appearance of Evil; and therefore, that they would order their Conversation so, that *their Good may not be evil spoken of*, Rom. xiv. 16. The other Thing is, that they would be induced both easily to pardon those rash Judgments in others, and abstain from them themselves. *First*, That they would pardon them in others; since so much Watchfulness, Care and Circumspection is requisite to avoid them; and in some they proceed from very innocent Causes, such as a Weakness of Judgment, a Lapse of Memory, an Excess of good Nature and Credulity; in others from an overcautiousness, which creates a Jealousie and Suspicion; and that Men are often obliged to act upon their present Conjectures and probable Opinions, tho' they afterwards prove to have been wrong. But what to say for a Perseverance in that Wrong, after they come to be sensible of it, I cannot tell. The least that a good Christian will then do is, not to persist in an ill Thing, but to make speedy Reparation. Then, for such a Person who has been injured by rash Judgments, there is the

greatest Reason that he should abstain from them himself, as knowing by Experience, the pernicious Nature and Consequences of them. And therefore having a right Sense of what is due to others upon these Occasions, he of all Men cannot pretend Ignorance, and has nothing to do but to apply the golden Rule, *of doing as he would be done by.* This is what occurred to me upon the present Subject, and which, I hope, ye will improve in your After-Meditations, and practise in your Lives, to your Growth in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him, &c.



SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

M A T. VII. 5.

— *And then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brothers Eye.*

V. 6. *Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you.*

The Seventh Sermon on this Text.

HAVING formerly divided this Discourse of our Saviour's against rash Judgments into three Parts; *viz.*

1. A Prohibition of Censoriousness or rash Judgment.
2. An Enforcement of the Prohibition by several Reasons and Arguments.
3. The Antithesis or opposite Duty to this Censoriousness, or rash Judgment.

We are now come to the last Branch of this Division, the opposite Duty to Censoriousness; and this, I told you, was comprehended in these Four Particulars.

1. That we should employ our Censoriousness chiefly upon our selves; that we should *first cast out the Beam out of our own Eye.*

2. That

2. That we should have charitable Thoughts of our Neighbour, and put the best Construction on his Actions they are capable of.

3. That we should perform the office of Monitors to our Neighbour himself, instead of Exposing him to others.

4. That we should use Prudence in such Admonitions, not to throw them away, where they will do hurt; but administer them to such Persons, and at such Times, and in such a Manner as is most likely to do good.

Now having at the last Occasion spoke to the first and second of these, our severity in Censuring our selves, and our Charity in Censuring others; I proceed now to the third and fourth, namely, The Duty of Fraternal Admonition, and the Prudence we are to use in Administring that Duty.

III. I begin with the Duty of fraternal Admonition, for which the preceding Censoriousness to our selves, and Charitableness to our Neighbours, are here supposed to be good Dispositions or Qualifications. Now for the Foundation of this Duty from my Text, it is comprehended in this Expression of *seeing clearly to cast out the Mote out of our Brother's Eye*. For to what Purpose should we see clearly to do this charitable Office to our Neighbour, if we are never to perform it to him? It is likewise implied in the next Expression, forbidding our throwing away of this precious Pearl of Admonition and Reproof upon Dogs and Swine, that is, on Persons who in all Probability will make a bad Use of it; for this implies, that if the Persons are not

not so indisposed, it is our Duty to administer it to them.

In speaking to this Duty of *Fraternal Admonition*, I shall First endeavour to give you a general Description of it, and of the chief Duties comprehended under it: then shew you the Usefulness of it in a Christian Life; and this will bring me to the last Thing in the Words, the Prudence to be used in managing it.

1. As to the First, the Description of the Duty of fraternal Admonition; I take it in general to be a friendly Guarding our Neighbour against Sin and Errour: or a Putting him in Mind that he is in it, or at least in Danger of being led into it, and the Directing and Guiding him into the right Way. There are many Branches of this Duty; I shall endeavour briefly to mention the chief of them, for that will go a great Way in the right Understanding the Description of the Duty.

(1.) *First* then, One of the best and safest Ways of Discharging this Duty, is by Fortifying our Brother before-hand against the by-paths of Sin and Errour, which we apprehend he will be in Danger of taking in his Christian Course. This is like furnishing the Traveller, at his first setting out, with a true Description or Map of the Roads, both the right and wrong ones, that he may follow the one, and avoid the other. This I call one of the best and safest Ways of discharging this Duty; for Men receive it with much less Prejudice, and more Goodness of Temper and Disposition, if we give them timely Warning of their Danger, before they actually go astray, than they do when

we tell them that they are already far gone in a wrong Way, and must either return a great Way directly back; or cross the Country through much greater Difficulties, before they can get into the right Way again. So in our spiritual Course there is no more innocent or useful Way of Spending our Time; there is no more Edifying Subject of Conversation, than when from an overflowing Fulness of divine Knowledge and Experience in our selves, we give copious Directions to others, well suited to their Capacity and Circumstances, how they may make the Journey of Life most inoffensively. This is what the Apostle St. Paul advises, Col. iii. 16. *Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all Wisdom; Teaching and Admonishing one another in Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual Songs.* It is much to be lamented that this edifying Way of Conversation is now so much laid aside among Christians, and that instead of it we run out into a thousand Trifles and Impertinencies, if not worse, Slanders and Calumnies; which instead of helping our Neighbour forward in his Journey heavenwards, lead him into many By-ways, out of which it will require a great deal of Time and Pains to extricate him.

(2.) This first Way is more general; but the Duty of fraternal Admonition doth not rest in Generals. Herein it differs from common Instruction, that it takes more particularly under Consideration the State of the Brother with Relation to those Instructions and Admonitions; as for Example, when we consider the present Temptations to which he is exposed, and suit our Cautions and Admonitions accordingly, for
Preserv-

VII.] *Fraternal Admonition.* MAT. VII. 5. 99

Preserving him against the Snares of Sin and Temptation; and when we consider the present Advantage and Opportunities he has for doing good, and put him in mind of them, and stir him up to embrace them. This is *that Observing and Considering one another* which the Apostle recommends to the *Hebrews*, Heb. x. 24. *And let us consider one another, says he, to provoke unto Love and to good Works; not forsaking the Assembling of our selves together, as the Manner of some is, but Exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the Day approaching.* For whatever that particular Time was, whether the Day of God's Vengeance on the *Jews*, or any other Time of Trial, it was it seems a Time of great Danger, and therefore the Apostle thought it necessary that the Christians should, by their mutual Exhortations at their Meeting together, fortify and prepare one another for it. And in Order to this, the Observing one anothers Humours, and Tempers, and Infirmities, and Dangers, and Imparting their Cautions, Admonitions, and Advices accordingly, was a great Part of this friendly Duty.

(3.) A Third Piece of this Duty is, in Case our Brother has actually betaken himself to any of the By-paths of Sin; and especially if he does not quickly take notice of it himself, and leave it, but goes on securely in it, it is then more than ordinarily necessary that this friendly Monitor should put him in Mind of his Error, and if he is not sensible of it, should by repeated Importunities jog and awaken him out of this dangerous Lethargy of Sin and Inconsideration. And if he finds him difficult of Access upon this

Subject, (as there are but few Men can bear with plain Dealing on such Occasions,) it is a Piece of Charity in such a Case, and belongs to this same Duty of fraternal Admonition, by more severe Rebukes, and with some Eagerness and Violence, such as a Parent would use to snatch a Child out of the Fire, to recover him speedily out of the Danger. This may perhaps, at present, occasion some Uneasiness; but afterwards, when he comes to himself, if he has any Sense of Goodness, he will look upon such as his best Friends; infinitely beyond those of another Kind, who were ready to strike in and flatter him in all his evil Courses, tho' never so destructive and pernicious.

(4.) A fourth Piece of Duty belonging to fraternal Admonition, especially when we find the Brother not otherwise capable of Admitting it, is to watch the Seasons and Opportunities, the proper Times when he is easiest of Access, or when the outward Dispensations of Providence by Sickness, or other Afflictions, have contributed to mellow his hard Heart, and to make use of these to instill our spiritual Counsel or Reproof. For Men are not always in the same good Humour, nor in the same malleable Temper; and it requires great Knowledge of one's Circumstances, and a great Exercise of Prudence and Patience, to make Way for such unpleasant Truths, as the Duty of fraternal Admonition and Correction requires us to deliver.

(5.) There is one Degree of this fraternal Correction and Admonition still remaining, namely, that when we have tried all other the above-mentioned Methods in vain, both by our
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selves

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 selves and others, whom we may employ as more capable of that difficult Duty, we at last break off all Friendship and Familiarity, not with a Design to abandon our Brother in these wretched Circumstances; for then he has most need of our Prayers and Endeavours; but only by such a desperate Cure to bring him to a wholesome Shame, and more vigorous Endeavours to recover himself out of the Snare of the Devil. The Apostle in this advises first an Abatement of Familiarity, upon his not amending, but not to the Degree of breaking off the Duty of Admonition and Converse entirely, *2 Theff. iii. 14. If any Man obey not our Word by this Epistle, note that Man, and have no Company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an Enemy, but admonish him as a Brother.* Yet sometimes I find good Men, upon an obstinate Continuance in Sin, have carried this much further, even to a total and final Abandoning of the Society of such Persons. Thus we find, after diverse gross Acts of Disobedience to God's Commands, and no Amendment upon Admonition and Reproof, the Prophet *Samuel* gave over all further Attempts upon *Saul*, except praying to God for him, and mourning in Secret for his Obstinacy; for so it is recorded, *1 Sam. xv. ult. that Samuel came no more to see Saul to the Day of his Death; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul.* So that let the worst come to the worst, we are never to leave off our Prayers for them; but to continue our Strugglings with God, even when they prove desperate with Man. So much for the Description of this Duty of fraternal Admonition, wherein it consists.

But there are some other Things requisite to be known about it, namely, when, or in what Circumstances, and by whom it is to be put in Execution; and with what Spirit it is to be gone about: Of which I shall say something with all convenient Brevity.

As to the first Question, when, and in what Circumstances this Duty is to be put in Execution; I answer briefly, the sooner the better; provided all other Things concur, that are requisite for the right Discharging of it. Preventing Means by good Education and Instruction can never be applied too early; The same may be said of the Infusing good Notions, and the Cautioning against bad Examples; and shewing one another the several Rocks and Shelves in the Voyage of Life that others have split upon. And it is not only these preventing Admonitions, which may thus early be applied with Safety; but likewise when our Brother has actually left the plain Road of Duty, and gone into some ill Course, the sooner he is admonished of his Error, and called back to his Duty, it is so much the better; a young bashful Sinner being much sooner reclaimed than an old hardened one. But as the Erring Brother is more and more entangled in sinful Courses, and grows more habitual, and headstrong and impudent in them, it will require a greater Degree of Care and Caution to manage this Duty of fraternal Admonition towards him: for more care must be then taken that it be administered by fit and skilful Persons, against whom he has no Prejudice; and in the gentlest, discreetest Manner; and at his easiest Times of Access; as has been already described.

The

The other Question is more easie to be resolv-
ed, namely, with what Spirit this Duty is to be
gone about; for no doubt it must be with a Spirit
of Love and Friendship. Enemies upbraid one
another with their Faults, from a Spirit of Ha-
tred and Enmity. They do it to expose an Ad-
versary, not to gain or save a Friend. They do
it to insult; the good Christian does it to re-
claim. They do it to his Enemies, or to the
promiscuous World abroad; the good Christian
does it to himself, with a pure Eye to his spiritual
Good and Advantage. One would think that
the Action of the Friend and the Enemy here,
have a great Affinity; but if we look either into
the Principle from which it proceeds, in the one
Charity, in the other Enmity; or the End it
aims at, in the one, the Good; in the other,
the Hurt of our Neighbour; or the Manner in
which it is managed, in the one, by a Spirit of
Meekness and Love; in the other, by a Spirit
of Anger and Hatred; there will be no great Dif-
ficulty in distinguishing the one from the other.
And therefore I shall insist no longer in the De-
scription of the Duty; but proceed,

2. To the Consideration of the Benefits of this
Duty in a Christian Life.

(1.) That it is a Duty, I hope none will
doubt; for both the Light of Nature, and the
Precepts of the Law and Gospel, concur in en-
joining it. By the Light of Nature we are
taught, that we are to make our Lives as useful
as we can in the World, and especially, that we
are to do all the Good to our Friends that lies in
our Power. It will be readily granted, that the
Design of all our Actions towards our Friends,

ought not to be what will please, but what will do them good. This is the Difference between a Friend and a Flatterer. The Flatterer studies only to please his Friend. But the true Friend studies his Friend's Good. And if this requires sometimes the Crossing and Contradicting him in his unreasonable Passions, and wicked Inclinations, this the Friend will venture upon, but the Flatterer will not touch or come near. If a Man wants an Instrument in any Wickedness, the false Friend or Flatterer strikes in with all his corrupt Inclinations, and furthers and promotes them; whereas the true Friend contrives his Disappointment in ill Things, and his Conversion from them. As when a Man is mad, his true Friend will be then for keeping all hurtful Weapons from him, and for confining him to a dark Room, and a strict physical Diet, such as may help to recover his Health; and not for allowing him his Swing and Liberty, with which he might quickly destroy himself. And as the Law of Nature teaches thus much, the Law of *Moses* is very express in it. *Lev. xix. 17. Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine Heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him:* Where it is plainly implied, that the not Rebuking our Neighbour, is the Hating him in our Hearts. But our Saviour has much improved this Precept, *John xiii. 34.* and has been much more particular upon it; commanding a Friendship among all Christians, and prescribing all the particular Steps we are to take with our offending Brother, as ye may see at large, *Mat. xviii.* in order to the right Discharge of this Duty of Fraternal Admonition. So that this
Duty

Duty constitutes a principal Part of both Law and Gospel, and is as necessary as the Love of our Neighbour, which is one half of our Duty.

(2.) Let us consider, that the faithful Discharge of this Duty is the principal Thing which makes Conversation useful. There have been many Inventions to make it pleasant and agreeable, but few to make it useful and profitable to the Concerns of our Souls. And indeed, bating those Things which we have described, as comprehended under the Duty of Fraternal Admonition, it will be a very hard Matter, to find much more in Conversation, that tends to our spiritual Benefit. Perhaps it may be said, though we our selves are not directly instructed or admonished in Conversation, yet as the Discourse is often pretty free of those that are Absent, we may indirectly be benefited by the Commendations or Censures of other Mens Actions. It is true, and this, if designed for our Benefit, is one handsome Way of brotherly Admonition. And for that Reason, even this is almost banished out of Conversation; whatever has a Tendency to awaken our Neighbour to any Sense of his Duty, being thought a Piece of ungentle Breeding. The only Way then to make Conversation useful, especially between intimate Friends, would be to retrieve this much neglected Duty of *Fraternal Admonition*, and with a true Spirit of Love and Charity to put it in Practice.

(3.) Let us consider, that in some Respects Fraternal Admonition is a more effectual Instrument of the Conversion and Sanctification of Men, than even good Books and Sermons; for they

they do only in general tell us our Duty, leaving the particular Application to our own Consciences. But this comes closer home, with a *Thou art the Man*; and something more still, that the World knows our Guilt or Hypocrisie; which is of great Consideration to induce us to mend our Manners. And therefore the Banishing such an effectual Means of Grace out of the World, or, which is the same thing, the bringing it into Desuetude, is a great Wound to Religion, and has a very bad Influence on Christian Morals.

(4.) Let us consider; That the Practice of this Duty of fraternal Correction would be the Destruction of Flattery, that greatest Bane of Society, which has eaten out all that's good in Conversation. As Flattery conceals Men from themselves, and represents their Virtues in a magnifying Glass, but their Vices through the other end of the Prospective; so Fraternal Admonition represents every thing in its true Colours. Flattery feeds Pride and Vanity; Fraternal Admonition nourishes Humility. Flattery shuts the Door to Repentance and Amendment; Fraternal Admonition is a great Spur to both. Flattery tends to deceive Men, and Fraternal Admonition to bring them to the Knowledge of themselves. Certainly the avoiding so many Mischiefs, and the bringing in so many Blessings, must be an unspeakable Benefit to human Society.

(5.) Fraternal Admonition is one of the greatest Acts of Charity. It is great in respect of the Object of its Care, being the Soul's, and eternal Salvation of Men; and it is great in regard of the Difficulty of it; for I know no Duty requires so
much

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much Skill and Dexterity, so much Wisdom and Prudence, so much Courage and Patience, to manage it to good Advantage, as this does. And it is a Duty attended with the greatest and best of Consequences, the right Forming of the Minds and Manners of Men; And therefore it is an Art, which of all other deserves to be the most seriously studied.

(6.) *Lastly*, It is a Duty, which of all other is the most amply Rewarded. If there be in Heaven, as I do not doubt there are, different Degrees of Glory, one of the highest, I question not, shall be conferred upon them, who prove Instrumental in the Conversion of many Souls to God, according to that of St. *James*, in the End of his Epistle: *Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he who converteth a Sinner from the Error of his Way, shall save a Soul from Death, and shall bide a multitude of Sins, Jam. v. 19.* And that of *Daniel*, Dan. xii. 3. *And they that be wise, shall shine as the Brightness of the Firmament; and they that turn many to Righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever.*

So much for inducing us to set about this difficult Duty of Fraternal Admonition.

I should now, in the last Place, consider the great Prudence here recommended in Administering this Duty; for there are some Men, here compared to *Dogs* and *Swine*, so incapable of admitting it, and who would receive it with so much Contempt and Profaneness, and with so much Wrath and Indignation, that a great deal of Harm is to be feared, but no Good to be expected from it, when administered to them. And there-

therefore our blessed and merciful Saviour, in such Cases, doth not require it at our Hands, but expressly forbids our Administring it to such Persons, and on such Occasions: *Give not that which is holy unto Dogs, &c.* But this is a Subject of that Extent and Difficulty, that though I would very willingly be excused from it, yet having baulk'd none of the Difficulties of this excellent Sermon on the Mount hitherto, I shall choose rather to give it a distinct Consideration by it self, than to leave it thus imperfect. But this will be work for another Day's Meditation.

God bless what we have heard at present, and give us Grace to bring forth the Fruits of it in a good Conversation our selves, and in our zealous Endeavours to reclaim others from the evil of their Ways, that we with them may at last obtain the end of our Faith, the Salvation of our Souls, through the Grace and Merits of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.



S E R M O N

S E R M O N VIII.

M A T. VII. 6.

Give not that which is holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you.

The Eighth Sermon on this Text.

HA V I N G in some former Discourses against Censoriousness and rash Judgment, both considered the Vice it self here prohibited, and the Reasons suggested in the Text against it, I came at last to the opposite Duty, which I proposed in these Four Particulars:

I. That we should employ our Censoriousness chiefly against our selves; by *casting out first the Beam out of our own Eye.*

II. That we should have charitable Thoughts of our Neighbour, and put the best Construction on his Designs and Actions they are capable of.

III. That in Case of his Sin and Error, we should perform the Office of Monitors to our Neighbour himself, instead of exposing him to others.

These Three I have already considered; now follows,

IV. The

IV. The *Fourth* and last Advice with Regard to these Admonitions and Correptions; namely, that we should take care so prudently to administer them, that they may do no Hurt, but give them to such Persons, and at such Times, and in such a Manner, as is most likely to do Good. *Give not that which is Holy unto the Dogs, &c.*

The Words being made up of a proverbial Speech, and that likewise wrapt up in a parabolical Phrase, have given Latitude to different Interpretations. In order to the finding out the true Sense, we must enquire into these four Things; first, to whom this Precept is given; then, who are here meant by *Dogs and Swine*; and thirdly, what is meant by giving our *holy Things and Pearls* to those Dogs and Swine; and lastly, what are the Dangers of Transgressing this Precept, *viz. the Trampling under Foot the Pearls and holy Things*, and the *persecuting* those who administer them.

I. We are to enquire to whom this Precept is here given. And as to this, I can see no great Difficulty in it; It is given to the same Persons to whom all the rest of the Sermon is addressed, to the same Persons to whom the preceding Precept against rash Judging is directed; that is, to all Christ's Disciples, or all Christians. And indeed I cannot but take this Verse as belonging to the same Subject concerning rash Judging, and as a proper Part of it; for as in the Verse immediately foregoing, our Saviour gave Direction concerning the Qualifications of the Monitors, that they should first try the Virtue of their Admonitions upon themselves; so now
in

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in this Verse, he describes to us the Qualifications of the Persons whom we are to admonish. And this leads me to

2. The *Second* Thing I was to enquire into; namely, who are to be meant here by *Dogs and Swine*; for they are the only Persons, it seems, excluded from our Admonitions. There are two Properties of the Dog, I think here chiefly pointed at; his *obstinate Barking*, and his *cruel Biting*; and both these help to discover to us, what sort of Persons we are to forbear to Admonish or Reprove: namely, first, the barking Cur, who, if you offer him ever so good Advice, and in ever so discreet and calm a Manner, will never listen to it, or be convinced; but will scold and argue again, from a mere Spirit of Disputatiousness and Contradiction. Arguments are but thrown away upon such a one; he is resolved not to be convinced, but will have the last Word, though it is no more to the Purpose than, as we say, *the Barking of a Dog*. This is the Spirit of obstinate Hereticks, and likewise of wilful, habitual Sinners; you may talk to them till your heart akes, you are never the nearer; they will bark on, their Passions will be more and more provoked; but neither their Heresies forsaken, nor their Lives amended: and therefore when we perceive this Obstinacy of Temper, we had as good let them alone; for no good, but a great deal of Hurt and Anger, is like to come from their incensed Passions. Secondly, Another sort of Person we are here excused from Admonishing or Reproving is, he that is meant by the fierce biting Dog: Those Men, who are so far from being perswaded to

Amendment by our good Admonitions, that they only hate us for them, and take all Opportunities to injure and persecute their Monitors. So much for what is meant by *Dogs*. *Swine* are chiefly noted for their Impurity, loving to root in Mud; and not contented, like other Creatures, to wade through dirty Places when there is Occasion, but loving to wallow all over in the Mire, till there is not one clean Part about them. And this Filthiness is so inherent in their Temper, and so inseparable from it, that no Labour or Pains can cure it; but the Sow that is washed will wallow in the first Mire again. By *Swine* then, we are to understand Men of the most profligate Lives, who are a meer Disgrace to their Christian Profession; and such as are so rooted in their Wick- edness, that they shew *an Incurribleness in it*; and if you take never so much Pains to wash and clean them, they continually break through all Exhortations, Resolutions, Vows and Promises; and upon the first Presenting of a Temptation, run upon it as greedily, as the Sow that was washed wallows over Head and Ears in the first Mire she comes at.

3. We are to enquire what is to be meant by *Giving that which is Holy to Dogs, and casting our Pearls before Swine*. This we do, whenever we throw away our Admonitions and Reproofs upon any of the above described unqualified Persons: I mean, the obstreperous, obstinate Defenders of their Evil Ways; the fierce Persecutors, or the habitual ill Livers, who are Proof against all the Means of Grace. The Word *Casting of Pearls*, implies a rash and inconsiderate Throwing away something of Value, where
it

it will do no good. And it is no new Thing for Admonitions and Reproofs to be compared to Jewels, or Pearls, or precious Things. *A Word fitly spoken, says Solomon, Prov. xxv. 11, 12. is like Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver. And again, as an Ear-ring of Gold, and an Ornament of fine Gold, so is a wise Reprover upon an obedient Ear.*

4. The last Thing to be enquired into, in Order to the Explication of the Words, is the Dangers they incur who transgress this Precept. And there are two here mentioned. 1. That the Dog and Swine trample all such Admonitions under their Feet; that is, they despise and contemn them; implying that there is an Encrease of their own Sin and Guilt, by their abusing the Means of Grace; and likewise that the Means of Grace themselves are rendered more contemptible by being thus abused by such ill Men. 2. That they turn again, and fall upon the Monitors, and persecute them. So that there is a threefold Danger here intimated. That godly Admonitions, and all such sacred Things, fall under Contempt; that the Safety and Tranquillity of the Monitor are endangered; and the Sin and Condemnation of the admonished are much encreased. All which it will be fit to consider a little more particularly.

(1.) Let us consider the Contempt of Admonitions and all other sacred Things, which will probably follow upon our Throwing them away upon such unworthy and unqualified Persons. *They trample them under their Feet.* It is impossible to describe what Dirt is cast upon holy Things by profane, incorrigible Men; how they

not only harden their Hearts, and disbelieve, but how they mock and ridicule the most sacred Truths. It is no easy Matter even for good Men to manage holy Things with that Honour and Decency, which is due to their great Worth and Dignity. What must we think then of the unworthy Treatment they meet with, when they fall into the Hands of the profanest Sort of Debauchee's, who have no Relish for such Things, except it be to mock and ridicule them? as we hear of some, who, *when they heard of the Resurrection of the Dead, mocked*; Acts xvii. 32. so far were they from believing that Doctrine of the greatest Consequence.

(2.) Another evil Effect of obtruding godly Admonitions and Reproofs upon Men, that are arrived to such a superlative Degree of Wickedness, is, that it stirs up the Hatred and Indignation of such Persons against their Monitors, which accordingly exerts it self in spiteful angry Words, and malicious persecuting Actions. We know what wicked Use *Herod* made of *John Baptist's* wholesome Reproofs; for St. *Luke* tells us, *Luk. iii. 19.* that *being reprov'd by him for Herodias his Brother Philip's Wife, and for all the Evils which he had done, he added yet this above all, that he shut up John in Prison.* We are here told the principal Cause of that Alienation of *Herod's* Affection from *John the Baptist*, of whom he had had a good Opinion formerly. But this Freedom of Admonition did so soon sour his Mind against him, that he not only put him in Prison, but afterwards consented to his Murder there. Severe Truths are so choaking to Persons arrived to an high Degree in evil Habits, that
instead

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instead of Amending upon them, they only grow
exasperated against those who presume to offer
them. But this is not all. For,

(3.) The Sin and Condemnation of such Persons is much encreased thereby. As when a Physician prescribes a Dose of Physick too strong for the Patient's weak Constitution, instead of doing him good, it disorders him so much the more, and incapacitates him as to the Admission of other more proper Remedies. The Monitor then must be like a wise Physician; he must prudently consider not only what Remedies are proper for the Distemper in general; but what are fittest for the Patient's Constitution and Circumstances, when he is become so weak and peevish, that he will not endure the usual Remedies. This is God's own Way with his Patients; when Remedies will not do, but make Men worse, he leaves them to themselves. *Ephraim is joyned to Idols: let him alone,* says the Prophet *Hosea*, Hof. iv. 17. And *why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more,* saith *Isaiab*, Isa. i. 5. to the incorrigible *Israelites*. In mere Pity then to the Souls of Persons, thus incapable of Receiving Benefit by Admonition, that we may not encrease their Sin and Guilt, we ought to forbear throwing away our Admonitions and Reproofs upon them.

The Words being thus explained, it appears that they are a Part of our Saviour's Doctrine, belonging to the right Management of Judgment and Censure: that as the Qualifications on the Part of the Censurer, were described immediately before in the same Discourse; so here the Qualifications of the Person fit to be censured

are described ; at least we are told what Persons, and in what Circumstances, are excepted out of the Obligation which lyes upon us to brotherly Admonition and Correption. In pursuing the Scope and Design of my Text, there are these four Things, I take to be comprehended under it ; in considering of which, I intend to bestow the Time that remains for this present Exercise, and so to make an End of this Part of our Saviour's Sermon, concerning rash Judgments, *viz.*

1. How cautious and tender we ought to be in Judging Men unqualified for admitting Admonition and Reproof ; since none are exempted from it, but those who are here described under the Denomination of *Dogs and Swine*.

2. That we are prudently to watch the most proper Times, and Mens most advantagious Circumstances, for doing them good with our Admonitions.

3. Particularly, that we are as much as may be to avoid the Provoking Mens Passions and Resentments, if we intend they shall receive Benefit by our Admonitions.

4. What pious and likewise prudential Aims we ought to have in Administring these Admonitions.

1. The *First* Thing I propose to consider is, How tender and cautious we ought to be in Judging any Person unqualified for admitting Admonition and Reproof, since none are excepted from it, but those here described under the Denomination of *Dogs and Swine*. By them, as I told you, there are but three Sorts of Persons, whom I take to be exempted from this Branch
of

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of our religious Care ; and these we ought not to conclude to be such upon bare Surmise or Suspicion, but upon good Grounds of Knowledge and Experience.

(1.) *First*, The Persons who will not endure sound Advice and Admonition, but set themselves to contradict, ridicule, or misrepresent it ; thus, when the *Jews*, instead of being convinced by St. Paul's Doctrine, were only filled with Envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming, Acts xiii. 45. the Apostles St. Paul and St. Barnabas thought it was their best Way to leave them to their own stubborn, incorrigible Temper, and to betake themselves to the *Gentiles*. But they did not do this without trial ; they had not only first endured the Abuses and Persecutions of the *Jewish* Rulers at *Jerusalem*, but had preached freely to these very *Jews* at *Antioch*, Acts xiii. 27. and had shewed them their Error, and the Danger of their following the Example of their Countrymen at *Jerusalem* ; and till they obstinately imitated them, contradicting and blaspheming, the Apostles did not put in execution this Advice in my Text against them, of not giving that which was holy unto Dogs. Indeed they found them such troublesome Enemies to Christianity, that St. Paul seems to apply expressly this Compellation of Dogs, for their Barking and Biting, to them ; *Phil. iii. 2. Beware of Dogs*, says he, *beware of Evil-workers, beware of the Circision*. Of this sort of Persons are all Hereticks, professed Enemies of the Truth, and obstinately wedded to their own Errors. Yet even such, this Apostle would not have deprived of our Ad-

monitions at first, till they have given Proof of their Obstinacy: *A Man that is an Heretick, says he, after the first and second Admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself, Tit. iii. 10.* There are several Sinners of this Nature totally incorrigible, so addicted to some dangerous Opinions and Practices, that we can do nothing with them, but abandon them, for fear of worse Consequences of their Obstinacy.

(2.) If they who contradict, ridicule, and misrepresent our good Advices and Admonitions, are to be deprived of them, much more are they who set themselves to persecute the Monitors; who turn again in an angry Way, and rend those who perform that friendly Office to them. Many Reasons might be given for our Saviour's exempting such Persons from this spiritual Care we are all to take of one another in the Way of Admonition; such as the Preservation of good Men, whom our Lord would not have to be needlessly harrassed or ruined; the preventing the Sin of bad Men, which would be mightily increased and aggravated by their being active in such Persecutions; and the Discouragements to other Christians, and the hindrance of the Propagation of the Gospel, by the Persecution of its most zealous Professors. But I have not Time to dwell upon them.

(3.) The notoriously Profligate and Profane, who are Scandals to their Christian Profession, who have not only great Failings and Infirmities, like other Men, but are all over infected with gross Immoralities, like a Sow wallowing over Head and Ears in the Mire; and if one takes
never

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never so much Pains to reform and reclaim them,
he is never the nearer; for as St. Peter says, in
Allusion, I think, to this Text, *it happens to
them according to the true Proverb: The Dog is
turned to his own Vomit again; and the Sow that
was washed, to her wallowing in the Mire,* 2 Pet.
ii. 22.

But now, alas, besides these three sorts, how
many others are there, as to whom we exempt
our selves from this Duty of Fraternal Admoni-
tion? It must be confessed, that it is generally a
very ungrateful Duty, and that for that Reason
few care to meddle with it, even in the Cases not
here excepted. And most Men are so apt to flat-
ter their Neighbour to his Face, and to censure
him when his Back is turned, that in the whole
Circle of Duties, there is scarce any one more
neglected than this of Fraternal Admonition.
There is so much Reason to doubt of our own
being duly qualified either to give, or receive it;
our Neighbour's Temper is so touchy, or we
are willing to believe it such; a convenient Sea-
son for this Duty is so hard to be found; and
Mens Passions and Resentments are so easily pro-
voked, and so hard to be laid again; in short,
there are so many Pretences for fearing *a Lion in
the Way*, that there is no great Hope this Duty
will be easily retrieved. However, having so
fair an Opportunity from my Text, I shall
make some short Attempt to facilitate it, and
to make it more Practicable; and that by offer-
ing a few short Advices both to the Persons that
want Admonition, and to the Monitors them-
selves.

First, To the Persons who stand in need of Admonition; and indeed all of us are such.

(1.) Let us consider, that we are all of us exceeding blind as to our own Faults, and want a good Friend for nothing more than to help us to discover them. As every Creature is naturally fond of its own Offspring, so we are all fond of our own Conceits, Notions, Actions, Contrivances, and Inventions. Our very Imperfections and Deformities seem Beauteous to us; and therefore of all Things we want a Friend to help us to discover the Faults and Blemishes in our own Actions and Performances. But we are not so Blind in any other Thing relating to us, as we are in our Morals. In other Things we are not so hard to be convinced that we are in an Error, or that any Thing is amiss; and we think our selves obliged to any one that will set us right; only in Opinions and Practices relating to our Morals, we think it is an Affront, and we cannot easily bear with it. If in a Journey we lose our Way, we are glad to meet any Man upon the Road to set us right; if we have a Leg or an Arm broken or dislocated, we are presently sensible of it, and are ready to send for, and to follow the Advice of a skilful Chirurgeon. And so it is as to Blindness, Deafness, Sickness at our Stomach, or any other common bodily Pain or Infirmity. But it is quite otherwise as to the losing our selves in our spiritual Journey; and as to our spiritual Blindness, Deafness, want of Taste or Appetite. There is such a vast deal of Pride and Self-conceit inherent in our corrupt Natures, that while we contemplate our selves

in our own Imaginations, we see our selves as it were in a flattering Glafs, which hides all the Wrinkles and Deformities; and we cannot easily endure that any one should undeceive us in this particular. And which is stranger, though we are all very apt to observe this Defect in others, there is none of us hardly can perceive it in himself, or can well brook it when discovered by others. Now this is what we should by all Means endeavour to be sensible of, and to amend, and to perswade our selves that they are our best Friends, who help to cure us of these spiritual Maladies, and in order to that, shew us to our selves in a true Glafs. A Thing which we ought therefore not only to bear with, but to encourage.

(2.) And this is the next Advice I would give to all that need to be admonished, that because it is commonly an unacceptable, tho' a most useful Duty, we should therefore encourage our Friends to put it in Practice, with regard to us; assuring them, that we will take it kindly at their Hands, and as one of the greatest Expressions of their Love and Friendship. Our blessed Saviour, though he had no Faults to enquire after, yet has by his Example encouraged us to enquire what Character the World has of us. For he asked his Disciples privately, *Whom do Men say that I the Son of Man am?* Mat. xvi. 13. And there he was pleased to learn what the World thought of him; and afterwards yet more home, *But whom say ye that I am?* By which Freedom he encouraged, and even obliged them to declare both the World's Sentiments of him, and their own. An Example
mighty

mighty proper for us to imitate, if we intend to encourage this useful Duty of Fraternal Admonition; a Duty, which our Lord's Apostles always speak of as proceeding from great Goodness, and deserving the greatest Love; as *Rom. xv. 14. I my self am perswaded of you, my Brethren, that ye also are full of Goodness, filled with all Knowledge, able also to admonish one another. And 1 Thess. v. 12. We beseech you, Brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in Love for their Works sake.*

(3.) Another Advice, very proper for those who have Occasion to be admonished, is, because we are apt to wrap up our Admonitions in as soft and decent Expressions as we can, that so a Thing which is harsh in it self, may not be made harsher by the smartness of our Words; that therefore, in order to his receiving due Benefit by the Admonition, the admonished Person would lay it home to his own Conscience, as separate from all that softness of Expression, and accuse himself more home than the Monitor does; and that for this End he would duly improve all the gentle Hints and Innuendo's that are made to him, into downright Accusations, and turn general Dehortations against Vice into particular Applications, as if they had been directly said to him; not to aggravate the Crime of the Monitor, but his own; so to carry it on more effectually towards Amendment.

(4.) The last Duty I shall mention, as proper for the admonished, is a Love and Gratitude to their Monitors: for as this is a Thing highly reasonable

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reasonable in it self, it is likewise a great Encouragement to the same Persons or others to perform the like friendly offices. Are we not thankful to one who tells us we are wrong in a Journey, and is at the Pains to direct or guide us into the right Way? Are we not thankful to a Physician, who admonishes us of any Thing we do prejudicial to our Health, and puts us in a Way to prevent the ill Effects of it? Are we not thankful to a Lawyer, who discovers some Flaw in the Deeds, or Conveyances of our Land, and puts us in a Way how to remedy it? And shall he who does us the like Kindnesses in our Souls Concerns, which are infinitely more valuable, deserve less of our Love and Esteem? And who, think we, will be at the Pains, ever to do us the like good Office again, if he must, as *St. Paul* says, Gal. iv. 16. *Be reckoned our Enemy, for telling us the Truth.*

So much for the Persons fit to be admonished; I must add a little to the Monitors, and then I have done. But this will fall in properly under the other Heads I proposed from my Text. Of which having spoke to the first, I must be shorter on the rest, out of Respect to your Time, and Patience.

II. The *Second* Thing then, I took to be comprehended in the Design of the Text was this; that we are prudently to watch the most proper Times, and most advantageous Circumstances, for doing Men good by our Admonitions. For it is not only a different Sort of Men that is marked out to us by this Comparison of *Dogs and Swine*; but the same Men in different Tempers, and under different Circumstances. The same
Man

Man is sometimes a *Lamb*, and at other Times a *Dog*; sometimes he is well prepared and disposed to receive Admonition, and at other Times he will flee in the Throat of the Monitor. This is what renders the Duty much more difficult, for we must watch the *mollia tempora fandi*, take him in the right Juncture of Time, when diverse good Circumstances do concur to soften his Heart, and to help our Admonitions to make Impression. Even *Pharaoh*, tho' a great Example of an obdured Sinner, was not equally stubborn at all Times; for when any of the Plagues were upon him, he would hear *Moses* and *Aaron* patiently, and promise to let the People of *Israel* go, tho' he soon forgot after the Plagues were removed. So some Men are well disposed, and brought into a tractable Temper by Afflictions; others by signal Mercies and Deliverances; most Men, if ever so wicked, have their lucid Intervals, when their Consciences are awakened, and they are apt of themselves to form good Resolutions; and then a little Help of a faithful Monitor may come in very seasonably to improve them. And tho' several of our Admonitions should be lost, yet perhaps some of them, coming in the critical Minute, in a favourable Juncture, may hit; and therefore to this may well be applied the Advice of the wise Man, *Eccl. xi. 6. In the Morning sow thy Seed, and in the Evening withhold not thine Hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.* A Precept, which encourages rather to venture a little good Advice at hap Hazard, than to be
over-

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over-nice in not coming out with it, till we are
sure of a convenient Season.

A *third* Thing I observed in the Design of
the Text was, that we are as much as is pos-
sible to avoid the provoking Mens Passions and
Resentments, if we intend they shall receive Be-
nefit by our Admonitions. For we are here
put in Mind of the Fierceness of the Dog; and
some think too of the Swine; both of them
most unmerciful Creatures, when thoroughly pro-
voked, but innocent and friendly enough, when
used gently. Of all Tempers, the haughty pas-
sionate Tempers are the worst to deal with.
*Let a Bear robbed of her Whelps meet a Man,
rather than a Fool in his Folly; Prov. xvii. 12.
The Meek will be guide in Judgment, says the
Psalmist, Psal. xxv. 9. and the Meek will be
teach his Way.*

4. But I hasten to the last Thing which I
observed from the Words, and I shall be very
brief upon it, having already, I doubt, incroach-
ed upon your Patience. It is to shew you what
Aims and Views we should have, both pious
and prudential, in administering our fraternal
Admonitions. And in short, there are these
three which I observe from the Text. 1. The
Honour of Religion; we are to take care that
holy Things be not trampled under Foot. 2. The
good of our Neighbour; and therefore we are
not to expose our holy Things to him, when
we have Reason to believe he will encrease his
Sin and Guilt by the Abuse of us and them;
but are to watch more favourable Opportunities.
3. Our own Safety and Preservation; for that
our Saviour is willing we should be cautioned to
mind,

126 *Persons excepted from, &c.* [SERM.
mind, that wicked Men do not for our good
Admonitions *turn again and rent us.*

Thus now I have treated at large this Subject
against rash Judgment, which, if it were duly
minded, would direct us admirably, both as to
that inward Charity we ought to entertain of
our Neighbour in our Hearts; and as to the
good Government of our Tongue, and a Dis-
cretion and Moderation in all our Actions and
Behaviour; for the want of which three Things,
there are so many Disorders in the World. If
ye know these Things, happy are ye, if ye do
them.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy
Ghost, be all Praise, Honour and Glory, Might,
Power and Dominion; for ever and ever. *Amen.*



S E R M O N

S E R M O N IX.

M A T. VII. 7.

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

V. 8. *For every one that asketh, receiveth : and he that seeketh, findeth : and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.*

V. 9. *Or what Man is there of you, whom if his Son ask Bread, will he give him a Stone ?*

V. 10. *Or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent ?*

V. 11. *If ye then being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him ?*

The First Sermon on this Text.

IN the preceding divine Sermon on the Mount, particularly from the 20th Verse of the fifth Chapter, our blessed Saviour had been teaching his Disciples higher Degrees of Duty than were taught by the best Jewish Doctors, the Scribes and Pharisees. In Pursuance of which Design, he had run through a great many of the chief Heads of Christian Morals, and had omitted nothing wherein that Doctrine wanted any Vindication from the Corruptions which had been brought

brought into it, by the Misinterpretations of the Teachers of those Days, or the Imperfection which had been tolerated by *Moses* himself, because of the Hardness of their Hearts. And now the Sermon drawing towards a Conclusion, his chief Care at last is, to guard against every Thing that might obstruct the good Effects of it in the Lives of his Hearers. And to this End, *first*, he gives them a compleat Abridgment of all Moral Duty ; by reducing all to the Love of God and our Neighbour. At the same Time he shews them, how they might be enabled, by the Grace of God's Spirit, to yield Obedience to that Duty he had taught them ; and how they might obtain this Grace by fervent and importunate Prayer. *2dly*, He guards them against the Contagion of the common loose Opinions and bad Examples of the World, by advising them to enter in at the strait Gate. *3dly*, He cautions them against the Seductions of false Prophets. And *lastly*, he guards them against the Delusion of an high Profession, without a suitable Practice, acquainting them that in the great Day of Accounts many will plead their high Profession, and their extraordinary Gifts, whom he will disown, because of their unsuitable Practice and Conversation. So he concludes with an apposite Similitude of a wise and foolish Builder, to shew them that all Gifts, and Talents, and Profession, will signify nothing without such a well-grounded Faith as produces an holy Life and Conversation. These are the great concluding Points of this divine Sermon which remain to be handled.

What

What I have now read to you, relates to the first of them ; namely, The Encouragement to fervent Prayer ; and upon occasion of that, we are briefly taught with what Love, and Trust, and Confidence, we are to rely on God, as Children on a Father, and indeed put in Mind of our whole Duty to him.

In the Words we have these Two Things :

1. The Duty of fervent Prayer, joined with vigorous Endeavours after Grace, *Ask, Seek, and Knock.*

2. Several Encouragements to this Duty, taken from the Promises and Nature of God.

I. I begin with the Duty of Prayer, on which I intend to employ this Day's Meditation. In this, I think, it will be very proper to do these Three Things :

1. To consider the Occasion of the Duty in this Place, and to discourse it chiefly with an Eye to that.

2. What is the Nature, and what are the Exercises of it.

3. The Circumstance of Instancy or Frequency.

I. Let us consider the Occasion of pressing the Duty of Prayer in this Place ; which I take to be this : Our Saviour had been recommending a great many difficult Duties to his Disciples. Now, it was very natural for him to think they would be mightily discouraged, considering how

disproportioned their Strength was to so difficult a Task. And therefore it was necessary, before he concluded that excellent Discourse of Christian Duties, to put them in a Way how they might be enabled to perform them; and that was by directing them to the Exercise of Prayer, that Key which opens up all the Treasures of Grace, whereby they might be enabled to yield a suitable Obedience to the many excellent Precepts he had given them. And herein especially consists the Advantage of the Christian Morals, beyond the Morals of the Heathen. They had all the great Tasks of Duty to undergo, only by their own Strength, Care, and Endeavours, which was a very discouraging, comfortless Business; but we Christians are taught where there is supply enough of Grace to be had; and that it is in the Hands of a gracious, merciful Father, who, by virtue of the Mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, will grant it to us upon our diligent and fervent asking for it by prayer. This is the great Secret, how Christians may come to be Men of much better Lives than any of the Heathen were. It is not that they are naturally of better Parts, or more industrious; but that they are assisted in an extraordinary Manner, by the Spirit of God, with all Grace necessary to enable them to do what he requires of them; and not only to do it, but to do it with abundance of Pleasure and Satisfaction. So much for the Occasion of this Discourse of Prayer.

2. I go on next to the Duty it self, where I am to consider the Nature and Exercises of the Duty of Prayer. As to the Nature of it,

it is an intent Application of the Mind to God; and comprehends the whole Commerce which our Souls have with him; whether to pay our Homage and Adorations to him; or to thank him for all his Mercies and Favours; or to address to him for any Mercies and Favours to our selves or others. But that Part of it, which is chiefly aimed at in this Place, is the begging of Grace, whereby we may be enabled and assisted to discharge the great Duties which he requires of us. Now to speak of Prayer with this View, we are to consider these Two Things.

1. The Necessity of Grace, to enable us to do our Duty.

2. The Fitness of Prayer towards the obtaining of Grace.

1. As to the *First*, The Necessity of the Grace of God, to enable us to do our Duty. This Necessity rises partly from the great Corruption of our Natures, which are now exceedingly unfitted and indisposed of themselves to do any Good; and partly from the Excellency of the Duties, which do very much surpass our Strength, in this State of corrupt Nature, and require the divine Aid and Assistance, to put us in a right Frame and Disposition for them. When I speak of the Corruption of our Natures, I mean, not only their original Corruption, which in this degenerate State we bring into the World with us; but the actual Corruption, which by so many repeated Acts of Sin, and evil Habits consequent thereon, does very much encrease the original One, so that we are now become seven-fold more the Children of Satan than we were before. It is impossible to tell you, besides the

Guilt of Sin, what an Incapacity and Impotency as to the favourable Sense and Understanding of all Good, and what an Aversion from it, this has brought into our Natures, that it requires a great Effort of divine Assistance to make us apprehend and relish, and put in Practice, those noble Duties which are enjoined us. For remedy whereof, there is a sweet and powerful Operation of the Holy Spirit, which excites our own Endeavours, and co-operates with them in the Use of the proper Means, and qualifies and enables us to do our Duty. I say in the Use of proper Means; for tho', no doubt, God can work Miracles in Grace, as well as in Nature, yet it is much more probable that he rarely works in either by the Way of Miracle; at least he does not encourage us to expect that Way of Working, but ties us up to the Use of Means, and in the Use of them, and not otherwise, allows us to expect his divine Aid and Assistance. But that I may not digress from the Subject we have in Hand, I shall not now consider any other Means of Grace, but only Prayer; and therefore proceed,

2. To shew the Fitness of Prayer towards the obtaining of Grace. If we consider either where Grace is to be had; or what are the right Dispositions for asking and receiving it; or what is the Nature of God, and his Love toward poor Sinners; on all these Accounts, we shall find Prayer a most proper Means for obtaining this great Gift of Grace, or the holy Spirit, whereby we may be enabled to do God's Will.

(1.) *First*, If we consider where Grace is to be had; it is a Treasure in the Hands of God himself. It is not like Silver or Gold, to be dug

dug with hard Labour out of the Bowels of the Earth. If you ask all the Creatures, they will all tell you, it is not in me. Now if it be only in the Hands of God, what so proper Way have we to come at it, as by addressing to him for it, through the Mediation and Intercession of Jesus Christ?

Ye will say perhaps, why might not God give us at once a sufficient Stock of Grace, enough to enable us to stand upon our own Legs, and to trade upon our own Account, that we may not have Occasion to trouble him continually with new Prayers for what we need? It is natural enough for foolish Men to argue at this rate. But if we consider our own Unfitness to manage such a Stock, tho' it were put into our Hands; or God's delight in the frequency of our Addresses; or the continual Benefits derived to us, by this our continual waiting on God in Prayer, we shall be of another Opinion. As to our Unfitness, we are like young Children that cannot go alone without Help; or at best, like foolish young Men, easily seduced with idle Company, if we had not both the Authority and good Counsel of a wise Father to keep us right. With all our Stock of Grace, we should quickly prove like the Prodigal in the Parable; if we had our Portion put into our own Hands, it would not be long before we squandered it away, and left our Father's House, and reduced our selves to the greatest Degree of Want and Misery. It is therefore much better Conduct, that this precious Gift of Grace be in our Father's Keeping; and that he dispense it to us, as we have Occasion; and that in order thereto,

we make frequent Applications to him. For we are much mistaken if we think the frequency of our Addresses to God is any way troublesome or displeasing to him. It is so far from it, that the most loving Father or Mother upon Earth is not so well pleased with the Company and Conversation of the most dutiful Child, as God is with the Prayers of his Children, and their Applications to him for a Supply of all their Wants. But the chief Reason of all for this Conduct, is taken from the great Benefits to our own Souls, by our frequent drawing near to God in Prayer. For as we are apt to imbibe a strong Tincture from the Humour and Principles of the Persons with whom we converse much; so it is in our frequent Prayers and Addresses to Almighty God, that we wear off our earthly, and acquire an heavenly Temper of Mind; we learn to delight our selves in God, and advance in his Love; we taste and see that God is good; worldly Things grow more unfavoury, and Devotion more and more sweet and pleasant; by Degrees we are acquainted upon Earth with the Joys of Heaven, and long to be there; we grow afraid of every Thing that may unfit and indispose us for that blessed State of Devotion here, or the more perfect Enjoyment of God hereafter. Whenever our Hearts and Minds are any way dull or out of Temper, we learn to run to God, and to give them a new Edge and Whet at Prayer; so that by that Means our Life upon Earth becomes a right Apprenticeship for Heaven, and we accustom our selves to the same Exercises and Employments here, in which we shall be taken up to all Eternity.

Eternity. Thus we see that Grace being in the Hands of God, doth necessarily put us upon Prayer, as the proper Means to obtain it from thence, as naturally indeed, as an hungry Child applies himself for Victuals to him or her that has the keeping of it; whereas if it were in our own keeping, we should not need to have such Recourse to God, except for Praise and Thanksgiving.

(2.) But then, *Secondly*, If we enquire into the right Dispositions for the Reception of Grace, we shall find they are all included in Prayer. Prayer presupposes that we are very sensible of our own Wants, Ignorance, Sin, and Folly; and so is grounded on Humility and Repentance. Prayer presupposes God's Ability and Willingness to relieve us, upon our due Application to him, through the Mediation of his dear Son Jesus Christ; and so proceeds from a lively Faith. Prayer presupposes a sincere Resolution to do God's Will, and for that End, we pray for Grace to enable us to do it. Prayer presumes upon the Love of God to Sinners; and consequently stirs up our Love to him again, and our Trust in him, and Dependance on him. Prayer presupposes a Delight in drawing near to God, and consequently an Heart much weaned from the World, and that has a favourable Sense and Relish of Devotion. In short, as all our Duty to God goes in Conjunction with this of Prayer, so I know no Disposition for the Reception of Grace, that can be wanting to him, who applies himself by Prayer for Grace to keep God's Commandments, with a sincere Design to use it for that End and Purpose.

(3.) *Thirdly*, The Consideration of the Nature and Attributes of God, is a great Encouragement to Prayer; for he is more ready to hear than we to pray; and more ready to grant, than we to desire; and doth so love all these Addressees, because he knows them to be most beneficial to us, that he has made it an express Condition in his Grants, that we shall sue unto him for them. But because this Consideration of the Nature and Attributes of God will fall in better from some of the following Reasonings about this Duty, I shall therefore pass it by at present, and proceed to,

3. The *Third* Thing I observed in the Duty of Prayer, namely, the Circumstance of Instancy or Frequency taught us in the triple Repetition of the Precept, *Ask, Seek, and Knock*. The Design of urging this Duty in so many Words is, to teach us that we ought not to perform our Devotions in a lazy, superficial Manner, but with all Earnestness, Diligence, Patience, and Perseverance, till we obtain what we pray for. But I shall not content myself with this general Purport of the Words; but shall enquire more particularly into the Sense and Meaning of them.

(1.) *First* then, It is not enough that we pray for a good Thing once; but we must insist, and renew our Petitions often; for the Words do each of them imply a further Degree of Industry and Diligence. *First*, The easiest Way of obtaining a Thing is, to have it for *Asking*; then the Word *Seeking*, implies a further Degree of Diligence; as when a Thing is out of Place,

Place, and we cannot have it for calling for, then we are at the Pains to search and look for it. But the Word *Knocking*, signifies a yet greater Degree of Patience, and Perseverance in our Suit. For it supposes that there may be several Difficulties in the Way, and that the Passage may be shut up, but that we ought not to be discouraged for all that; but that we should patiently wait, and drive on our Suit with greater Importunity.

(2.) *Asking, Seeking, and Knocking*, implies that we ought not to be discouraged with the Difficulties we meet with, either in putting up our Prayers to God, or in not receiving quickly a due Return of them; but that we should strive to conquer and overcome all Difficulties, and be incessant in our Prayers to God. To give more particular Instances:

Are we often in a dry, cold Frame of Spirit, that Devotion goes awkwardly and heavily with us? This is a great Temptation to neglect the Duty; but we ought not to be discouraged for all that, but should manfully set ourselves to overcome this Temptation; and this we may do several Ways; sometimes by endeavouring to rouse up ourselves into a livelier Temper; as we find the *Psalmist* doth, when he thus awakens himself, *Psal. xlii. 5. Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him for the Help of his Countenance.* Sometimes by complaining of it to God, and begging his Help, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Psal. xxii. 1.* And sometimes by acquiescing meekly under it, and pursuing our Devotions,
if

if not so pleasantly, at least as sincerely, and much more laboriously; as having less of the Pleasure of sensible Devotion to oil the Wheels, and make them run swift and nimble. Then our Saviour's Direction to his sleepy Disciples is very seasonable, *Matth. xxvi. 41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation: the Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak.*

Have we often prayed for a Blessing, and cannot obtain it? Let us not give over, but imitate that poor Cripple, who lay so long at the Pool of *Bethesda*, and met with so many Disappointments of others stepping in before him, yet got cured at last. But this is a Case I intend to consider at large, when I come to the Promise here annexed; and therefore shall not now dwell upon it.

Do we often relapse into the same Sins and Follies, from which, by the Grace of God, we had escaped? This requires a redoubling of our Diligence, a calling more importunately upon God. *Save me, O God, for the Waters are come in unto my Soul; I sink in deep Mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep Waters, where the Floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying, my Throat is dried: mine Eyes fail while I wait for my God, Psal. lxxix. 1, 2, 3.* For I think the Words are as applicable to Sins as to Afflictions.

(3.) *Asking, Seeking, and Knocking*, implies a careful watching and embracing the favourable Opportunities of Devotion, whether these arise from external Providences, or internal favourable Dispositions. *First*, I say, external Providences; such as a favourable Deliverance from Sin or
 Trouble,

Trouble, in Answer of our Prayers: Then our Hearts being enlarged with Joy, it is mighty seasonable to give our Devotions vent in Thanksgiving; as the *Psalmist* does, *Psal. xviii. 4, 5, 6. The Sorrows of Death compassed me, and the Flouds of ungodly Men made me afraid. The Sorrows of Hell compassed me about: the Snares of Death prevented me. In my Distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: and he heard my Voice out of his Temple, and my Cry came before him, even into his Ears.* So likewise whenever we set about any Business of Importance or Consequence, it is then highly seasonable to begin with calling upon God. *A Jove Principium.* A Custom which we find the Apostles followed at their Ordinations, or whenever they sent Men out upon any Employment of great Consequence. So again, whenever we are left in the Dark, and know not well what Course to take, either in our spiritual or secular Affairs, then is a proper Time to address God, and beg Direction of him by Prayer, according to that Advice of St. James, *Jam. i. 5. If any of you lack Wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* So when any anxious Care, or distracting Fear seizeth our Spirits, let us make Haste to discharge it on God; as St. Paul advises, *Phil. iv. 6. Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving, let your Requests be made known to God.* So when any deep Affliction overtakes us, that we are scarce able to wrestle with, we should then have our Recourse to God, after the Example of the royal *Psalmist*, who often gave us
a Pat-

a Pattern of this Practice with Success, *Psal.* cxlii. 2. *In the Day of my Trouble, saith he, I sought the Lord, I poured out my Complaint before him, I shewed before him my Trouble.* *Psal.* cxviii. 5. *I called unto the Lord in my Distress; the Lord answered me, and set me in a large Place.* So when any strong Temptation assaults us, our best Course is, to flee unto God for Shelter; after the Example of *St. Paul*, *2 Cor.* xii. 7. When there was given to him a Thorn in the Flesh, a Messenger of Satan to buffet him, then he besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him; and had a gracious Answer, *My Grace is sufficient for thee.*

And besides these, and such like external Providences, there are many internal favourable Dispositions, which call upon us to the same Exercise of Prayer. Sometimes we have a great Awakening in our Consciences, a great Overflowing of godly Sorrow, Stings of Remorse from some seasonable Admonition, earnest Desires to draw near to God in Prayer, a great Delight in God: whenever we perceive ourselves to be in any such good Temper of Mind, or melting Frame and Disposition of Heart, let us then strike while the Iron is hot; when these favourable Gales blow, then let us hoist our Sails, and make the best of our Voyage to Heaven.

(4.) The Words *Ask, Seek, and Knock*, import a great Affiduity in Devotion. That we should frequent it very often, both in publick and private; that besides the more solemn Times of it, we should accustom ourselves to many occasional Addresses, and likewise to pious Ejaculations,

culations, and habitual mental Prayer; that these holy Breathings, and setting of God before our Eyes, and imploring his Aid and Assistance, should become as natural as bodily Respiration; the one being as necessary for the Preservation of the spiritual, as the other is for the Preservation of the natural Life; that Devotion should be intermixed to sanctify and sweeten all the Cares, and Troubles, and Business, and even Recreations of Life; that Prayer should be the Key to open up the Day, and to lock up the Night, and both to begin and end all our Business; that our Love, and Fear of God, our Faith, Hope, and Trust in him, should be continually expressing itself in Confessions, Supplications, Prayers, and Praises; and that our Love to our Neighbour too should continually be venting itself in Intercessions and Thanksgivings for him, this being the most universal Way whereby we can be beneficial to all Men; in short, that, as the Apostle says, 1 *Thess.* v. 17, 18. We should *pray without ceasing, and in every Thing give Thanks.*

(5.) I shall name but one Sense more, in which, I understand this *Asking, Seeking, and Knocking*; and that is, that we use our utmost Effort and Endeavours to make our Prayers effectual, that is, to obtain what we pray for. This includes a great many holy Exercises, which I have not now Time to insist upon; such as the putting and keeping of ourselves always in a good Frame and Temper for Devotion, the preserving our Minds disentangled from inordinate Cares; not distracted with too much Company and Business; not polluted with lustful Imaginations;
not

not discomposed with Anger; not obstructing the Effect of our Prayers with Malice and Envy; not dissolving our serious Temper with Gluttony and Drunkenness; not regarding Iniquity in our Heart; not praying for one Thing in our Devotions, and going quite contrary in our Life and Practice; but contriving that fervent Prayers and vigorous Endeavours may go hand in hand together; and then we may promise ourselves, that the Encouragements here interspersed and annexed shall be made good; that if we ask Grace, we shall receive it; if we seek it, we shall find it; and if we keep knocking, the Door of Grace shall be opened unto us.

This is the next Thing I should have gone upon; and it will be a proper Subject for our next Meditation. I shall detain you no longer at present. Let all them who are desirous to learn Christian Duties to Perfection, learn not to depend on their own Strength and Endeavours; but call in the Assistance of God's Grace by incessant fervent Prayer, in the Name and through the Mediation of Jesus Christ, this being the great Secret, whereby our Hearts are sanctified, our Lives amended, and our Souls finally saved. Blessings of inestimable Value; which God of his infinite Mercy bestow upon us all, for Jesus Christ's Sake. To him, &c.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N X.

M A T. VII. 7.

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

V. 8. For every one that asketh, receiveth : and he that seeketh, findeth : and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

HA V I N G entred on these Words at the last Occasion, I told you they contained the first concluding Caution which our Saviour gave against such Things as might obstruct the good Effects of this Sermon on the Mount, upon the Lives of his Hearers. For having given so many Precepts of great Perfection and Difficulty, that his Disciples might not be discouraged, as being unable of themselves to discharge so difficult a Task, he puts them in a Way how they might obtain of God Grace sufficient to perform what he required of them ; namely, by fervent and importunate Prayer, accompanied with vigorous Endeavours after Grace to keep his Commandments.

In the Words I observed these two Things:

1. The Duty of fervent Prayer, accompanied with vigorous Endeavours after Grace, *Ask, Seek, and Knock.*
2. Several Encouragements to this Duty, taken from the Promises and Nature of God.

Now having spoke to the first of these, The Duty of Prayer, at the last Opportunity; I proceed now to the *second*; namely, The Encouragements taken from the Promises and Nature of God. I begin with the Promises, or rather Promise here repeated and interspersed, *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you:* And that we might not think this Promise was something extraordinary, and that the Return of Prayer was like other miraculous Gifts in those Times, our Saviour adds an Assertion, by which we are taught, that the Promise is extended to all who perform the Duty. *For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* It is a very full Promise of Grace in Return of our fervent and importunate Prayers.

But because Experience doth not so fully and readily answer what seems to be here promised, for we often ask without receiving; and seek without finding; and knock when it is not opened unto us; therefore there is a great Difficulty to be cleared in the first Place, concerning the Meaning of this Promise; for certainly the Words are not to be understood in the same Latitude

as they found. We are not to have such unworthy Thoughts of God, as to believe that he has obliged himself to answer all the most foolish, the most sinful, nay the most contradictory Petitions of all Men, or their Prayers of any kind, if they do but put up their Requests with their Mouth, though perhaps they never seriously think of them with their Hearts. No; though the Promise is here set down in few and general Words, it must be understood with those particular Explications and Restrictions which are mentioned in the Context, and other parallel Passages of the holy Scripture, which I shall therefore endeavour to lay together, and to open the Reason of them, that our Saviour's Meaning as to this Promise may not be misunderstood or perverted. Now, for Memory's sake, the Explications of this Promise may be reduced to these four Sorts: 1. The right Qualifications of the Persons that pray. 2. The Matter of our Prayer, or the Things we pray for. 3. The Manner of our praying or asking. 4. The Grant of our Prayers or Petitions: Concerning all which I have something to offer towards the Explication of this Promise.

I. As to the *First*, The Qualifications of the Persons that pray. I think we may take it for granted, that the Persons to whom this Advice is given, are Disciples or Christians, using their own diligent Endeavour; and therefore what they cannot attain by their own Strength, they are encouraged to attempt by the Use of Prayer. This Promise then is only made to Christ's Disciples, and consequently, only to Believers; and to such Believers as diligently make use of their

own Endeavours. So that perhaps all that is to be said of the right Qualifications of the Persons that pray, may be reduced to these Two, *Faith* and *Practice*. First, *Faith*: And thus the same Evangelist explains it, *Matth. xxi. 22. And all Things whatsoever ye shall ask in Prayer, believing, ye shall receive.* So St. James explains the like Promise, *Jam. i. 6.* For having said at the preceding Verse: *If any of you lack Wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him:* Which is the very same with the Promise in my Text: He adds immediately, by Way of Application, *But let him ask in Faith, nothing wavering.*

Now by Faith requisite in him that prays, there are several Things meant, as necessary to entitle us to this Promise made to Prayer in the Text. As,

1. The Person, who trusting in this Promise, puts up his Prayers to God, must believe both his Being, and his Ability, and good Will to grant those Things he prays for. *He that cometh to God, saith the Apostle, Heb. xi. 6. must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them who diligently seek him.* This Qualification carries its own Reason along with it; for no Man can be understood to pray to God in good Earnest, if he does not believe him capable of hearing and granting his Requests.

2. Christian Faith implies not only a Belief in God, but a Belief and Trust in the Mediation and Intercession of Jesus Christ; for thus Christ himself explains it, *Joh. xiv. 13, 14. Whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name, saith he, that will I do,*

I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son: If ye shall ask any thing in my Name, I will do it. And Job. vi. 24. Hitberto have ye asked nothing in my Name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your Joy may be full.

3. Faith implies not only a general Belief in God, and that he is to be addressed through the Mediation of Jesus Christ; but likewise a Belief of this particular Promise, that God for Christ's sake will hear and grant our Prayers, *Mark xi. 24. What Things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, (or, as some other Readings have it, believe that ye shall receive them,) and ye shall have them.* It is indeed a very unreasonable Thing for any Man to claim Benefit by a Promise to which he himself gives no Credit.

4. By Faith in the praying Person, is not only implied, that he believes Prayer is a proper Means to obtain of God the good Things he wants; but likewise that there is no obtaining of them without it. What I mean is this, that he who comes to pray to God, should come believing that it is not in his own Power, by any Skill, Contrivance, or Endeavour of his own, to procure to himself those good Things he prays for; and therefore that he is to depend entirely on God for them, by this Means of Prayer; according to the Advice of the Wise Man, *Prov. iii. 5. Trust in the Lord with all thine Heart; and lean not to thine own Understanding: in all thy Ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy Paths.* And according to the excellent Advice of his Father David, *1 Chron. xxviii. 9. And thou Solomon my Son, know thou the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect Heart,*

and with a willing Mind: for the Lord searcheth all Hearts, and understandeth all the Imaginations of the Thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee: but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

So much for *Faith*, the first Qualification required in him that prays to God, and expects the Benefit of the Promise in my Text.

Next follows *Practice*, the other Qualification requisite in him that prays to God; which imports, that in good Earnest he use his true Endeavour to obtain those good Things which he prays for. This I shall likewise branch out into some more particular Rules.

1. There must be a general Care and Endeavour to comply with all God's Commandments. *1 Job. iii. 22. Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him; because we keep his Commandments, and do those Things that are pleasing in his Sight.* If we are either in general negligent of our Lives and Conversations; or particularly, if we indulge ourselves in the Practice of any known Sin, without striving earnestly to get rid of it, we have no Reason to expect that God will grant our Requests in Prayer, *Prov. xxviii. 9. He that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Law, even his Prayer shall be abomination.* And *Prov. xv. 8. The Sacrifice of the Wicked is an Abomination to the Lord; but the Prayer of the Upright is his Delight.*

2. We must not presume to go to God in Prayer, being conscious to ourselves of having committed any known Sin, without repenting particularly of it. If we carry any such Idol in our Bosom, it will be like *Achan's* accursed Thing,

Thing, and will deprive us of the Blessing we might otherwise expect from our Prayers.

1 *John* iii. 21. *Beloved, if our Heart condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God, and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his Commandments. And the Psalmist lays it down as a Rule, Psal. lxxvi. 18. If I regard Iniquity in my Heart, the Lord will not bear me. And God tells the People of Israel, that when they came to pray to him with their bloody Designs in their Minds, and Actions of Cruelty in their Lives, unrepented of, he would not hear their Prayers: Isa. i. 15. And when ye spread forth your Hands, says he, I will hide mine Eyes from you: yea, when ye make many Prayers, I will not bear: your Hands are full of Blood.*

3. Another Instance of our sincere Endeavour to amend our Lives, to qualify ourselves for Prayer, is, that we must set about our Prayers with Hearts free from Malice, and full of Charity to all Men. *When ye stand praying, saith our Saviour, Mark xi. 25. forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also which is in Heaven may forgive you your Trespases. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in Heaven forgive you your Trespases. And in another Place of this same Sermon on the Mount, If thou bring thy Gift to the Altar, and there rememberest that thy Brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy Gift before the Altar, and go thy Way, first be reconciled to thy Brother, and then come and offer thy Gift, Matth. v. 23.*

4. A fourth Branch of this Sincerity is, that whosoever would claim any Benefit from this Promise made to Prayer, must take Care that

there be no bad Design in any of his Petitions. St. *James* assigns this for a Reason, why many of our Petitions are not granted: *Ye ask, and receive not*, says he, *Jam. iv. 3. because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your Lusts.* If any Man should pray for Success in a wicked Design, or for Money and Means, which he intends to lay out in bad Uses, it would be better for that Man that his Prayers were denied, than granted.

These are the Qualifications I have observed, as to the Light which is cast on this Text, from the Context, and other Passages of holy Scripture, to be required in the Persons praying, if they would reap any Benefit from this great Promise.

II. The next Thing in our proposed Method is, to consider some Qualifications of this Promise, with Relation to the Matter of our Prayers, or the Things we pray for. For though the Expression in the Text is very general, it must not be understood of every Thing that is asked of God, but only of such Things as are both good in themselves, and good for the Petitioners. And this we must, in very many Cases, leave to God to judge of, who knows infinitely better what is good for us, than we ourselves. But to consider a little more particularly the Matter of our Petitions.

I. This Expression in my Text, *Every one that asketh, receiveth*; must be understood only with Relation to *good Things*; for so it is limited and explained in the Context at the 11th Verse. *If ye then being evil, know how to give good*

good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, give good Things to them that ask him? No other Gifts can come from God, or should be asked of him. Every good Gift, as St. James saith, *Jam. i. 17. and every perfect Gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights.* Some further Light into this Matter will be afforded us from the Consideration of the Occasion of this Discourse about Prayer, which, as I formerly shewed you, was to answer the Disciples Fears, concerning their Disability to observe those many difficult Rules of Duty he had prescribed them; for his chief Intent seems to be, to direct them to this noble Means, whereby they might be furnished with a sufficient Stock of Grace, sincerely to do their Duty. And I believe it is chiefly, if not only, with Relation to this Grace, that the Promise is here made; *ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* And I am the more confirmed in this Sense of the Words, because what St Matthew here calls *good Things*, St. Luke in the parallel place calls *the holy Spirit*. *If ye then being evil,* says he, *Luk. xi. 13, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?* It is not then Riches and Honour, Prosperity and Victory, and such like outward Blessings; I mean unnecessary Blessings; (for as far as a Competency, *our daily Bread*, we may pray for, and confidently expect) but the holy Spirit, with all his Graces, this Promise relates to. And this alone, if duly considered, would take off most of the Objections, which naturally

rise from this Promise. For, as this Limitation to good Things cuts off all Petitions for Things unlawful and prohibited, so it cuts off most of our Prayers for Things indifferent, and of a middle Nature; at least answers the Objections from the not granting them, because we can never be sure that these are absolutely good; they often tending to our Hurt and Prejudice. And therefore we should not pray for them absolutely, but only conditionally, in so far as God sees they will prove beneficial to us. We have besides them a large Field for our Prayers, namely, God's holy Spirit, with all his Gifts and Graces, in so far as they may either promote our own Salvation, or make us in our several Stations useful to others.

2. The Promise in my Text, is not to be extended to all Gifts in general, but is to be limited to such as are good for us that ask them. For it is very possible there may be diverse Gifts, excellent good in themselves, and yet not proper for us, in our particular Circumstances. There are Gifts fitted for all Stations and Relations of Men; but we should content ourselves with such Gifts as are most proper for that Station wherein it hath pleased God to place us in the World. And before we venture to pray for the Gifts requisite for any higher Station, we should wait with Humility till God is pleased to call us to it. And even then he knows best what Degree and Measure of Gifts suits best with our Capacities. But it is otherwise with Grace and Virtue; we can never be overstocked with them, and therefore both by our Prayers, and other Endeavours,

deavours, should study *to grow in Grace and in every good Work.*

We have now considered the Persons asking, and the Matter of their Petitions.

III. We are next to consider the Way and Manner of Asking, so far as this Promise in my Text is concerned in it. For it appears from the Context, and other Passages of holy Scripture, that as to the Manner, our asking should be with Heartiness and Fervour, with Patience and Constancy, with Humility and Submission, with Gratitude for former Mercies, and joined with the diligent Use of other Means appointed by God; without which, Prayer alone will not be sufficient to obtain the good Things we want.

1. As to the Manner of Asking, it must be fervent and hearty; not with a wavering, double Mind, asking so faintly, as if we were afraid to have our Petitions granted too soon, or to be taken at our Word, when we pray for Grace to deliver us from any predominant beloved Sin. *He that wavereth, saith St. James, Jam. i. 6. is like a Wave of the Sea, driven with the Wind and tossed; let not that Man think that he shall receive any Thing of the Lord; a double-minded Man is unstable in all his Ways.* There are too many such wavering, half resolved Petitioners, who lose Time with their uncertain *shall I, shall I's*; and scarce ever know their own Minds; so far are they from this importunate *Asking, Seeking, and Knocking*, mentioned in the Text.

2. As to the Manner of Asking, it must be with Patience and Constancy; this the Words *Seeking and Knocking* do likewise import; and
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our Saviour further explains it in the Parable of the importunate Widow, *Luk. xviii.* which Parable, St. Luke says, he spake *to this End, that Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* It is quite a wrong Practice then of many, who, if they have not an immediate Return of their Prayers, upon once or twice asking, give over; which is far from the Apostle's Injunction, *to pray without ceasing,* 1 *Theff. v. 17.* One Reason, no doubt, why God delays the answering of our Prayers, is, that we may have frequent Errands to the Throne of Grace, there being nothing better for us than to draw near to God.

3. The Manner of our Asking should be with Humility and Submission, not directing the Time, not prescribing the Manner; not being positive as to the Means and Instruments; but submitting all to God's wiser Choice, and correcting our imperfect Desires by his more perfect Pleasure. This we may learn from our Saviour's Practice, who, when he had prayed that the bitter Cup of his Passion might pass from him, adds immediately, *nevertheless not my Will, but thine be done,* *Luk. xxii. 42.*

4. As to the Manner of our Prayers, they ought to be accompanied with Gratitude for former Mercies. And therefore should not altogether run in the Strain of Petitions, but with a great Mixture of Thanksgiving. This is St. Paul's Advice to the *Philippians,* *Phil. iv. 6.* *In every Thing, says he, by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, let your Requests be made known unto God.* Like that excellent Prayer of *Jacob's,* for Deliverance from his incensed Brother;

X.] of Prayer. MAT. VII. 7, 8. 155

Brother; *Gen. xxxii. 10.* which was ushered in with a most thankful Acknowledgment of God's undeserved Mercies to him, through the whole Course of his Travels; *I am not worthy, says he, of the least of all the Mercies, and of all the Truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy Servant; for with my Staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two Bands.* Then follows his Prayer: *Deliver me, I pray thee, from the Hand of my Brother, from the Hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the Mother with the Children.*

5. And lastly, let our Prayers be joined both with the diligent Use of other lawful Means appointed by God, particularly with Christian Vigilance; *Watch and pray, says our Saviour; Mark xiii. 33.* and likewise with an express Intention, to make good Use of the Grace we then pray for, in keeping of God's Commandments, like the Psalmist, *Psal. cxix. 32. I will run the Way of thy Commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my Heart.* And Verse 8. of the same Psalm, *I will keep thy Statutes, O forsake me not utterly.*

IV. The last Thing I proposed to consider, for explaining the Promise in my Text, and for clearing it from all Imputations, is something relating to God's Grant of our Prayers and Petitions here promised. And it is this; that God performs this Promise, not only when he grants the very Thing we pray for in kind, but in divers other Cases and Instances, when we are not so sensible of it. For clearing of this, I shall put a Case or two, where God grants not exactly the
Thing

Thing we pray for, yet grants what is here promised; namely, some good Thing or other, which really answers the End and Design of our Prayers. Suppose a Man under Temptation, and fearing his own Lapse or Relapse, should pray for the Removal of the Temptation; and instead of removing it, God should furnish him with a sufficient Degree of Grace to preserve him from being overcome by it; is not the End of this Prayer sufficiently answered? And this was St. Paul's Case, 2 Cor. xii. 7. *Lest I should be exalted above Measure, says he, through the Abundance of the Revelations, there was given to me a Thorn in the Flesh, the Messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this Thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me: and he said unto me, My Grace is sufficient for thee: for my Strength is made perfect in Weakness.* We are to consider, that though we short-sighted Creatures see perhaps but one Way of escaping a Danger, and accordingly bend all the Force of our Prayers, that we may compass *that*; yet it is to be believed, that the infinitely wise God knows of many Ways to answer the same Design; and it is but reasonable, of all those Ways, to leave it to him, to chuse that which he knows will best answer his own Honour, and our Good.

The other Case I shall put is this: Suppose we pray for one thing which we think very good, and instead of that, God gives us another, which is really far better, shall we say that such Prayer has not been answered? *e. g.* Suppose a beloved Child is very sick, and the Parents, as is usual, pray for the Recovery of its Health: if instead
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of that, God, out of a great Love to that same Child, should think fit to take it to himself into Heaven, is not this granting a much better Thing than was prayed for? And this was the Case of *Abijah*, the Son of *Jeroboam*, a good Child in a wicked Family. The Prophet *Abijah* being consulted whether the Child would live or die, answered thus: *The Child shall die, and all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him, for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the Grave, because in him there is found some good Thing toward the Lord God of Israel, in the House of Jeroboam,* 1 Kings xiv. 12. In general, we may rest satisfied, that if we pray as we ought, and as has been described from the holy Scriptures, and our Prayers are not answered in kind, God has good Reasons for so doing, though unknown to us; and that he will answer the Intent of those Prayers some other Way, that will prove as much, or more to our Happiness and Benefit.

Thus now I have opened up to you the Meaning, with the due Qualifications and Restrictions of this great Gospel Promise: And have from the Context, and other plain Scriptures, cleared it from the Mistakes to which it is obnoxious, when God's Truths are considered by halves. I shall conclude with two or three Assertions resulting from this Doctrine, which I desire to leave with you, as very proper to settle your Minds in this matter.

The *First* is this: If there are any who think this Promise has not been made good to them, let them examine themselves by these Rules which have been laid down from the holy Scriptures for the Explication of it; and they will find,

find, that God has not been worse than his Promise; but that the Fault is in themselves, who have not complied with the Conditions required, towards the Accomplishment of it; or else that it is accomplished, though not in Kind, yet in a Way as beneficial for them.

The *Second* Assertion is this; That all who are destitute of Grace to do their Duty, neglect Prayer, which is the sure Means of obtaining it: At least do not go about it in the right Way and Manner which I have now described to you, out of the holy Scriptures.

The *Third* and last Assertion is, That all who continue earnest in Prayer, have obtained likewise the Grace to amend their Lives; let them therefore diligently improve their Talent, and stir up the Grace of God, which is in them. And if they labour under any spiritual Wants, let them continue instant in Prayer, and not doubt, but that trusting to this Promise of Christ's, they shall at last prevail. So much for the first Encouragement to Prayer, taken from the Promise of God. The other, taken from the Consideration of his Nature, as he is a most loving Father to his own Children, I must refer to another Opportunity.

Now to God, the Hearer of Prayer; to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all Praise, Honour, and Glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XI.

M A T. VII. 9.

V. 9. *Or what Man is there of you, whom if his Son ask Bread, will he give him a Stone?*

V. 10. *Or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent?*

V. 11. *If ye then being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

The Third Sermon on this Text.

OUR blessed Saviour having at the seventh Verse of this Chapter, recommended fervent Prayer, as a Duty highly requisite towards the facilitating of all other Duties; for enforcing this his Exhortation, he immediately backs it with two Encouragements taken from the Promises and Nature of God. The first of which I considered at the last Occasion, endeavouring to shew you, that a Grant of Grace doth always attend the due Use of Prayer, if we perform it with those Conditions and Qualifications, which, I shewed you, were prescribed in the Context, and in some other Passages of holy Scripture.

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I proceed now to the other Encouragement, taken from the Nature of God, considered as he is our heavenly Father. *Or what Man is there of you, &c.* In speaking to which Words, I shall apply myself to the three following Particulars.

1. To consider God's Goodness and Readiness to give good Things to us his Creatures.

But, 2. That he loves that we should ask him for those Things.

3. What Duties are incumbent upon us, from the Knowledge and Belief of this Paternal Affection in God, toward his poor Creatures.

But before I enter upon the Particulars, since they all rise from the Similitude in the Text of a Father's Readiness, not to deny good Things to his Children, when they ask him; it will be necessary, *First*, briefly to clear up this Comparison. As God is infinitely removed from our Sight and immediate Knowledge, the little Knowledge we have of him, is by the Help of Similitudes, taken from the Creatures. Particularly, there is nothing more resembles the Love of God to his Creatures, than that natural Love which they have for their Offspring. *Moses* compares God's Care of his People *Israel* to the Eagle's tender Care of her Young, *Deut. xxxii. 11.* *As an Eagle stirreth up her Nest, fluttereth over her Young, spreadeth abroad her Wings, taketh them, beareth them on her Wings; so the Lord alone did lead Israel.* Especially the Goodness of God is resembled to that of Parents to their Children; to a Mother's Care for Tenderness; and to a Father's for Providence. To
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XI.] *Duty to him.* MAT. VII. 9, 10, 11. 161

come then to the Simile in the Text, for our Encouragement to frequent and ardent Prayer, God is represented here as a kind Father, who, when his Son asks him useful Necessaries, would be loth to cheat him with hurtful Things, something resembling the other in Figure or Shape, but not at all of the same Beneficial Nature. And from hence he draws an Argument *à fortiori*, *If ye then being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, give good Things to them that ask him?*

The Similitude being thus cleared up; we may observe from it these *Three* Things.

1. That God's Goodness to those who pray to him, is really beyond any Thing we have to explain it by. We know nothing in Nature of a more sincere and steady Love than that is of Parents to their own Children, yet it is much allayed and abated by their other bad Qualities; by Passion and Ill-nature, by Lust and Drunkenness, and divers other Vices of the Parents. And where it is not abated in the Heart, it is often curbed in the outward Expressions of it, by the Narrowness of their Fortune, and other Necessities of their outward Circumstances. Now though we should in our own Minds abstract all these Impediments from this Love, yet we must still believe that all created Love and Goodness, as to the Degree of it, falls infinitely short of God's Love and Goodness to his Creatures.

2. Another Thing we may observe from our Saviour's Deduction from this Simile is, that the Promise and Encouragement in the Text are to

be limited to *good Things*: And this accounts for many of our Petitions, of which we cannot perceive that we have any Returns. For perhaps the Things we prayed for were not good in themselves, or not good for us; there is a great deal of Reason why it ought to be left to our heavenly Father's superiour Wisdom to decide whether it is fit to give us these very Things in kind, or to deny them, as being improper for us, or to answer our Prayers in something that is better, and more convenient.

3. A *Third Thing* we may observe from this same Way of arguing, is, that the Promise is not restrained to the Elect, sanctified Ones, who, in a more peculiar Sense are *the Children of God*; but is to be extended to all that pray to him, with the due Qualifications formerly described; for it is not here said, How much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good Things to his Children? This would only have created great Doubts and Scruples, that not being easy to be known who are the Children of God. But, for preventing all Scruple, it is said here, *How much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, give good Things to them that ask him?* A plain Intimation, that the Encouragement is to all Men; to the Good, that they may so continue, and increase more and more in Grace; and to the Bad, that they may become Good. But it is time now to come to the Particulars, which I propos'd to consider from the Words.

I. The *first* was, God's Goodness and Readiness to give good Things to his Creatures. There is no Attribute of God more essential to him, or
 2 that

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that he seems more desirous we should know him by, than this. This is the chief Part of his Name, or Character, as it is described, *Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6, 7. And the Lord descended in the Cloud, and proclaimed the Name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth. Keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, and Transgression, and Sin.* This is the Attribute he recommends most to our Imitation, *that we should be merciful, as he is merciful,* Luke vi. 36. Without this all his other Attributes would be very terrible. Wisdom without Goodness, degenerates into an insidious Cunning; and Power without Goodness, is the Character of a Tyrant, or an Oppressor, or a Devil. But when infinite Goodness is joined to Almighty Power, and unerring Wisdom, it is the greatest Encouragement in the World to make our Application to such a Being. It was from this Goodness that God created the World; for it was not that he might thereby procure or contrive any Addition to his own Happiness, which was always infinite, but that he might communicate of his own Fulness to his Creatures. And it is from the same Goodness that he supplies us with all Things pertaining to Life and Godliness. And not to stay upon the Enumeration of lesser Mercies; it was from this his Love and Goodness to poor lost Man, that he sent his dear Son Christ Jesus into the World, to recover them out of that wretched State and Condition, into which they had sunk themselves; and, finally,

it is owing to this Goodness, that for Christ's Sake he is ready and willing to bestow all Grace upon us, if we fervently ask it, and diligently use it. And this would lead me to the next Thing I proposed to consider, namely, that howsoever ready and willing God is to give good Things to us Men, he loves that we should address him for them by Prayer. But because there are some obvious Objections against this Doctrine of God's Readiness to give us good Things, it will be fit in the first Place to remove them.

This Doctrine then may seem inconsistent both with what perhaps ye may have heard, of a great Number of Men, without any Consideration of their antecedent Demerits, decreed before both to Sin and Misery; and to the scanty Measure of the Grace of God bestowed upon Men, without which they are not able of themselves to bring any Good to Perfection; howsoever they may have some imperfect Embryo's of it. But I think both these are easily answered; for as to the first, howsoever the Devil has propagated such a strange Notion, on Purpose to lay all the Blame of our Sin and Damnation upon God; there is nothing more certain, than that from the whole Tenour of the holy Scripture, our Destruction is only of ourselves; and that no Man will ever be condemned for any Thing, which it was not in his own Power, by the Grace of God, to have helped and prevented. And as for the scanty Measure of the Grace of God, that is likewise purely our own Fault, in that we do not more
2
fervently

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fervently ask it, or more diligently use it. And
so now I come to,

II. The *Second* Thing I proposed to consider, namely, that God loves to be asked, and acknowledged, and waited upon, for the good Things which he is willing and ready to grant. There are three plain Reasons for this Doctrine; that it is absolutely necessary for his Honour, and for our Good, and for the right Government of the World.

(1.) *First*, I say for God's Honour. Suppose a Prince ever so merciful, would it be consistent with his Honour to pardon his rebellious Subjects, if they refused so much as to beg Pardon, or to petition for any Favour? Or would it stand with the Honour of any Father, to receive a rebellious Son into Favour, while he refuses to submit, and scorns to ask any Favour of him? The utmost we can suppose to be honourable for the tenderest Prince or Parent in such a Case, is, to declare their Willingness and Readiness, upon the rebellious Subject's or Son's returning to his Duty, to forgive what is past, and to receive him into Favour for the Time to come; and this God has amply done in the Gospel. But still there must be a Submission on the Part of the Transgressor, otherwise it is no Way honourable for the Prince or Parent actually to quit their Resentment, and to receive into Favour such rebellious Children or Subjects.

(2.) It is necessary likewise, for the Good of the Persons themselves, that God should treat them in this Manner. To grant them their Requests, while they stand out in Rebellion, or to

think to make them happy, without addressing God, or in any other Manner than by drawing near to him, is a Repugnancy and Contradiction in itself, which it is not possible to reconcile, except Man were a more ignoble Creature, and incapable of knowing and loving God. And,

(3.) It is absolutely necessary for the right Government of the World. For if Men could obtain all good Things, without addressing to God for them, would not this be great Encouragement to wicked Men not to draw near to God, and to stand out in Rebellion against him? Would not this introduce an utter Confusion into the Government of the World; and by perverting the due Use of Rewards and Punishments, cut off that comely Order which God hath established, that Duty and Reward, and Sin and Punishment, should go together? So now I am come to,

III. The *third* and last Thing which I proposed to consider; namely, what Duties are incumbent upon us, from the Knowledge and Belief of this paternal Affection in God, toward his poor Creatures. A great many noble Duties flow from this Doctrine, not only with Relation to Almighty God, but with Relation to our Neighbours. I shall endeavour to put you in mind of the chief of them, that we may not be barren, but fruitful in the Knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

1. *First* then, from hence will very naturally follow that great Duty, which is the Sum and Substance of all our Duty to God, namely, the *loving of him* out of Gratitude, with all our
Heart

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Heart and Soul, and Mind and Strength. If we preserve in our Minds this Notion of God, that he is affected to us his Creatures, as a loving Father is to his own Child, this joined with his other Excellencies and Perfections, must be a powerful Inducement to us to love him again. For what more lovely Object can possibly be so much as imagined, than unerring Wisdom and Almighty Power, in the Management of such a paternal Inclination to us, and Propension to do us good, as the most loving Father has to his own Son?

I am the more willing to take notice of this in the first Place, because such an earnest drawing near to God, as is here prest, seems to me to be a very comprehensive Duty; so comprehensive indeed, as to take in the whole Duty that Man owes to God; as the next Verse takes in the Whole of our Duty to our Neighbour. For Proof of this, I need say no more than I have just now said, while I shewed you that it teaches us *the Love of God*, which you know our Saviour made the Sum and Substance of our Duty to God, which is taught us in the first Table of the Law; as the Love of our Neighbour is the Sum and Substance of our Duty to our Neighbour, taught in the second Table. But I shall endeavour to give more particular Satisfaction as to this same Notion, by a brief Induction of the chief Duties we owe to Almighty God; and by shewing you, that they all flow from this lovely Notion of God, here given in the Text.

1. *Faith* is a fundamental Duty we owe to God; now as this is necessarily presupposed as the Foundation of our Prayers; for *he that comes to God, must believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them who diligently seek him*; Heb. xi. 6. so it is chiefly conversant about his Goodness; one Instance of which, namely, his sending Christ into the World to bring us to Heaven, is the Foundation of all our Faith.

2. *Obedience* naturally flows from our Belief of the Goodness of God; for who can it be due to, except to the supreme Being, who lays upon us so many Obligations of Love and Gratitude? Among Men, a Superior, who, to his Power and Authority, adds the Endearments of Love and Goodness, with what Pleasure are his Commands received and obeyed? And if Greatness and Goodness, when they are in Conjunction, are so much respected and obeyed in a mortal Man, where the Effects of them, as to us, are so soon at an End; how much more ought they to be so in the living God, of whose Goodness we hope to reap the good Effects to all Eternity?

3. This Goodness is the great Ground of *our Hope*. For we cannot but believe that a most loving, merciful Father, seeks the Good of his Children; and we are all his Children both by Creation and Redemption; and nothing can bind up the Bowels of God's Mercy toward us, but our own Undutifulness. What greater Encouragement can there be to hope in God, than that he accepts of all our sincere Performances with the good Will of a Father? If a Father perceives a Readiness in his Child to serve him; if he does but offer at many Services, though he
has

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has not Strength to accomplish them, he accepts the Will for the Deed ; and if the Child errs in many Things, whether through Weakness of Understanding, or Defect of Memory ; then it is our Comfort, that *like as a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,* Pſal. ciii. 13. It is our great Comfort, I ſay, that all our Actions are interpreted with the Love of a Parent, and not ſtrictly ſcanned with the Criticalneſs of a Judge. Miſtake me not, as if I meant that God looks upon our Actions with a blind Indulgence, which hinders many Parents from perceiving their Childrens Faults, or correcting them ; all I mean is, that he bears a true paternal Affection to us, and provided we are dutiful, not rebellious Children, that he will excuſe our Sins of Weakneſs and Ignorance, and accept of our very imperfect Duties, proceeding from a ſincere Love and Affection to him. And likewise for a Remedy of the Imperfection of our Services, that he is ready and willing, if we duly apply to him for it, to beſtow upon us all Grace requiſite to render our Obedience more acceptable. What can we deſire further for our Encouragement, than that this Grace, which facilitates all Duty, ſhould be in the Diſpoſal of our heavenly Father, and that we may have it, by due Application to him, through the Mediation of Jeſus Chriſt ; and that he ſhould be well-pleaſed with theſe our Addreſſes, and as deſirous to beſtow Grace upon us, if we are duly qualified to aſk and uſe it, as we can be deſirous to have it ?

4. A true Senſe of the Goodneſs of God, is the greateſt Ground of *our Fear of him* ; I mean, that filial reverential Fear, which is joined with
Love

Love and Honour, such as our Fear of God ought to be; not that servile Fear joined with Hatred, such as Slaves are under to an hard Master, or Subjects to a great Oppressor. If ye will but remember, how afraid a dutiful loving Child is to do any thing that may offend or displease a tender loving Father or Mother, or how afraid a good Servant is of disobliging a kind Master or Mistress, ye may at once both have a right Notion what the true Fear of God is, and how a Sense of his Goodness occasions this Fear. Not but that the Fear of God may be occasioned by other Motives, particularly a Belief and Consideration of his righteous Judgments; and that all Motives are good, which bring us nearer to God; and particularly, that Fear is of the right Stamp, which drives us to our Duty, instead of driving us away from it; yet, with ingenuous Minds, it is chiefly true Goodness and Love to us, which makes us both love our Benefactor, and fear to offend him.

5. This same Sense of God's Goodness, is a great Motive to *our Trust in him*; a Duty, without which our pusillanimous Minds would be apt to fall into Despondency and Despair. Our Wants, our Dangers, and Temptations, are so many; our Strength so small; our Constancy in any good Thing so soon shaken; that if it were not that we trust in God's Goodness, that *he will not break the bruised Reed, nor quench the smoking Flax*, Isa. xlii. 3. that he will either by his good Providence stave off Temptations, or proportion them to our Strength of Grace, or accept of our weak Endeavours, and pardon our Failings and Infirmities, we could have no
Heart

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Heart to set about Duty at all. But when we consider that our Father in Heaven is ready to supply all our Wants, that he will defend us against all our Enemies, and that he will help us out of all our Difficulties, when we turn our Thoughts from our own Weakness to his Almighty Power, joined with an infinite Good-will to his poor Creatures; this is enough to inspire us with an invincible Courage, and with a full Assurance of Faith, that though we can do so very little of ourselves, we shall be able to do all that is required, through Christ strengthening us; and that his Grace will be sufficient for us.

6. A great Sense of this paternal Goodness in God, disposes us to *bear patiently whatever Troubles and Afflictions he thinks fit to lay upon us*; believing certainly that it is all for our good; and that whatever Crosses we meet with on this side Hell, are all sent with a Design to reclaim us from the Evil of our Ways, and to reduce us to our Duty.

7. This same Sense of God's Goodness, will dispose us *to honour him*; for it is this which turns all his other Attributes to be beneficial to the World; for as among Men, it is not Greatness alone, separate from Goodness, which renders any Person honourable; at least, if we honour him for his Greatness, it is because Greatness is an Instrument of Goodness, and in hopes that it will be so used; so in God it is the Conjunction of his Power and his Wisdom, with his Goodness and Beneficence to Mankind, which draws out our Honour and Respect. If God were, as the *Epicureans* fancied, a Being infinitely
happy

happy indeed in himself, but not in the least minding the Affairs of us Mortals, or vouchsafing to concern himself in any Business of this lower World; this would be so far from producing that Honour and Esteem, which is due to him, that it would induce a total Oblivion of him; and as he doth not concern himself with us, it would be hard to prove that we should concern ourselves with him; and this is what that Sect knew would bring in, at least, a practical Atheism into the World. But it is the Conjunction of these two, *optimus maximus*, the *best* as well as the *greatest of Beings*, which draws out our Honour and Regard. It is the Goodness of God then, in conjunction with his Greatness, that begets in us a true *inward Veneration* for him, which shews itself in all those particular Expressions of Honour, which are due to his Name, his Word, his Sacraments, his Day, his House, his Ministers, and Servants, and every thing that has any Relation to him. All which oblige us to a great Number of Duties, which one Way or other reflect Honour on Almighty God, and bring down Benefits upon ourselves.

8. *Lastly*, The Consideration of the great Goodness of God, and our continual Application to him for Grace and every other good Thing we want, puts us in mind of our own Insufficiency and Indigency, and so teaches us *Humility*, which is a most essential Duty we owe to Almighty God, continually putting us in mind to magnify and glorify him, and to vilify and deprectate ourselves.

Thus

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Thus now I have shewed, by an Induction of Particulars, that the preserving in our Minds this right Notion of God, as of a most loving Father, always ready to assist his poor Creatures upon their Application to him, doth naturally lead us not only to Gratitude and the Love of God, which is the Sum and Substance of all the other Duties we owe him, but to every particular Duty required of us toward God. A short Way, to teach us a Compend of those Duties; as the next Verse teaches us the Compend of our *Duty to our Neighbour.*

But this not only shews us what an Idea and Conception we ought to have of Almighty God in our Minds, and how all our Duty to him does most naturally result from it; and therefore this may well be called *natural Religion*; but it shews us likewise, how *by imitating God* in this one Particular of *his Goodness*, we may likewise discharge all our Duty to our Neighbour, and so fulfil the whole Law and Prophets. And so indeed we find in the Words immediately following; the one, by way of Consequence, is deduced from the other. *Therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do you even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.* To love God sincerely, and our Neighbour on his Account, or out of Regard to him, is the Sum and Substance of our whole Duty, as it is taught in the Law and the Prophets; and we may add too, as it is taught by Christ and the Apostles.

From hence we may see how false, how unscriptural, and how unworthy Notions they give us of Almighty God, who represent him as
acting,

acting, not from a *Principle of Goodness*, but from a *Principle of mere Power and Dominion*, in making so many Men and Women on purpose that he might make them miserable; which has occasioned Mens laying the Blame of all their Sin and Misery on God, instead of accusing themselves, and improving that Accusation to the Purposes of Repentance and Amendment of Life.

But yet, let not this Notion of God, as a loving Father, deceive us, as if it excluded *his Justice* and Severity to obstinate, incorrigible Sinners; for as there is no greater Anger and Severity in the World, than what is raised by *abused Goodness and Mercy*; so if we abuse God's Goodness, we shall then perish unpitied, as base, ungrateful Rebels to their best Benefactor; obstinately standing out against all the tenderest Offers of Mercy and Pardon.

Now God give us Grace to consider in this our Day the Things which belong to our everlasting Peace, before they be hid from our Eyes.

To this great and good God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, &c.

S E R M O N XII.

MAT. VII. 12.

Therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The First Sermon on this Text.

IN the End of this Sermon on the Mount, we have several general Exhortations of our Saviour's, all tending to remove whatever might obstruct the good Effects of it among his Hearers; I mean, whatever might hinder their putting in Practice what he had enjoined them.

One Thing, which might have hindred their setting about that holy Practice, namely, the Want of Strength and Ability for it, we have heard how he obviated, by directing them to Prayer, as the certain Way and Means to obtain such a Measure of Grace as should enable them to observe his Precepts, though ever so perfect.

Another Thing apt to deter Men from attempting the Christian Obedience here required, is the great Number of Duties enjoined, that it is not easy to suppose any one's Memory could retain them all, or that we should always have the Presence of Mind to put them in Practice readily upon all Occasions; besides the many
Rules

Rules concerning the Degrees of Perfection, to which that Obedience is required. For our Saviour had not offered to enumerate or speak to them all, but had only treated of such as were either defectively explained by the *Jewish* Doctors of those Days, or had been delivered imperfectly by *Moses* himself, because of the Hardness of their Hearts; or wanted to be cleared from some Blemishes, which the bad Examples of the Scribes and Pharisees had incorporated and intermixed with them. For preventing and answering this Defect of Memory, which likewise darkens the Understanding, our Saviour furnishes us here with a short Compend of our Duty. In the Words immediately preceding, he had given them a right Notion of God, as of *a loving Father*, able and ready to relieve them upon their Application to him. This Notion, among other good Effects of it, was exceedingly adapted to stir them up to *the Love of God*, which is the Sum and Substance of the first Table of the Law; and now in the Words I have read, he teaches them the Sum and Substance of their Duty to their Neighbour; required in the second Table. And this he infers by way of Consequence, from what he had taught of the Love of God to those who address him. The foregoing Words were: *If ye then being Evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven, give good Things to them that ask him?* Then follow the Words of the Text: *Therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

In which Words we may observe these Three Things.

1. The Dependance of this Rule on the foregoing Doctrine, in the Particle *therefore*.

2. The Rule itself: *All things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*

3. Our Saviour's honourable Character of this Rule. *For this is the Law and the Prophets.*

I. I begin with the Dependance of this Rule on the foregoing Doctrine. *Therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them, q. d.* Since God so loves his Creatures, see that ye imitate him in this, and that ye love your Neighbours as yourselves; by treating them, as ye would wish they should treat you in the like Circumstances. As to the Dependance of this Rule on the former Doctrine, it may be accounted for by a threefold Consequence: namely, by Way of Imitation of God in his Goodness; and by Way of Gratitude to him for it: and from his Relation of a loving Father to us; which makes us all Brethren.

1. By Imitation of his Goodness, *q. d.* If God delights so much in loving his poor Creatures, and in doing them good; therefore if ye would approve yourselves as the genuine Children of God, study in this to resemble your heavenly Father, namely in doing good to all, and in loving all, as ye would wish to be loved and to be done well by yourselves. As there is no better Mark of a Child's being genuine, not spurious, than his resembling him, who should be

his Father ; so there is no surer Mark of a Child of God, than the resembling him in his Love and Goodness to his Creatures. And so the Consequence, I think, may be well accounted for ; that since God loves us as a tender Father doth his own Child, therefore we should love one another with a very intent Love, such as this is, which we have all for ourselves ; that whatsoever we would that Men should do to us, we should do so to them.

2. Another Way, this Precept may follow from the former Doctrine, is, by Way of Gratitude for God's Love and Goodness to us ; *q. d.* If God is so exceeding kind to you, the best Way ye can shew your Gratitude for it, (since we cannot better gratify him by any of our Services,) is to be kind to one another ; so kind, as to set our Self-love and our Love of our Neighbour upon the same Footing.

3. *Thirdly*, This Doctrine follows well from the Relation of God, as a loving Father to, us his Creatures ; for if he is our Father, then we are all Brothers and Sisters. If he is so nearly related to us as a Father, we are nearly related to one another as Brethren. So much for the Connexion, denoted by the Particle *Therefore*.

II. I proceed next to the Rule itself. *All Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* For understanding of this Rule, (the Shortness of it making it liable to Misinterpretation,) there are several Things to be gathered from the Circumstances, which will serve to guard us against the Mis-understanding, and Misapplication of it.

1. *First* then, We are to consider that this whole Discourse of our Saviour's, is a Discourse of Christian Duties; and that this Compend is brought in both to refresh their Memories, as to the Duties our Saviour had already described in this Sermon, and to supply that Part of Duty, which he had not spoke to. And therefore the Words, *All Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you,* must be limited to the Point of Duty. The *all Things* here, is *all Duties*; q. d. If ye would know in all Cases and Circumstances whatsoever, what is your Duty to your Neighbour, take this Rule for it; suppose yourself in his Place, and him in your's, and then ask yourself the Question, what you would desire and expect of him as his Duty to you in such and such Circumstances; and, according to the impartial Answer of this Question, do ye so by him. The Question then we are here to put to ourselves, is only a Question of *Duty*, and of nothing else. This one Consideration cuts off all other foolish and unreasonable Desires, which, from the general Sound of the Words, might seem to be here meant, and is to be limited to such Desires as we reasonably think, and expect should be complied with *in Point of Duty* by our Neighbour towards us, in the like Circumstances.

2. These Words, which I added last, concerning the Equality of the Circumstances, must be carefully minded, to prevent a dangerous Error in the Interpretation of this Rule. For it was never our Saviour's Design to set all Men upon the Level, by taking away all Distinction between Princes and Subjects, Masters and Servants, Parents, and Children, and in short, be-

tween all Superiors and Inferiors. This leveling Principle has no Countenance either from this, or any other Text in Scripture; and would occasion all manner of Anarchy and Confusion in the World. But applying the Circumstances right, it is an excellent Rule to find out the just Weights and Measures of our Duty to our Neighbour thus; placing myself in my Neighbour's Circumstances, and him in mine; what I in those Circumstances would judge to be his Duty to do to me, the same I ought to do to him in the like Circumstances; and what in those Circumstances I should judge to be a Fault, that I ought by no Means to do to him.

3. We are to observe here, that the Rule we are to go by in our Dealings with our Neighbour, is not what he doth by us, but what we would have him to do by us, or rather, what we should think his Duty to do by us, in such and such Circumstances. It is a vulgar and dangerous Error in Morals, that Men think they do very fairly by their Neighbour, if they treat him as he treated them in the like Circumstances. And by the Fallacy of this wrong Rule, they seldom make any Scruple of doing one ill Thing for another; and of requiting one Injury with another.

4. Because this Rule is set in very general Terms, *whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them*; we are to consider, that it takes in all Duty, not only what is Duty by the Law of Nature, and by the positive Laws of God, but also what is our Duty by the Laws of the Land, or by any laudable Custom or Practice; the Way to find out our Duty in all these

Cases is, to put the Question to ourselves, what we should think to be our Duty, if our Neighbour were in our Place, and we in his. But then, in the answering this Question, we must take Care as to that Part of our Duty, which rises from human Laws and Customs, to give always the Preference to what is a known Duty by the Laws of God. For this Rule being given as the Compend of all the Duties we owe to our Neighbour, contained in the Law and the Prophets, must never be interpreted to reach to any Thing inconsistent with them. By the Help of this Explication, a Man will be restrained from any such false arguing as this might be of a Pot-Companion from this Rule: As I would that my Neighbour, when I go to see him at his House, may treat me to the greatest Excess of Drinking; so I think it my Duty to treat him when he comes to my House: For granting that such a Custom were crept in, in some Places, we must remember that God's own Laws about Sobriety and Temperance must take Place, before any of the contrary Customs of Men. So much for the Rule, to guard us against the Misinterpretation of it.

III. The *third* Thing in the Words is, our Saviour's honourable Character of this Rule; *for this is the Law and the Prophets.* By the Law and the Prophets joined together, is to be understood the Moral Law, with all the excellent Explications of the Prophets; and their Exhortations upon it. For the Prophets were as so many Commentators on the Moral Law. This was the Design and Purport of their Writings, to enforce that noble Rule of Duties; the Ceremo-

nial Law they did not meddle with, except it was to divert Men's Zeal from it, to the more substantial Duties of the Moral Law: as we may see at large from that smart Reprimand in the first Chapter of *Isaiab*, from the 10th to the 21st Verse: *Hear the Word of the Lord, ye Rulers of Sodom; give Ear unto the Law of our God, ye People of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the Multitude of your Sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord. I am full of the Burnt-offerings of Lambs, and the Fat of fed Beasts, &c. and a great deal more to that Purpose. Then follows: Wash ye, make you clean, put away the Evil of your doings from before mine Eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your Sins be as Scarlet, they shall be as white as Snow; though they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the Land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured by the Sword: for the Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* What our Saviour means here then, when he says, *this is the Law and the Prophets*, is, that this is the whole Drift and Design, nay, the Sum and Substance of the Moral Law and the Prophets.

But before I proceed further in the Consideration of this, there is an Objection so very obvious, that it will be necessary to remove it, in order to the right Understanding of our Saviour's Words. The Objection is this: If the doing by our Neighbour, as we would wish to be dealt by ourselves in the like Circumstances, is the whole Drift and Purport, and likewise the Sum and Substance

Substance of the Moral Law, what becomes of our Duty to God, contained in the first Table of the Law? for this Rule at best can be but the Compend of that Part of the Law, which prescribes our Duty to our Neighbour. I answer, That these two are here connected together, and the one is made to flow from the other, as we have already shewed from the Particle *therefore*. Now this, if duly observed, is sufficient to convince us, that the Love of God is laid down as the Foundation of the Love of our Neighbour; and this voids the Difficulty; for if we love our Neighbour for God's sake, this certainly includes the Love of God, and so is the Sum and Substance of both Tables of the Law, and of the Comments of the Prophets upon it.

The Objection being thus removed, let us next consider the Nature of this Commendation of the Rule in my Text; *This is the Law and the Prophets.*

I. *First* then, To take this Commendation at the lowest, it must mean, that this Doctrine is exactly agreeable to what is taught in the Law and the Prophets; consequently that all inordinate Self-love, which would have one Rule for our dealing with other Men, and another for their dealing with us, is utterly condemned by the Law of *Moses* itself. If there were no more in the Rule but this, it is a noble Rule, as both establishing the Standard of Justice, and guarding against the Biass of Injustice. The Standard of Justice is, that we have one equal Measure for our own and all other Mens Actions; that we use not one Measure to buy, and another to sell

withal; one Measure for a Friend, and another for an Enemy; one Measure for ourselves, and another for other Men; but that we have one common Rule for ourselves and for all our Neighbours, good and bad, Friends and Foes, in the same Case, and under the like Circumstances. The Equity of this is so self-evident, that Words would but make it more obscure.

The Bias of Injustice, is the Partiality of our own Side, to which all Men, in this corrupt State, are naturally inclined. Now this is well guarded against in the same Rule, which sets Self-love, and the Love of our Neighbour, upon one and the same Foot; so that it is not possible to observe this Rule, but either by depressing Self-love to the Love of our Neighbour, or by exalting the Love of our Neighbour to the Pitch of Self-love.

Secondly, This Commendation, that *this is the Law and the Prophets*, implies, that this Rule is the Intent, Purport, and Design of the Moral Law, and of the Commentaries of the Prophets upon it. This is what they all aimed at in the many particular Rules of Duty which they taught. So that the Fifth Commandment, *e. g.* obliges Superiors to use the same Moderation toward their Inferiors, and Inferiors to pay the same Respect to their Superiors, as they would think just, if they were in each other's Place; and the Sixth Commandment is only the preserving our Neighbour's Life by the same Rules of Justice, by which we think it reasonable to preserve our own. The Seventh Commandment lays the same Restraints upon us in regard of our Neighbour's Wife and Daughter, which we
confess

confess should be observed as to our own. The Eighth Commandment preserves our Neighbour's Goods and Estate, by the same Rules of Justice and Honesty, with which we are desirous to preserve our own. The Ninth Commandment requires the same Candour and Veracity in Speech from us to them, which we think it is their Duty to use towards us. And the Tenth Commandment lays the same Restraints upon our covetous Appetite after our Neighbour's Goods and Estate, as we ourselves think just should be laid upon all Men with regard to our Goods and Estates.

Now this is a very great Commendation of this Rule; for it both directs us from what good Principles, and with what pure Designs we should set about all Duty; namely, from a Principle of Love and Charity, and with a Design of doing equal Justice to all; and likewise if at any Time we are at a Loss, as to any particular Duty, *pro hic & nunc*, as Circumstances may alter, this directing our Aim and Intention in the Main, to do as we would be done by, will help mightily to keep us in a straight Course for Heaven. And when two Duties come in Competition, or two Truths, this will shew us where to place most of our Zeal; namely, upon that which tends most to the Love of God and our Neighbour; that being the Polar Star, by which we ought to direct our Course.

Thirdly, This Commendation of our Saviour's, that *this is the Law and the Prophets*, signifies, that this is the Sum and Substance, this is a Breviate and Compend of the Law and the Prophets, with Relation to this Subject of our Duty to our Neighbour. Now this Commendation
yields

yields us these two excellent Characters of this Rule; namely, the Universality or Comprehensiveness of it; and the Brevity and Compendiousness of it.

(1.) Let us consider the *Universality* or *Comprehensiveness* of this Rule; as Instances of which, I shall only offer to you these two Things; That it is a complete Sum of all the Rules set down in the holy Scriptures concerning our Duty to our Neighbour; and that it is likewise in the Nature of a good Casuist, to decide all the particular Cases, and Doubts, which rise from those Rules.

First, I say, it is a complete Sum of all the Rules set down in the holy Scriptures concerning our Duty to our Neighbour. The Scriptures owned in those Days were only those of the Old Testament, the *Law* and the *Prophets*, which our Saviour, in my Text, asserts that this Rule comprehends. *St. Paul* asserts the same of all the Commandments then in being, or that could be, touching our Duty to our Neighbour. For, *Rom. xiii. 9.* after an Enumeration of divers particular Laws, he adds thus: *And if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying; Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.*

Then it is in the Nature of a good Casuist to decide the particular Cases, which rise from those Rules. I would desire no more, *e. g.* to decide all the Cases of *Buying and Selling*, but only for the Seller, on the one hand, with an honest Mind, to put himself in the Buyer's Place, and to say to himself; If I were the Buyer, and he the Seller, in what Manner would I then think
it

it just that I should be used? Would I think it fair to be exacted upon on account of my Ignorance or Necessity? Or if any Misfortune should befall me, that I could not find Pay just at the Time appointed, would I think it just to be so surprized at a Disadvantage, to be allowed no Time, but to be thrown into Prison, or forced to sell my Bed from under me, that Payment might be made immediately; or any other Way worried and harshly used by my Creditor? And so, on the other hand, what honest Debtors would it make, for them to put themselves in the Room of the Creditor; and to say, if he were my Debtor instead of my being his, would I not think it just that he should provide me Pay in due Time, that he should keep his Word to me, as I keep mine to him, and so deal upon the Square? Would I think it just to be choused and abused, and fed with vain and fruitless Promises, which are never designed to take Effect? The same Way of Reasoning would serve between *Parents and Children*; between *Masters or Mistresses, and their Servants*; between *Rulers and Subjects*; between *Lawyers and Clients*; *Physicians and Patients*; *Judges and Litigants*; *Natives and Foreigners*; *Benefactors and those who are obliged by them*; and all the other innumerable Relations and Circumstances of Men and Women, in their various Transactions with one another. Let a Man impartially put and answer the proper Questions to himself, and then practise upon the Rule of my Text, and I may venture to say, he will need no better Casuist for directing his Conscience and Conduct. It is true, if our Self-love is great, our Charity

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by this Rule, may be greater than strict Justice requires, if we answer the Case impartially. But where is the Harm of that? *Love or Charity can work no evil to his Neighbour*, Rom. xiii. 10. and therefore will at least prove *the fulfilling of the Law*. For of the two, it is certainly much safer for a Man to take Wrong to himself, than to injure his Neighbour; there being no Sin in bearing with many Wrongs, but a great deal in the doing of one.

(2.) Let us next consider *the Brevity and Compendiousness* of this Rule, as St. Paul says in that forecited Place, Rom. xiii. 9. *If there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself*. Now this Brevity and Compendiousness has these two good Uses: It helps both the Understanding and the Memory. *First*, It is a great Help to *the Understanding*, which is apt to be confounded and bewildered with many Particulars, often not well digested, nor having any regular Dependence one upon another. It is then a great Help to the Understanding; to see in a little what it cannot so easily comprehend in the great; as to see a large Country comprised in one little Map, shewing the Proportions and Situations of the several Places, gives a Man a clearer and more distinct Conception of it, than if, without such Assistance, he had travelled it all over. Especially it is a great Relief to the Minds and Understandings of the weak and ignorant, (which are generally the far greater Number) to have clear and short Compendiums of their Duty. And this Compendiousness is no less convenient on account of *the Memory*, which receives great Assistance

Affistance from it. For Memory is treacherous and deceitful, and if it do not let Things slip at present, is never able to keep them long, but that something or other will be lost. Now here is the great Benefit of such a Breviate, that if we do happen to forget any of the Particulars of our Duty to our Neighbour, it is included, and consequently recovered in the general; especially when the general Compend itself is a Thing so fitted for the Memory, that it cannot easily be forgotten: for as it is but one Thing, *the Love of our Neighbour*; so that one Thing is so linked to another, namely, Self-love, which is most deeply rooted in our Natures, that we can no more forget it, than we can forget ourselves.

This calls to Mind another Advantage of our Saviour's Compend of the Law and the Prophets, namely, the Nearness and Readiness of this Rule. Every Man carries it in his own Breast, so that we may apply to this the Words of God to the People of *Israel*, Deut. xxx. 11. *For this Commandment which I command thee this Day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in Heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to Heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? neither is it beyond the Sea, that thou shouldest say, who shall go over the Sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart, that thou mayst do it.* It requires no great Learning or Skill in Books, no great Policy or Acquaintance with the World; it requires only an Acquaintance with a Man's self, and an honest Mind to answer truly to the genuine Sentiments of his own Heart.

So that as every Man in this Case is taught of God, so he is taught of his own Mind and Conscience. Nay, shall I say more? he is taught of his own Partiality and Self-Love, (which the wickedest Man alive has good Store of,) how he ought to behave himself to his Neighbour upon all Occasions; nor is he only taught these Dictates of Self-love in a dry, speculative Way, as, alas, we learn a great many other Things; but in a lively sensible Way, Self-love being very ready and pressing with it's Dictates.

Thus now I have explained to you this noble Rule, the Measure of all Justice and Charity among Men. I should, by Way of Application, both shew you how widely Men deviate from this Rule; and assist you with some few Advices to facilitate the Practice of it. But these will make a good Subject of another Discourse.

Now God of his infinite Mercy grant that, laying aside the wicked Principles of Self-love, we may treat our Neighbour as lovingly and kindly, as justly and mercifully, as we think it reasonable that he should treat us. Now to this great God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, &c.

S E R M O N XIII.

MAT. VII. 12.

Therefore all Things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

HAVING explained these Words at the last Occasion, I might content myself, as I often do in other Cases, to leave the Application to every one's Care, according to the several Occasions and Circumstances of Life. But because I have some Reason to apprehend that the greatest Difficulty, as to this Subject, lies in the right *Application* of this noble Rule, and that we want some good Directions for that Purpose, I thought it might well answer the Labour, if I endeavoured to enquire into the Causes why so excellent a Rule (which seems to be an easy Expedient to suggest and to facilitate all Duty) is so far from answering the End, that the far greatest Part of Men are governed still by the Principles of Self-love, and have little Consideration of other Men in their Dealings and Transactions with them, and so by some proper Ad-
vices

vices to attempt the Redress of this so universal an Evil.

In some, this proceeds from Ignorance and Want of Skill how to apply the Rule; in others, from Negligence and Inconsideration; and in a third Sort, from a wilful Blindness, Partiality, and Biass of their own Side, which occasions their using one Measure for their own Actions, and another for other Mens. I shall consider them all three, and offer some Advice for the Cure of them.

I. *First*, There are some, who really know not how to apply this Rule. For the Rule is, that they are to suppose themselves in their Neighbour's Circumstances, and whatever they think would be due to them in those Circumstances, that they should do the same to their Neighbour. But now there are a great many, who cannot justly tell what Opinion or what Mind they should be of, or what they would think due to them, if they were in their Neighbour's Circumstances. And indeed it must be confessed in general, that it is no easy Matter for a Man, who is now fixed in any certain Sort of Circumstances, to be able to tell truly what Mind he should be of, if his Circumstances were altered. For there is nothing more common than for an Alteration of Estate and Circumstances, to beget likewise an Alteration of Mind and Manners. Is not this a Thing we see confirmed by every Day's Experience? The same Person, *e. g.* who, while a Servant, thinks his Master and Mistress can never use him kindly enough, and who is continually exclaiming against them for their
Stinginess

Stinginess and Penuriousness, and for their exacting so much Work and Labour; no sooner comes to be Master of Servants himself, but he takes to the very same Ways of exacting as much Work, and saving as much Victuals and Cloaths from his Servants as he can. The same Man, who, while a private Soldier by Sea or Land, was apt to complain of any usual Gains his Officer makes by their Cloaths or Provisions, and thinks it a very unjust Thing, no sooner comes to be an Officer himself, but, as if he had some new Light infused into his Mind, he thinks all these Things just Perquisites. And so it is almost in all Ranks and Relations of Men; Self-love and Self-interest do so blind us, that we are very unequal Judges of every Thing wherein we ourselves are to partake of any Benefit, or by which we are to receive any Disadvantage. It was a true saying of the Comedian, *Tu si hic sis, aliter sentias.* *If you were in my Place, you would be of another Mind.* And this is one Reason, amongst a great many other, that we are all so rash and uncharitable in our Judgments and Censures of one another, because we see not with the same Eyes, but judge of all Persons and Things with those partial Sentiments, as they make for or against our own Inclinations or Interests. Young Men think their old Fathers too severe and too stingy; and old Men think their Sons too careless and too prodigal. Subjects think their Rulers too encroaching and arbitrary; and Rulers think their Subjects too sawcy and stubborn. Buyers think the Sellers too dear and exacting; and the Sellers think the Buyers very unreasonable Judges of their Skill, and Hazards,

and Time, and Stocks. So that the great Difficulty is, how to direct Men to a right Way of applying this noble Rule of my Text, to the several Cases and Circumstances of Life. In order to this, I shall endeavour to offer some good Advice, which, if duly observed, will much facilitate the Practice of this Rule of dealing by others, as we would think it just they should deal by us in the like Circumstances.

1. *First* then, let us consider, though now we are in other Circumstances, whether in some Time of our Life we have not been either in the very same Circumstances our Neighbour is now in, or else in Circumstances so very like them, that from the Remembrance thereof, we may be able to answer the Question to ourselves, what we then thought just and reasonable to be done to one in that Condition, *e. g.* Would a Master know what is the most fitting Behaviour for him to use to his Servants? If he can remember the Time when he himself was a Servant, or an Apprentice, or an Orphan, but used as a Servant, the Sense and Remembrance of the Sentiments he had at that Time, together with the Application of this Rule, will afford him the best Resolution of his Question; namely, now that he is a Master, that he ought carefully to forbear all such Usage, as his own Judgment, and Reason, and Experience, then told him was harsh and oppressive; and, on the other Hand, that he ought to do those Things to his Servant, which he was then sensible were fair and just towards him. For no abstracted Considerations of those Things, will furnish us with so just and true a Sense of them, as the real Feeling and Experience

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we have had of the same State and Circumstances in ourselves. Thus a noble Heathen Poet introduces a certain great Person, telling how, from the Experience of Misfortunes in her own Circumstances, she had learned to pity and relieve the Unfortunate :

Haud ignara mali miseris succurrere disco.

Virg.

Having Experience of Misfortunes myself, says she, I learn to relieve the Unfortunate. A very just Thought; and I find God himself makes use of such an Argument in a more lively Manner to the People of *Israel*, against the Oppression of Strangers, *Exod. xxiii. 9. Thou shalt not oppress a Stranger, says he, for ye know the Heart of a Stranger, seeing ye were Strangers in the Land of Egypt.* Now if this one Thing of Experience were observed, and applied to the Rule of my Text, what excellent Direction would it afford us in most of the Cases of human Life? If ever ye were poor, think upon it; ye know the Heart of a poor Man, and what is the most proper Way to treat and comfort any such. If ever ye were in Debt, and had to do with a rigid Creditor, then ye know, when ye are Creditors, what is the most proper Way to behave yourselves towards your Debtors. If ever ye were sick, and wanted Tendance, and Company, and Comfort of Friends, your own Experience, with the Help of this Rule, will teach you best your Duty to sick People. If ever ye suffered under harsh Masters or Mistresses; or were disheartned by severe Fathers and Mothers, or Fathers or Mo-

thers-in-Law, or Tutors and Guardians; if ever ye were imposed upon by fraudulent or exacting Merchants, or oppressed by insolent or arbitrary Magistrates, Officers, or Commanders; then your own Experience, with the Application of this Rule, will best teach you how to behave your selves, when ye are Masters, or Mistresses; Parents, or Parents-in-Law; Tutors and Guardians; Merchants, or Magistrates, &c. or in any other of those States and Circumstances, of which ye have had Experience in any former Part of your Life.

But against this it may be objected, That the taking of this Course will cast us upon the contrary Extreme, as putting all the Weight of Self-love, and Self-interest, into the other Scale. For it is not to be supposed, when we were in these other Circumstances, that our Sentiments were exactly just, no more than they are now. But to this I answer; *First*, That this Method will bring our partial Sentiments much nearer a Poise than they would be otherwise, by balancing the inordinate Self-love, which insinuates itself into all our Actions at present, with a former Self-love, which would have turned the Scale the other Way. Now the weighing these two one against the other, is the Way to find out the right, which is commonly in the Middle between them. But, *Secondly*, suppose this Method should carry us a little to the other Extreme, the Consequence will only be, that we shall be a little kinder to our Neighbour than is exactly just; and this, I think, is no bad Consequence, as long as we ourselves are the other Party; what if we do intermix a little more Charity,

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rity, more Humanity, more Civility and good Usage than is exactly our Neighbour's due, and so yield a little of what in Strictness would be our own Right, is there any Harm in this? Never fear that too much Charity, or Goodness, or kind Consideration of our Neighbour's Circumstances, will do us any harm, if we should happen to go a little to that Extreme. But really there is no Occasion to fear the running to this Extreme at all, for Self-interest is so strong, that if we strain ever so much against it, it will retain something of its present Crookedness; at least, there is no Fear that by all our Pains it will quite go back to its former Biass, and incline to that Extreme, if we should use ever so much Art and Vigour to bend it that Way. The Method then to which I have been advising you, is, only to serve your Self-love, and Self-interest, which are very crooked Inclinations, the same Way ye serve a crooked Stick, when ye would make it straight; ye bend it as far as ye can the contrary Way; not that ye mean to have it crooked that Way no more than the other, but because ye know that is the best way to overcome its present Crookedness, and to make it straight.

So much for the first Advice, to facilitate the Rule of my Text; namely, the remembering and considering what Sentiments we had formerly, when we were in the same or like Circumstances with our Neighbour, and the acting accordingly; which, by the by, is, though a very rational, yet a very uncommon Practice; for when Men grow rich and great, they soon forget what Thoughts and Sentiments they had when they were low and poor; at least, they do not care

actually to remember and call to Mind these Things.

But now, *Secondly*, suppose we have never been in any such Circumstances ourselves, there are many other Ways, by which we may come to know what are the ordinary Sentiments of Men in the same or like Case with those we have to deal with. Next to Experience, the Examples of others, of which we have read, or which have been told us, or which we may have observed our selves, if duly improved, will serve to teach us what we would think just and fair in such and such Circumstances. Especially it is observed of domestick Examples, those I mean, in our own Family and near Friends, that they make almost as great an Impression, as the other Experiments we make in our own Persons. Here then we have the Experience of our Fathers, and Mothers, and Predecessors, and all our near Relations, Friends, and Acquaintance, to help us to this useful Piece of Knowledge, what Sentiments we should be of, if we were in such and such Circumstances, that so we may be enabled to do by our Neighbour, as we should think it just and fair that he should do by us in the like Circumstances. So we find the People of *Israel* put in mind, not only of such Things as fell under their own Experience, but under the Experience of their Fathers and Progenitors. Thus the Prophet *Jeremiah* puts them in mind of their Father's Hospitality, and Justice, and Honesty, to condemn their own Covetousness and Oppression: *Jer. xxii. 15. Did not thy Father eat and drink, and do Judgment and Justice, and then it was well with him? he judged the Cause of the Poor and Needy,*
then

then it was well with him.—But thine Eyes and thine Heart are not but for thy Covetousness, and for to shed innocent Blood, and for Oppression, and for Violence, to do it. So the Advice to be hospitable to Strangers, because they had been Strangers in the Land of *Egypt*, was often given, not only to themselves, but to the Posterity of them who were so oppressed. This is the great Use we should make of all Histories, and all Examples, both for Imitation and Caution, even to learn, both from the Virtues and Vices of others, what is right, and what is wrong, and what unbiaſſed Sentiments of Things we should have, if ever it come to be our own Case. But,

Thirdly, Where both these fail, and we have neither our own Experience, nor our Observation of the Experiences of others, to direct us to find out the real Sentiments we should have, if we were in such and such Circumstances, then the Knowledge of Mankind in general, together with an hearty and compassionate Application of other Mens Thoughts and Circumstances to our selves, will qualify us to find out the right Temper of Mind and Thoughts for one in such and such particular Circumstances. And therefore let us but endeavour heartily to make other Mens Case our own, and to have a true Sympathy and Fellow-feeling of it, and it will be no very hard Matter to enter into such Thoughts and Considerations as are proper for their State. An universal Concern for, and good Will to, others, would go a great Way in this. We see how pathetically an Attorney, or Advocate, will open, and plead for his Client's Cause, only for some known Considerations, whereby he makes his

Client's Interest his own: Now if Charity and good Will to Men were as prevalent, we see plainly, how possible it is for Men that have an hearty Concern for others, to enter into their Thoughts, and to have a right Feeling of their State and Circumstances. It is true, most Men, from an Hard-heartedness and Unconcernedness in their Neighbour's Calamities, will not suffer their Minds to enter into the Consideration of his unfortunate Circumstances; like the Priest and the Levite in the Parable, who would not trouble themselves so much as to look at the poor wounded Man, but *passed by on the other Side* of the Way, *Luke* x. 31, 32. But if we would accustom ourselves to the Spirit and Temper of the charitable *Samaritan*, and heartily concern ourselves for our Neighbour's Misfortunes, we should soon learn to act the compassionate Part as effectually, as if we ourselves had been, at some time of our Life, in the self-same Circumstances. So much for an Help to them who are willing, but really know not how to apply this Rule of my Text, of doing by others, as they would be done by themselves.

II. A *second* Sort of those who do not comply with this Rule are such, I told you, who overlook it by pure Negligence and Inconsideration. For it is a Rule so manifestly reasonable in itself, that if Men would but advert to their Actions, and advert to the Rule, they could not well miss of complying with it. But there is an infinite Number of Men and Women, as well as Children, who live altogether at Random, and scarce ever think of squaring their Actions by any Rule.

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If they can but gratify their own evil Inclinations and unruly Passions, they never think of living by Rule or Principle. I cannot believe but that this is pure Negligence in most Men, and not a Flaw in their Understanding; for if any should go to treat them as they treat others, there are no Persons sooner sensible of the Injustice of it. There are a great many of those we call *Plowden's Cases*, where a Man is very sensible of an Injury done to himself, and knows what Reparation should be made to it; but he can do many just such Injuries to his Neighbour, and has no Sense of them at all, nor does in the least mind the making Reparation. The same Favours for which he would expect all Returns of Gratitude, he never minds, or thinks himself obliged to make any Returns for them. And the same Injuries for which he would expect Reparation from others, he looks upon as no Injuries, when he does them to others.

Shall I need to use any Arguments to confute this Practice? No; the Persons themselves are convinced of the Evil of it; but Self-love blinds them. *Having Eyes, they see not*; they connive at their own Faults, and open their Eyes wide at the Faults of other Men. A sure Sign, that they are not ignorant of the Rules of Right and Wrong, but that there is an evil Bias of some corrupt Affection that blinds them, which they might easily discover, if they would be at the least Pains to do it. For it is as plain, that we ought to keep one Rule for our own and other Mens Actions, as it is that we should have one Standard, one Yard, one Bushel, one Pot to buy and to sell with; and that we ought not to use
 diverse

diverse Weights and Measures. The most proper Advice then that can be given in this Case, is carefully to observe this Bias of Self-love and Self-interest in ourselves, and to be very suspicious of it, as betraying us to many Acts of Injustice and Uncharitableness; and so to be upon our Guard against it, and to use our Endeavours accordingly. And let us accustom ourselves, in all our Dealings with our Neighbour, to put the Case that he were in our Circumstances, and we in his, and act accordingly. It is impossible to tell what an Habit of Righteousness, Mercy, and Goodness, this would introduce; and what a happy World it would make, if generally put in Practice. But I hasten to,

III. The *Third* and last Sort of Transgressors of this Rule of my Text, who act from a wilful Blindness and Bias of their own Side; and these are the worst and most unaccountable of all other Transgressors of this Rule, and the most incapable of Conviction. I shall give you a few Instances of this kind, that ye may perceive what Shifts Men make to transgress this noble Rule, and not only to transgress it, but to think it their Duty so to do. Our Saviour foretold his Disciples that they should be put out of the Synagogues, nay, that the Time should come, that whosoever killed them, would think he did God Service. There has been abundance of this persecuting Spirit against the Church, not only from *Heathens* and *Jews*, but, which is much stranger, from Christians one against another. Now these same Men would think it the unjustest Thing in the World, if others should use them at that Rate;

Rate ; if others kill them for their Religion, this is Murder ; and they die Martyrs ; but if they put others to Death for their Religion, this is Zeal, and these others are Hereticks. And there is no convincing them of the Injustice of this Proceeding, when they are the Persecutors ; though they are immediately very sensible of it when they are the persecuted. They go by this wrong Maxim, that the Orthodox Church may and ought to persecute the heretical Church, but the heretical Church may not persecute the Orthodox. The Maxim is a very false one, in so far as it encourages Persecution in the true and Orthodox Church ; we may say to these Men, what our Saviour said to some of the Apostles, *Luke ix. 55. Ye know not what Manner of Spirit ye are of.* And it is a Maxim, which if it were true, would only set all People upon Persecution when they are able ; for every one thinks himself orthodox. And suppose they err in this, as it will be readily owned by these persecuting Zealots, that there are none orthodox but themselves, yet by the Help of another Principle, which all own to be true, namely, that even an erroneous Conscience is to be obeyed, the Hereticks thinking themselves Orthodox, are obliged, by the Help of the other false Maxim, to persecute the Orthodox, whom they think Hereticks. But to use no other Arguments against this cruel Opinion, and all the bloody Persecutions which it has occasioned, but only that of my Text, how can they think they answer this great Duty of doing by their Neighbour as they would have their Neighbour to do by them in the like Circumstances ? For surely none of them will grant that

that it is their Neighbour's Duty to persecute them to Death, when he thinks them Hereticks; and therefore, why should they persecute him to Death, because he is, in their Opinion, an Heretick? Another erroneous Practice of this Nature is this, and I think as expressly contrary to the Rule of my Text as any Thing can be; almost all Men, when their Party happens to be contrary to the Religion established by Law, plead mightily for Toleration, and for a Liberty to serve God after their own Way; but when the Scene is shifted, and these same Men that were under come to be uppermost, there are no Men more bitter Enemies to Toleration and Liberty of Conscience, and none more violent for Persecution than they. This is another of those unfair Cases; they think Persecution of Dissenters a good Thing, except when it is against themselves. But it is a manifest Breach of this Rule of my Text, by which they should certainly treat Dissenters under them, with the same Charity and Moderation, with which they would think it just to be treated themselves, when they are Dissenters under others. The same good Rule will hold to all State, as well as Church-Dissenters. I do not mean the Enemies to Government, the Movers of Sedition or Rebellion, who have just Reason to fear the Sword of the Magistrate, it being given him on purpose for the Preservation of Peace, and the Punishment of evil Doers. I mean only such as are not always in Favour, but experience the Changeableness of Courts and Preferments. Is there any Thing more common than to hear them complain sadly of the Violence of all that are in Power, when they themselves

selves are out? But when the Scene turns, and they get their Enemies undermost, they do not abate in the least of their Insolence and Cruelty. The same may be said of all Party Quarrels. There is no greater Enemy to this noble Rule, than the acting from the Spirit of Party, and the espousing all Party-Opinions and Practices by the Lump; and taking our Measures of right and wrong, according to these Party, and therefore partial, Considerations. And therefore let us never espouse any Party so far, as to see only their bright Side, but none of their Faults and Errors. And let us endeavour after such an unbiaſſed Rectitude of Spirit, that we may be able to discern the Virtues even of a Foe, as well as of a Friend, and the Faults of a Friend as well as of a Foe; and whenever we have the Luck to be of the Party that is uppermost, let us treat those that are under, with the same Moderation and good Temper, as we would wish them to treat us, if we were in their Place, and they in ours.

To conclude, in order to the due putting in execution this Rule of doing by our Neighbour as we would have him to do by us, let us learn to admit this one Question into our Deliberations, and not to proceed to Action till we have decided it as impartially as we can; namely, if I were in my Neighbour's Place, and he in mine, how would I think it just or charitable to be treated by him? The true Answer to this Question will direct us to every Thing that is just and fair, nay, to every Thing that is kind and charitable, and even to every Thing that is handsome and generous. And though at present

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sent it may perhaps not be so grateful to our Self-
love, and Self-interest, or to our Lusts, or Pas-
sions, and Resentments, we may assure ourselves
it will yield us afterwards more Peace in our
Consciences, and more Comfort at the Hour of
Death, and in the Day of Judgment, than if
we had followed the crooked Rule of more par-
tial Views and Considerations.

*Now God himself, who hath taught us, that
all our Doings without Charity are nothing worth;
send into our Hearts this most excellent Gift of Cha-
rity, the very Bond of Peace and of all Virtues,
without which whosoever liveth is counted dead be-
fore him, for his dear Son Jesus Christ's sake.*

To whom, &c.



SERMON

S E R M O N XIV.

MAT. VII. 13.

Enter ye in at the strait Gate; for wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.

V. 14. Because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.

The First Sermon on this Text.

IN these Words our blessed Lord endeavours to remove another Impediment, which was likely to hinder the good Success of the Doctrine he had delivered; he foresaw many would be startled at the great Difficulties in the strict Way of Duty, which he had laid down, and would be for inventing Ways and Means to creep out of them; some would content themselves with the exterior Part of Duty, neglecting the interior; some with publick Duties, neglecting secret ones; some with Duty in peaceable Times, when they run no great Hazard by it, neglecting or deserting it in Times of Persecution and Danger: Some would interpret Duties in such a soft Sense, as to
reconcile

reconcile them with the Customs and Fashions of the World; some would think to make up what was wanting in practical substantial Duties, by an over Zeal in speculative Points and Ceremonials, and against all erroneous heterodox Opinions; some would be for delaying their Repentance and Amendment of Life, to Sickness, or old Age, or even to a Death-bed. These and many other various Ways, our Saviour foresaw Men would invent, to shake off the Yoke of Duty; and not only that false Teachers and loose Livers would invent them, but that great Multitudes would be apt to join in with them, and at least, by their Numbers, give them Countenance, and perhaps affix odious Names of Distinction on those few who should stick close to their Duty, let the Hazard, or Disgrace, or Unfashionableness, be what it would. Therefore he thought it necessary to caution his Followers against all such loose Opinions and Practices, how much Countenance soever they might receive from the World, and to exhort them to keep strictly in the narrow Way of those Duties which he had laid down, tho' it should be ever so much deserted by others, and discountenanced and discarded, or even persecuted by the World. This I take to be the Scope and Design of these Words, which I have read, *Enter ye in at the strait Gate, &c. q. d.* I have now taught you the perfect Way of Duty, and that so plainly, that ye cannot easily miss of the Sense and Meaning of it; nevertheless, I must give you Warning, that there will be many Ways found out by false Christians and loose Livers, to contrive a broader and easier Way to Heaven than I have laid out for you; but

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but have a Care of it, it is the high Way to Hell,
and therefore avoid it, though it be frequented
by ever so much Company ; and keep ye to the
strict Way of Duty, if ye should meet with ever
so many Difficulties, and ever so little Company
in it ; for that is the Way will lead you to
Heaven and Happiness.

But for our better understanding the Meaning,
and pressing the Scope of this Exhortation of
my Text, it will be necessary more particularly
to consider these four Things.

1. What is to be meant by the *broad and nar-
row Way*, here described.

2. What by *the little Company* in the narrow,
and the great Company in the broad Way.

3. The different Ends to which both these
Ways lead ; the broad Way *to Destruction*, and
the narrow Way *to Life*.

4. The Necessity of our most vigorous En-
deavours to go by *the strait Gate and narrow
Way*.

I. We are to consider what is meant by the
broad and the narrow Way, here described. Now
these being but Similitudes, we are to enquire
what is couched under them. The strict Way
of Duty may well be compared to a narrow Way,
hedged up on each Side, and keeping us within
the just Bounds of the Road ; and if this Road
happens to be deep or rough, we must go through
it ; there is no turning aside to the right Hand,
or to the left, without trespassing upon some
Man's Enclosure ; and besides, the By-ways of
Enclosures would be apt to mislead us ; for tho'

they are perhaps drier and smoother, and more inviting to the Eye, we are much more apt to be lost and bewildered in them. But to explain the Matter without Metaphors; by *the strait Gate, and the narrow Way*, are meant the Difficulties both of the first Entrance upon a serious Course of Life, according to our Saviour's Precepts; and the Difficulties of continuing stedfastly in it, notwithstanding the many Persecutions and other Temptations to take the Way of Vice. And by the *wide Gate and the broad Way*, is meant, this Way of Vice, which offers itself, and allures us both with a more easy Entrance into it, and with its greater Agreeableness to our corrupt Inclinations, while we continue in it; for these do not brook well to be hemmed in with Hedge and Ditch, but want to have the Liberty of expatiating, and of taking their Diversion, without any Thought of the Journey's End, or the great Business we are about by the Way. On the one hand then, here is set before us the Way of our Saviour's Precepts; this is a Way which is both very difficult to enter upon, considering the great Corruption of our Natures, and the Strength of our evil Habits, and the strong Torrent of the contrary Customs of the World; and very difficult to hold on in it against all Temptations from the Devil, and the World, and the Flesh: This is *the narrow Way*, here spoke of. On the other hand is the Way of Licentiousness, giving a Loose to our Appetites and Passions, and indulging to our evil Customs and vicious Inclinations, making frequent Sallies out of the Road of Duty, into the broad Fields of Sin and Pleasure; forgetting the Business of our

2

Journey,

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Journey, and not minding in what Ruin and Misery these idle and vicious Courses will end. This is *the broad Way*, which our Saviour here cautions us against.

By the by, we are to observe, that it is not all uneasy difficult Ways of living, which we are to take for the safe narrow Way here described, but only the Way of Duty and Virtue, or, which is the same Thing, the Way of our Saviour's Precepts, in so far as they are attended with Troubles and Difficulties, which is to be understood by the safe *narrow Way* in my Text. This is the main Point which our Saviour is securing by all those excellent Cautions in the End of this Sermon on the Mount. It was that we might comply with this, that he directed us to the right Way of obtaining Grace of our heavenly Father; it was that we might not forget this, that he furnished us with that comprehensive Breviate of Duty, we heard lately explained, that *whatsoever we would that Men should do to us, we should do so to them*. It is for this that he guards us here against the broad Way of Sin and evil Example. It is for this, that in the following Words he cautions us both against false Prophets, and against false Hopes of Heaven, from the Example of careless Livers, though professing Christianity, and pretending to a great Interest in Christ. I think it necessary to put you in Mind of this, because a great many other Austerities have been invented and recommended to the World, which, with unwary People, might pass for the narrow Way of Religion and Virtue, but are not. St. Paul tells us of some of these Austerities in his Days, Abstinence from Meats,

and forbidding of Marriage ; and the Church of *Rome* has taught us a great many more, in the strict Vows of several of their Monastick Orders, and the strict Abstinence enjoined in many of them. Every new Sect too among ourselves, commonly affects something or other of this kind, as a Mark of Distinction, or as an Artifice to recommend themselves as more strict and self-denying than their Neighbours. But we are to remember, that it is only the Way of Christ's Precepts, and not any human Inventions, which is recommended to us, by this Injunction of *entering in at the strait Gate, and walking in the narrow Way that leads to Life*. We are not to load the Way of Duty with more Difficulties than God has thought fit to burden it with, and should look with a jealous Eye on them that do ; their Design being to divert Mens Zeal and Diligence from the substantial Duties of Religion, to Matters of Superstition and human Invention.

Now, if the narrow Way here described, is the Way of Christ's Precepts, then it is no hard Matter to understand what is to be meant by the *broad Way* ; namely, the Way of Liberty and Licentiousness, confined by no Bounds, but jumping over Hedge and Ditch into our Neighbour's Enclosures, and venturing on Things prohibited. Now this may well be resembled to a broad Way, because of the much greater Easiness of it to Flesh and Blood, and because it is much less confined within any strict Bounds, but leaves a Liberty to Mens Lusts and Passions, and covetous and ambitious Inclinations, and will not be restrained within the Rules of Duty ; and because it is much more frequented by great Crowds of
 2
 Company,

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Company, than the narrow Way of Duty is.
And this leads me to,

II. The *Second* Thing we are to consider, which is, how little Company there is in the narrow Way of Duty, and how much in the broad Way of Sin; for as to the one, to wit, the broad Way, and the wide Gate, we are told, that *many there be which go in thereat*; but as to the other, the narrow Way, and the strait Gate, that *few there be that find it*. This is another great Inducement to Care and Diligence, to walk in the strict Ways of Christian Virtue laid down by Christ; because not only our own Lusts and Corruptions, but the Examples likewise of the World, will be apt to seduce us into the Way of Liberty and Licentiousness. In speaking to this important Observation of our Lord's, I shall do these three Things.

1. I will shew the Truth of this Assertion, that there are many who fall in with the broad Way of Vice and Licentiousness; and but few in comparison, who take to the strict Way of Duty, and keep in it.

2. I shall consider the Danger we run, from this Prevalency of evil Example.

3. I shall endeavour to find out the Duty our Saviour designed to teach these his first Disciples, and all other Christians to the End of the World, from this Observation.

1. As to the Truth of the Assertion, that there are many who fall in with the broad Way of Vice and Licentiousness, and but few in comparison, who take to the strict Way of Duty, and keep in it. To say nothing of those that were

without the Pale of the Church of God at that Time, of whose vicious Lives *St. Paul* gives us a most terrible Description, *Rom. i.* from the 21st Verse to the End of the Chapter; to pass by them, I say, because it was not so much with an Eye to them our Saviour gave this Caution; and to consider only what he had more immediately under his View, the present State of the *Jewish* Church, together with what he foresaw of the future State of the Christian Church, it will be no hard Matter to make good this sad Observation of them both. As to the *Jewish* Church, if the Pharisees, the strictest Sect among them, had no better Righteousness than that exterior one, which our Saviour has been exposing, confuting and rectifying, all along this excellent Sermon on the Mount; what shall we think of the Righteousness of the Sadducees, who believed no future State? And what of the Righteousness of the great Body of the People, who commonly lived in Ignorance, and went astray after their worldly Cares and Lusts, *like Sheep without a Shepherd?* And as to the Christian Church, tho' it was a very exemplary Body of People, while they were under the Cross, and had no secular Powers to encourage them; no sooner did the *Roman* Empire receive the Profession of Christianity, than presently there broke in such a worldly Spirit into the Church, that for one sincere Christian, there were a great many Hypocrites; and in After-Times, abundance of deluding Arts have been found out, to reconcile the Duties of Christianity with the Ways and Fashions of the World, and to teach Men a broad and easy Way to Heaven, without the Trouble of mortifying their Lusts, and subduing their Passions, and weaning their

their Hearts from the World, and in short, without quitting their Sins, and becoming new Creatures. To say nothing of the vast Number of Inventions to this Purpose in the Church of *Rome*, by Dispensations, Pardons, Indulgences, Penances, Absolutions, their Doctrine of probable Opinions, loose Interpretations of Christian Duties; and where these are any thing severe, making them pass not for Duties, but Counsels of Perfection; but, I say, to pass by all these, and to look at Home among ourselves, how few are there among us, who seem to think themselves obliged to live up to the strict Rules of Christianity, and are not more governed by the Maxims and Customs of the World? And wherever these two interfere, do not prefer the Customs of the World to the Precepts of Christ? I cannot pretend to tell how these loose Opinions and Practices have prevailed; no Author will own them in all their Consequences; but our own wicked Inclinations prepare us for sucking in all such Principles as tend to the favouring and justifying licentious Practices. So if any Authors have spoke of the Decrees of God, though the same Authors endeavour to reconcile that Doctrine with the Sincerity of his Exhortations to a good Life, we are apt to suck in the dangerous Part of the Doctrine, and to make use of it to justify our own evil Courses. If there be in Scripture any one Instance of a late Faith and Repentance that were accepted, (as I think there is but one, namely, that of the Thief upon the Cross;) we are apt presently to apply it to ourselves, to a Purpose for which I dare say it was never intended; not to encourage us to Repentance; as soon as we come

to be acquainted with Christ; (which one would think should be the natural Consequence of that Example,) but to delay our Repentance as long as we can; which makes a Case very different from that which is there put; for that in all Probability was the first Time that Malefactor was acquainted with the Doctrine of Christ, and therefore, though late, it was as soon as he could exercise the Faith and Repentance of a Christian; so that to apply this Case to a Man who has all his Life long been acquainted with the Christian Religion, without exercising Repentance and Amendment of Life, is, as I said, at least a Misapplication of the Case; and would not readily occur to our Thoughts, but that we are so apt to catch at every Thing that may encourage us in the broad Way of Sin. So as to the Nature of Repentance; because we would indulge ourselves in our evil Courses, we are willing to believe that there is no more requisite towards it, but a certain Sorrow for Sin, without considering, that without Amendment of Life it is not a Repentance of the right Stamp. So because we have been taught that no Man lives without Sin; the Meaning of which is, that even the best of Men are subject to Error, and Ignorance, and Forgetfulness, and several other Sins of Weakness and Infirmary; we, to encourage ourselves in our loose Morals, are apt to apply this Doctrine to our great wilful Sins, deliberately continued in without Repentance. And so in all other Things there is a strong Bias upon our Spirits, instead of the strict Ways of Duty, to flee to the loose Ways of Sin, contenting ourselves with any Colour of Probability, such as in other Cases would not satisfy a Man
of

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of any Skill in the Way of common Reasoning. Not to speak now of the vast Multitudes of nominal Christians, who neither make Conscience to live up to the Precepts of Christ, nor seek out any Reasons, or so much as Pretences, to excuse it.

2. In the next Place, let us consider the Danger we run from this Prevalency of evil Example.

The greatest Part of Men are either not capable of examining the intrinsic Goodness or Badness of the Way, that is, of the Course of Life which they ought to follow, being blinded by Ignorance, or strongly biased by the Prejudices of Education; or at least, if they are capable to do it with Pains and Application, are much more apt lazily to take Things as they find them, than to trouble themselves to dispute the common Practices of the World: when Men are in a well beaten, much frequented Road, where their Fellow-Travellers seem not to have the least Doubt of the Way, they march on with Confidence, though they should happen to be wrong, and so mislead and deceive one another. Men in this Respect are like Sheep; they love to herd together; and where one or two has the Hardiness or Rashness to lead the Way, the rest will certainly follow. Especially there is a Contagion in bad Example, our own Corrupt Inclinations giving us a strong Bias to the Thing, and then Example giving Courage and Countenance to it. So that it is a very hard Matter to resist both these, bad Inclination joined with bad Example. More particularly when the Example is so general, as to obtain the Authority of an established

blished Custom or Fashion. Then it goes on with Boldness, and, like an impetuous Torrent, carries all down before it. It requires then not a feeble Light, and a weak Inclination, but a full Assurance, and a very firm Resolution to withstand it, and to row against the Stream: Especially where bad Customs and Fashions are armed with Power, so as to raise Persecution against those of a contrary Way. There are but few who have the Courage, and Patience, and Steadiness of Mind to hold out against Persecution. For many of those who abstain from vicious Courses, do not abstain out of any Firmness of Principle, but either from a Goodness of natural Temper and Disposition, or from a Tincture of Education, or out of Respect to Parents, Tutors, Masters, Benefactors, or Governors. Some with an Eye to Profit or Preferment, and some from the slender Impressions of Shame or Fear: now all these, tho' in good Times they will make a Shift to hold on tolerably well in the Way of Duty, yet so soon as the Storm of Persecution arises, they are quickly beaten from their Constancy, and follow the Multitude to the doing of Evil; so that it is no Wonder, as our Saviour observes in my Text, that many frequent this broad Way, and go in at this wide Gate; and that the Way of Duty being deep and rocky, and full of Difficulties, especially in the Beginning, there are but few who find it out, and continue in it. It is like an old deserted Way, grown up with Bushes, or deep in Mud, ill cleared, and little trod or frequented; and therefore none will be apt to take it, but they who are very well assured that it is the only right Way, and that all the rest are wrong.

3. In the last Place, we are to endeavour to find out the Duty our Saviour designed to teach these his first Disciples, and all other Christians to the End of the World, from this Observation of the great Numbers that frequent the broad Way that leads to Destruction, and the Smalness of the Number of those who frequent the narrow Way that leads to Life. Not to insist now on other good Uses which might be made of this Doctrine, the main Design of our Saviour here seems to be, to caution us against a sinful Course of Life, though it should come recommended to us by Numbers, Custom, Authority, and Example, and with all the Invitations of Ease and Pleasure; for all this is represented by the broad Way, much frequented by Company. And to give a greater Force to his Exhortation, he not only supposes, that often it may be so, but acquaints us, that generally it will be so; that the Way of Vice and Licentiousness will have the Advantage of Numbers and Fashion; and the Way of strict Virtue will be exploded, and looked out of Countenance; two Duties are naturally consequent upon this Observation; *Caution* and *Courage*: First, *Caution*; as when an experienced Pilot lays down to a Skipper the several Rocks and Shelves, or Eddies and Currents he shall meet with in the several Parts of his Voyage, it is with a Design, no Doubt, that he should either avoid them, or steer so much the more cautiously, if he must be obliged to go among them. This is our Case in the Voyage of Life; We are in very great Danger from the prevailing Customs and Examples of the World.

All

All People almost that we converse with, infuse the Poison of their corrupt Notions and Opinions, while they speak with such an Air of Esteem and Admiration of the Things of the World, and so drily and indifferently (if they afford them any Place at all in their Conversation) of the great Concerns of another Life. As it is a very difficult Matter, when an Infection is so generally spread, that the very Air is corrupted, not to suck in some of the pestilential Atoms; so it is a very difficult Business, in this corrupt World, to converse so innocently, as not to learn some of their wrong Notions and Maxims, and to be led into some of their vicious Manners and Customs. We must therefore both fortify our selves with the best Preservatives and Antidotes, with which our Saviour's Doctrine furnishes us the best of all Kinds; and must likewise frequently search and examine whether any of the World's Infection has taken hold of us, and got within us, and so purge it out again by Repentance, and new Resolutions and Endeavours. But sometimes the evil Customs of the World are so headstrong, that bare Caution alone will not do, without a great deal of Courage and Resolution to stem the Tide, and to oppose the Torrent of Vice which breaks in, and carries all down before it. There is a weak and fearful Bashfulness, which often betrays us to sinful Compliances; this we must take the Courage to break through, remembering our Saviour's Threatning, *Mark viii. 38. Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and sinful Generation; of him also shall the Son of Man*
be

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*be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his
Father with the holy Angels.*

So much for the *second* Thing I observed in the Words, the small Company in the narrow Way of Duty, and the great Company in the broad Way of Sin. I find Time will not permit my meddling at present with the other two Points I observed from the Words, concerning the different Ends, to which these two Ways do lead; and the Necessity of our using our most vigorous Endeavours to get out of the broad Way of Sin, which leads to Destruction, and to walk in the narrow Way of Virtue, which leads unto Life: And therefore I must refer them to another Opportunity.

Only that ye may not be discouraged with what I have said of the Difficulties in the Way of Christ's Precepts, it will be necessary to acquaint you, that though the Way was very difficult in those Days, by Reason of the Persecutions which attended the Christian Profession; and although it is still difficult, especially at the first shaking off of evil Habits; it grows daily more and more pleasant, the further Progress we make in it; and the Peace of Conscience with which it is attended here, and the well-grounded Hope of Happiness hereafter, to all considering People, gives it much the Advantage even in Point of true Ease and Pleasure, of the Way of Sin and Folly; the Pleasures of which are both short and unsatisfactory, and exceedingly embittered with the doleful Prospect of that everlasting Anguish and Despair in which they will certainly end.

Now

Now God give us all Grace to confider in this our Day, the Things which belong to our everlasting Peace, before the Time come that they be hid from our Eyes.

To this great God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, &c.



SERMON

S E R M O N XV.

M A T. VII. 13.

Enter ye in at the strait Gate; for wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.

V. 14. *Because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.*

The Second Sermon on this Text.

HA V I N G at the last Occasion discoursed from these Words, there were Four Things I then propos'd to be considered from them.

1. What is to be meant by *the broad and narrow Way* here described.

2. That there is but *little Company* in the narrow, and a *great Company* in the broad Way.

3. The different Ends to which both these Ways do lead; the broad Way *to Destruction*, the narrow Way *to Life*.

4. The Exhortation concerning the Necessity of our most vigorous Endeavours *to enter by the strait Gate, and to walk in the narrow Way.*

Now,

Now, having at that Time spoke to the first and second of these, shewing you that by the broad Way, is meant the Way of Sin and Vice; and by the narrow Way, the strict Way of Duty, which had been described by our Saviour in the foregoing Part of this excellent Sermon on the Mount; and likewise, how few there are, in comparison, who follow this strict Way of Duty, and how many that are for inventing easier, but much unsafer Ways to Heaven; I proceed now to what remains upon this Text.

III. The *third* Thing then I observed in the Words, was the different Ends to which both these Ways do lead; the broad Way to Destruction, and the narrow Way to Life. *Broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction; and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life.* In treating of this Subject, I shall go by these three Steps or Degrees.

1. I will shew, that the Way of Virtue, and the Way of Vice, have Ends vastly different.

2. From the two Words in the Text, which describe those different Ends, *Destruction* and *Life*, I will enquire into the Nature of those different States.

3. I will endeavour to explain how those different States result from the different Courses of Life of the Wicked and the Godly; because the several Ways are said to *lead* to them.

I. *First*, That the Way of Virtue, and the Way of Vice, have Ends vastly different; as
different

different as *Destruction* and *Life*. They are not like two Ways which lead to the same Place, which though they part, yet meet again either in some other Part of the Road, or at least at the End of the Journey; but they are like two Ways which part more and more from one another, and end in very distant Countries. As if two Ships should steer different Courses, the one a right Course, which would carry its Passengers streight to their right Port and Harbour; the other a wrong Course, which carries them into the Enemy's Country, where they lose Ship and Cargo, and are made Prisoners, or Slaves, as long as they live. The steering this wrong Course is not always the effect of Ignorance, but often of Carelessness and Inconsideration; as if the Master and Seamen should spend their Time in Drinking and Gaming, and never mind the steering the true Course to the right Harbour; but forgetting their Reckoning, should fall in with Rocks and Shoals, and be lost and cast away; while the other sober and diligent Men get safe into the Harbour.

This was a very proper Consideration for our Saviour to leave with his Disciples, that they might not neglect those excellent Precepts he had given them, even to put them in mind of the different Fates of those who led their Life in the broad Way of Sin; and of them who walked in the narrow Way of Duty, which he had shewed them. The broad Way, like that of a Ship, which cannot endure to bear up against the Wind, but always fails before it, never carries a Man to the right End of his Voyage; but either upon Rocks and Shelves, or into the

Enemy's Country ; or at least, to some very distant Place from what he desires to go to. On the other Hand, the narrow Way of Duty, like that of a Ship, which bears well up to the Wind, loses no Way, but holds on in a direct Course to the right Port and Harbour. There is a great deal more Pains and Trouble indeed in bearing up against the Wind, than in sailing before it ; as there is a great deal more Trouble in the Way of Self-denial and Mortification of our carnal Appetites, than in indulging our selves in our sinful Inclinations ; but if we consider the different Ends of the one and the other Way, we are not to take our Measures of the Goodness or Badness of the Passage, till we see the End of it ; for that is to be reckoned a good Passage, which carries us sure and safe, and without loss of Time, to Heaven, though we should meet with some blustering Winds and Weather in it ; and that is an unfortunate Passage, which carries us to the wrong Port, or splits the Ship against the Rocks, although, as to the sailing Part, it should be ever so pleasant before the Wind, and the Seamen and Passengers should pass their Time ever so idly in drinking and gaming together.

The very Heathen, by the Light of Nature, were sensible of the different Ends of Virtue and Vice ; and therefore they not only appointed Rewards for the one, and Punishments for the other, in this World ; but give us Descriptions of the vastly different States which they apprehended would be allotted them in the World to come ; the one very happy, the other very miserable. But the Christian Religion has mightily improved

improved what was but imperfectly delivered by those, who had no further Help than that of the Light of Nature. For it has given us very particular Accounts of the Immortality of the Soul, and the Resurrection of the Body; of the Day of Judgment, and the Proceedings of Christ, the righteous Judge, and of the various Sentences which shall be pronounced on both good and bad, adjudging the one to everlasting Happiness, and the other to everlasting Misery. And this leads me to the *second* Thing I proposed to consider on this Subject; namely,

II. The Nature of those different States, described here by the Words *Destruction* and *Life*. To begin with the Word *Destruction*. We are to understand it, not for Annihilation, but for the height of Misery. And this is no unusual Acceptation of the Word; as when we speak of an Enemy's destroying of a *Country*, we mean only that he makes it very miserable by all the Calamities of War. This is the Sense of *Destruction* when applied to damned Souls in a future State; for as far as we can gather from the holy Scriptures, (the only sure Guide in such Matters,) there is no such good News for wicked Men, as that there shall be an utter End of their Being, and consequently that they shall be insensible of all the Pains of Hell; for as to the Soul, it is immortal, and never dies; and as to the Body, there is nothing plainer delivered than the Doctrine of the Resurrection, not only of *the Just*, but of *the Unjust*. Now, to what Purpose should the Body be raised to Life, if it is immediately to die again? It is true, some alledge that it seems to

be a very unnatural, and a very unphilosophical Thing, that the Body, without a continual Miracle, should be able to subsist long, much less to all Eternity, under those exquisite Torments which are in Hell. But this Objection rises from two very weak Foundations, which, if they are removed, this Difficulty will quickly vanish. The first is, that we apprehend no Difference between our present mortal Bodies, and the Bodies we shall have after the Resurrection; whereas, as the Resurrection-Body is not maintained by such corruptible Things as Meat and Drink, so neither is it corruptible as they are; it is true of all such Bodies, whether they belong to happy or unhappy Souls, that *this Mortal must put on Immortality, and this Corruptible shall put on Incorruption*, 1 Cor. xv. 53. and therefore the Frame of such a Body is not to be destroyed by outward Accidents, as the Frame of our mortal Bodies is. And the second wrong Foundation upon which the Objection is founded is, that we fancy *Hell-fire* is of the same Nature with our Fires here upon Earth, and must make as great an Impression upon Matter; Whereas all these Descriptions of Hell-Torments in holy Scripture, as of *a Worm that never dies, and a Fire that is never quenched*, are only lively Metaphors to express the exquisite and endless Pain and Anguish of such Persons who shall be adjudged to *Hell-Torments*. So that there is no unphilosophical Notion in this, that God can and will fit the Resurrection-Body so properly to a State of Immortality, either of Happiness or Misery, that it shall be capable to accompany the Soul to all Eternity in either of those States; and likewise

that he will fit the Rewards and Punishments of either State so, that both Soul and Body shall be capable of them. But against this Act of God's, some object that it is very disagreeable to the Justice, and much more to the Mercy of God, to inflict eternal Punishments for temporary Sins, for that the Punishment ought to bear a due Proportion to the Sin. This will be best answered by the last Thing I observed on this Subject, namely, that the different States of Men to all Eternity, result not from any arbitrary Sentence of God's, but from the different Courses of Life of the Wicked, and of those that fear God; because the several Ways, *viz.* the broad Way of Vice, and the narrow Way of Virtue, are said in my Text to *lead* to them. But before I come to that, we are to consider the Nature likewise of Happiness under the Notion of Life, by which it is represented in the Text. By this Word *Life*, is not meant here the natural Life, consisting in a Conjunction or Union of Soul and Body, which Sort of Life is common with the Reprobate, and is consistent with a great deal of Misery; but by Life, is meant the Union of the Soul with God, as our Saviour explains it, *1 John v. 12. he that hath the Son, hath Life; and he that hath not the Son, hath not Life.* It is called *Life* by way of Excellency, as signifying a pleasant, happy Life. And in this Sense Living is used both in the holy Scriptures, and in other antient Authors. Thus *1 Sam. x. 24.* these Words, which literally rendered signify only, *Let the King live*, are translated by the *Chaldee Paraphrast*, *Let the King prosper.* So *1 Sam. xxv. 6.* part of *David's* Message to *Nabal*;

230 *The Way to Destruction, and the* [SERM. *bal*; the Words which we translate, *Say ye to him that liveth in Prosperity*, in the Original are only, *Say ye to him that liveth*. So the *Psalmist* is to be understood, *Psal. lxxix. 32. The humble shall see this and be glad; and your Heart shall live that seek God.* And *St. Paul*, 1 *Theff. iii. 8. Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.* And so very often in holy Scripture *Life is taken for an happy and glorious Life.* Thus *Mat. xix. 17. If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments.* And *John v. 29. The Hour is coming, in which all that are in the Graves shall hear his Voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the Resurrection of Life.* The same I told you of antient *Heathen Authors*, who use the Word *to live*, for living joyfully and happily. So *Catullus, Vivamus mea Lesbia; i. e. Let us enjoy our selves.* So *Martial,*

Sera nimis Vita est crastina, vive hodie.

Live to day, says he, *it is too late to live to morrow.* Taking then the Word *Life*, for an happy Life; to understand it right, we must know wherein eternal Happiness doth consist. And though this is a Subject far above our weak Capacities to understand, for when we have done our best to explain it, we may truly say with the Apostle *St. John*, 1 *John iii. 2. It doth not yet appear what we shall be;* yet some of the principal rough Draughts of that happy Life we give you from the holy Scriptures.

1. *First* then, as to the Bodies of good Men after the Resurrection, they shall be no longer carnal, lumpish, weak, sickly, or mortal; but
spiritual,

spiritual, sprightly, lively, immortal, and incorruptible. As there is a great Difference between living in an old, leaky House, made of Dirt and Clay, every Day mouldering away, and quickly tumbling down; and living in a pleasant well built Palace, where there are all Manner of Conveniences; so our Souls will be unspeakably more commodiously lodged in that *Building of God*, as the Apostle calls it, *2 Cor. v. 1. Eternal in the Heavens*, than in these heavy, weak, sickly, dying Bodies, which we carry about with us in this World.

2. *Secondly*, The Soul will be as much improved as the Body; for as to it's Understanding, whereas we labour here with a great deal of Pains after the Knowledge of a few Truths, and these we never attain to in any great Perfection, but see them in an obscure Manner, as *through a Glass darkly*, *1 Cor. xiii. 12.* and when we know them, are very apt to forget them again, through Weakness of Memory, Multiplicity of Business, and many Distempers incident to Body and Mind; it shall be quite otherwise in that blessed State, where we shall see Things so clearly as one Man sees another, *Face to Face*; and both our Understandings shall be enlarged to the utmost Capacity of apprehending and comprehending all Truths, even such as do easily puzzle and confound us in this Life, and we shall be delivered from all those Weaknesses and Infirmities, which occasion here our forgetting daily many Things which we formerly learned and knew. And, which is above all, our Wills shall be perfected into a true Habit of Holiness, and exact Conformity to the Will of God, and a perfect

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fect Liberty from all Servitude of Sin. And our Affections shall be restored to a true Harmony, of good Regulation, and absolute Contentment and Satisfaction.

3. *Thirdly*, As our Persons shall be thus admirably well disposed for partaking of all Happiness, so such a Happiness shall be provided for us, as shall sufficiently answer the utmost Capacities of such a perfect and glorified Creature. I shall not pretend to enumerate, but leave it to yourselves to consider the innumerable Branches of that Happiness, resulting from our Knowledge, Vision, and Love of God; and his reciprocal Love of us again; from the happy Society of Saints and Angels; from the perfect good Government of Heaven; from an absolute Freedom from all Pain, Misery, Toil, Weariness, and Want; from an Impossibility of sinning and offending God; from the Possession of all Good, and the unspeakable Joy and Complacency flowing from it; and the Assurance that all this shall last for ever and ever.

So much for the Description of the Nature of these different States here mentioned.

III. I go on now in the *third* Place, to shew that these different States result from the different Courses of Life of good and bad Men. This I think is very plain from my Text, in which it is said, that wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that *leadeth* to Destruction; and strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way, which *leadeth* unto Life. It is a great and dangerous Mistake in many People, that they look upon the Rewards and Punishments of the future State, so abstractedly

abstractedly from the Life and Temper of the Persons, who are to be so rewarded and punished, as if it were only an arbitrary Act of God's that hinders a wicked Man to get to Heaven, or a good Man to drop into Hell. The Consequence of which is, that God's Justice, or his Mercy at least, are taxed and called in Question, though by the eternal Laws of Righteousness both have the natural Fate to which their wicked or good Deeds do naturally lead. This if duly considered, would vindicate God's Justice from all Imputations, and would shew, that, without a Miracle to hinder it, a wicked Man's Life and Actions will carry him as naturally to Hell, as the Rivers run into the Sea : and therefore **that** the whole Fault lies in the first choosing, and the after holding on so long in the Ways of Sin, which infallibly lead to Death. God has declared with an Affelevation, that *as he lives he has no Pleasure in the Death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his Way and live*, Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

For apprehending the Meaning of this Truth, we are to consider, that it is a Thing which implies no less than a Contradiction, that an unholy, unregenerate Man, continuing such, should be happy in the Enjoyment of an holy God ; Light and Darkness, Bitter and Sweet, or any other the most inconsistent Things in Nature, may agree as well as these two. *First*, It is utterly inconsistent with the Nature of God, to love impure Souls, continuing such ; and his Nature being unchangeable, he must for ever hate with a perfect Hatred, whatsoever is unalterably unholy and impure ; and to suppose an Interruption
of

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of his Hatred of incorrigible Sinners, is to imagine he can cease to be a pure and holy God. *Secondly*, They that are habitually and finally wicked, having slipt their Day of Grace, and lost the Time for Repentance, must needs be presumed to continue wicked and impenitent, while they have any Being or Subsistence in the future State, and consequently having an everlasting Aversion to God, can never be happy in the Enjoyment of him.

Thirdly, The Souls of wicked Men being immortal, they must have an eternal Duration, except God should be pleased to annihilate them; and this he has no where promised that he will do; neither is he any where obliged to it. He has not promised that he will do it; so far from it, that he has declared the quite contrary: For he has told us of that State of the Damned, that *their Worm dieth not, and their Fire shall not be quenched*; and their Punishments too are represented as various, that some shall suffer more, some less; *It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for Capernaum*, Matth. xi. 21. and that *some shall be beaten with many, and some with fewer Stripes*, Luke xii. 47. And that *some shall receive greater Damnation than others*, Matth. xxiii. 14. All which is directly contrary to this Fancy of *Annihilation*; for if that were true, then all should suffer equally: Because there are no Degrees of Annihilation or not being. And as God has no where promised this to the Wicked, he is no manner of Way obliged to do this for them: For as a * learned Man of our Church argues well

* Dr. Whitby.

well upon this Subject, If he were obliged to annihilate the Souls of wicked Men, it must be because he is obliged to put them out of that Misery which they have brought upon themselves by their own Folly and Rebellions; and if so, since this must certainly be an Act not of strict Justice, but of Grace and Favour, God must be bound to shew an Act of Grace and Favour towards Men, purely because they have provoked and rebelled against him; that is, because they have done that which renders them the proper Objects of his Hatred and Indignation; and be obliged to save Men from that Misery, which by their stubborn Disobedience to all his Calls, Admonitions, and Exhortations, and all the gracious Methods his Providence had used to preserve them from it, they wilfully have brought upon themselves. To all this, if we add, that as this dismal State has neither present Joy, nor future Hope, it must be necessarily and eternally miserable; and all this, not by any positive Act of God, inflicting everlasting Stripes on the Wicked, or loading them perpetually with fresh Torments, as the Objection against his Justice and Mercy supposed, but wholly from their own Sin, which renders them incapable of the Enjoyment of an holy God, and perpetually excludes them from his blissful Presence, which, to a Soul that is immortal, and can never die, must be the Source of everlasting Torment; and from the natural Workings of its Faculties, will necessarily subject it to the perpetual Gnawings of a despairing Conscience; as might be shewn more at large, if I had not already left too little Room for,

IV. The *fourth* and last Thing I observed from the Words; namely, The great Duty here enjoined, of *entring in at the strait Gate*, and going by the *narrow Way* of Christian Virtue; if we intend to be finally happy. That this requires some vigorous Endeavours, appears not only from the Straitness of the Gate, and Difficulties of the Way, here mentioned, but more plainly from the parallel Place in St. *Luke*, Chap. xiii. 24. Where the Exhortation is worded thus: *Strive to enter in at the strait Gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* It appears plainly from this Exhortation of our Saviour's, that though there are considerable Difficulties in Religion, yet by Pains and Diligence they are all to be surmounted, through the Assistance of God's Grace, which, a little before my Text, he had taught us to beg of God by fervent Prayer. Endeavours and Prayers must go hand in hand together; and ye have heard what great Encouragement there is to our Endeavours; no less than a Life of infinite Glory and Happiness; and what Danger, if we neglect them, even an Eternity of the most exquisite Anguish and Misery; and how many there are who miscarry for want of due Pains and Endeavour.

What remains then, but that we gird up the Loins of our Minds, and prepare ourselves for working out our Salvation with all Diligence; and begrudge no Time or Pains that is laid out either in studying to know, or in learning to practise our Duty, or in avoiding or resisting the Temptations to the contrary Vices, from the
Devil,

XV.] *Way to Life.* MAT. VII. 13, 14. 237

Devil, the World, and the Flesh : Assuring our selves that no Labour is so well bestowed, or can turn to so good Account. I shall conclude with the Words of St. Peter, 2 Pet. i. 5. *Giving all Diligence, add to your Faith, Virtue ; and to Virtue, Knowledge ; and to Knowledge, Temperance ; and to Temperance, Patience ; and to Patience, Godliness ; and to Godliness, brotherly Kindness ; and to brotherly Kindness, Charity. For if these Things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Now to Him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.



SERMON

S E R M O N XVI.

MAT. VII. 15.

Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheeps clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.

V. 16. *Ye shall know them by their Fruits: do Men gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles?*

V. 17. *Even so every good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit: but a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit.*

V. 18. *A good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit: neither can a corrupt Tree bring forth good Fruit.*

V. 19. *Every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the Fire.*

V. 20. *Wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them.*

The First Sermon on this Text.

TH E S E Words have an apt Coherence with the foregoing, being a further Prosecution of a Design which our Saviour manages with great Accuracy in the Close of this divine Sermon on the Mount: His Design was to guard his

his Disciples, and his other Auditors, against every Thing that might prevent or obstruct their Obedience to those Precepts of holy Living, which he had given them in the foregoing Part of the Sermon. These six Verses which I have read, are a Caution against the bad Influence false Prophets or Teachers might have upon us, to turn us away from that Obedience. In the Words we may briefly observe these three Things:

1. The Caution itself, against false Prophets or Teachers, who, howsoever they make in outward Appearance some specious Pretensions to Piety and Religion, yet inwardly are dangerous Enemies to it; as a Wolf under a Sheep's Skin designs to make Havock of the Flock.

2. A Mark given how we may discern false Prophets from true, by the Fruits of their Doctrine on themselves and others.

3. An Illustration of this Mark, from the Similitude of good and bad Trees and Vines, which in this resemble bad and good Doctrine, that each of them brings forth good or bad Fruit, according to its Kind; and likewise that each of them shall be treated well or ill, according to the Goodness and Badness of their Fruit.

I. I begin with the *first*, The Caution against false Prophets, ver. 15. *Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheeps Clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.* For understanding and recommending of which Caution, it will be necessary to do these four Things:

I. To

1. To explain what is meant by *false Prophets*.
2. To consider the external Hypocrisy of their *Sheeps Clothing*. And,
3. Their internal bad Designs; *inwardly they are ravening Wolves*.
4. What Caution we are to use against them, when we are exhorted *to beware of them*.

But before I begin, it is briefly worth the observing, that this Exhortation is made to the very same Persons to whom all the rest of this Sermon is directed; that is, as I shewed you before, to the Multitudes, and our Saviour's Disciples; not only to the Twelve, but to all the rest who came to learn of Christ; that is, all Christians, who were called Disciples in those Days. From which Observation we may learn, that this Cautiousness against false Prophets, is every Man's Care and Duty. St. John gives the same Advice to the Christians in his Days, to whom he wrote, 1 John iv. 1. *Beloved, says he, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits, whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the World*. It seems our Saviour and his Apostles thought this a Duty not fit to be limited to a Pope and a Council, nor even to the Bishops and Pastors of the Church; but thought it necessary to oblige every Man, by the Light of Reason, and the Use of the Scriptures, to guard himself as well as he can against Impostors; as every Man, though he be not a Physician, is to guard himself against Quacks and Poisoners. This being premised, I proceed now to the first Thing proposed, *viz.*

1. To

I: To enquire what is meant here by *false Prophets*; for there is some Difficulty in this Compellation. The Word *Prophets* sometimes signifies those extraordinary Teachers, who had the Gift of foretelling Things to come; and sometimes it is taken in a larger Sense, for all that publish or interpret the Mind and Will of God, whether they foretel Things to come or not. It is in this last Sense the Word is to be taken here; for the Thing our Saviour had in View was, to guard them against such false Teachers, as should corrupt the Christian Morals, or find out Ways to excuse Men from the Observation thereof. By the Word *Prophets* then, I understand here all Teachers, who interpret or expound the Word of God. By *false Prophets*, are not to be understood all that are any way mistaken, or in an Error concerning divine Things; many Errors are very innocent; and no Person being infallible, this would be to make all Teachers ravenous Wolves whenever they fall into any sort of Error or Mistake in religious Matters. But by *false Prophets* here, I think are to be understood either such Teachers as lead us into some very dangerous Soul-destroying Error, whether it proceed from an Error of their Understanding, or not; or rather, such as are Enemies (at least in their Capacity of teaching or prophesying) to those excellent Morals our Saviour had been delivering; for that (as I have often observed to you) was the Thing he was driving at in all these Cautions, which he gives in the End of this Sermon, even to secure their Obedience to what he had taught, and to guard them against every

Thing that might hinder or destroy it. Now he foresaw how much this Christian Obedience would be endangered from false Teachers; of which there has been a great Number since, whose Doctrine has proved very pernicious to Christian Morals, and has a plain Tendency to the overthrowing of Holiness and Virtue. And because I think it may both tend to your better understanding what Sort of false Prophets are to be meant in this Caution, and likewise to the cautioning you against their pernicious Opinions and Practices, I will give you some Instances of the principal of such as I think fall under this Caution of my Text.

(1.) *First* then, Many of the Scribes and Pharisees were such false Teachers, who taught that we fulfil the Commandments, if we abstain from the gross Act prohibited by them, though we indulge ourselves in the secret Pollutions of the Thoughts, nay, even break out into several Words and Actions flowing from the inward carnal Principle, and directly leading to those gross external Actions. For in our Saviour's Sense, inward Malice and Hatred, and contumelious Words, and provoking injurious Actions, are Breaches of the Sixth Commandment, as well as, though not so great, as actual Murder. And inward Lust in the Heart, with other impure or obscene Words and Actions, are Breaches of the Seventh Commandment, though they should not break out in the gross Acts of Uncleaness. And by a Parity of Reason, all rash judging, censuring, and, defaming, is a Breach of the Ninth Commandment, as well as false Witness bearing; and all Discontent with our own Circumstances,

Circumstances, and envying those of our Neighbour, is a Breach of the Eighth and Tenth Commandments, as well as the more gross injuring him in any of his just Possessions.

(2.) These same Scribes and Pharisees were false Teachers, or false Prophets, when they taught the People to spend all their Zeal about Ceremonies and Circumstantials of Religion, with the Neglect of the great and weighty Matters of Duty. Nay, though they should not expressly or directly teach this latter Part, it is a necessary Consequence of the former; as he who divides a great Stream into a great many little Rivulets, by so doing incapacitates it from turning a Mill, or from carrying any great Burden. And in Imitation of this Pharisaical Righteousness, they are false Teachers, whoever they are, that in after Ages teach Men to spend all their Zeal about dry Opinions, or empty Ceremonies, neglecting the great and substantial Duties of Religion, as, alas, this is the most fatal Rock that almost all Parties have split upon.

(3.) The same Scribes and Pharisees, and some other Teachers of those Days, were false Prophets, when they taught People to depend confidently on their being Descendants from *Abraham*, and on their Profession of the *Jewish* Religion, without Renovation of Heart and Amendment of Life. A true Prophet, *John* the Baptist, severely exposes this Error, *Matth.* iii. 7. *O Generation of Vipers, says he, who hath warned you to flee from the Wrath to come? Bring forth therefore Fruits meet for Repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our Father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these Stones*

to raise up Children unto Abraham. And, by a Parity of Reason, they are to be accounted false Prophets, whoever they are, that in these latter Ages do teach, that their giving up their Name to any one Church, or any one Denomination of Christians, is sufficient to entitle them to a future State of Salvation, while they themselves continue wicked Livers.

(4.) They are false Prophets, who, in their Descriptions of the Terms of Salvation, give such slight Notions of Faith, Repentance, and new Obedience, as tend to feed the false Hopes of meer nominal Christians and loose Livers; making Faith to be only a confident Persuasion that they are the Elect of God, though there are few or no Signs of Election to be found in their Lives: And making Repentance only some Degrees of Sorrow for Sin, without sincere, and vigorous, and continued Endeavours after Amendment of Life; and making new Obedience, but some few Degrees of formal, partial, or temporary Obedience, instead of that hearty, universal and constant Obedience required in the Gospel.

(5.) They are false Prophets, who teach People any other false Principles, such as have a Tendency in them to excuse from the obeying our Saviour's Precepts; of which there are too many, which have been sent abroad in the World. I shall name some of the chief of them.

(1.) There are many who have taught false and dangerous Doctrines concerning the Decrees of God, as if he had so absolutely predetermined from all Eternity whatever comes to pass in Time, even in the most sinful Actions of Men, that it is an easy Thing from that Doctrine to make

him the Author of all Sin; pardon the Blasphemy of such a Thought: Thus here is a Door opened for all Men to shift the Guilt of all their Sins from themselves, and to lay it upon God; than which, nothing can have a worse Influence on our Obedience. Now this Error proceeds from our not understanding aright the Difference between God's foreseeing the sinful Actions of Men, his providing for that Case, or determining what he will do in that Case, and his determining them to the sinful Actions themselves. To illustrate it by a Similitude among Men: Suppose a provident King, knowing the discontented Tempers of several of his Subjects, should conclude with himself, that it is very probable these discontented Subjects, especially if they have any Countenance from a powerful foreign Prince that is his Enemy, will break out into actual Rebellion; suppose likewise this provident Prince, thinking all this very probable, should forecast in his own Mind what Course to take to withstand such a Rebellion, or yet further, how to make the best Use of it for his own Interest, and the Good of his Subjects, in Case it should happen; and suppose such a Rebellion should accordingly happen, and this Prince had so well laid every Thing (as expecting it) that he not only disappointed the Designs of the Rebels, but gained such further Points for the future Benefit and Security of his own Affairs, as should gain him more Peace and Quietness to his Government, and more Love of his Subjects, than if such a Rebellion had never happened; would any of these good Counsels and prudent Measures of such a Prince, be Ground enough to say, that

the Rebellion was all laid and contrived by the Prince himself, and so to excuse the Insurrection of the Rebels, and father it all upon the Prince? This Comparison may very lively represent to us, the Nature of God's Counsels and Decrees concerning sinful Actions; for bating this one Difference, that God's Fore-knowledge is certain, and the Fore-knowledge of Man is but probable, in all other Things the Simile will hold; and especially as to the main Thing we are upon, God's certain Fore-knowledge of Sinners Intentions and Actions will no more excuse the Sinners, than such a Prince's probable Conjectures, and perhaps exact Intelligence, would excuse the Rebels. It is true, as a wise Prince makes use of such Misfortunes to procure Security, and some other Advantages to his Government for the future; so God, in his wise Providence, makes use of sinful Actions for promoting his own wise Ends and Designs; but still without having any Hand in the Sinfulness of the Action itself, which must be laid altogether at the Sinner's Door. I have often chosen in this familiar Manner to give you the right Notion of God's Decrees, and to shew you, that they have no Causality in sinful Actions; though God makes use of them to bring Good out of Evil. And therefore let no Man think that God's Decrees will be any Cloak or Excuse for his Disobedience to the Laws of our holy Religion.

(2.) Of this Sort of dangerous Principles, we may reckon another most dangerous and difficult Doctrine, which has been delivered concerning God's absolute and irrelative Election and Reprobation; as if the final Fates of Men were not
to

to be decided, as ye heard lately, from the different Courses Men follow, the narrow Way of Duty, or the broad Way of Licentiousness, which I shewed you naturally lead, the one to Life, and the other to Destruction; but from some arbitrary Methods of God's own secret Will, without any Regard to our Obedience or Disobedience. But they must have both very strange Conceptions of God, who fancy him to govern rather by arbitrary Will, than by just Laws; and of the Sincerity of the holy Scriptures, which, in the most serious Manner, by Precepts, Promises, Threatnings, Exhortations, and Expostulations, press us to our Duty, upon the Hopes of Heaven, and Fear of Hell, to think that our eternal Fate was decreed, without any Regard to our Compliance or Non-compliance with these Scripture Declarations.

(3.) A *third* dangerous Principle, which at once cuts off all Encouragement to Gospel Obedience, is, the restraining the Benefit of Christ's Redemption to a few, manifestly contrary to abundance of most express Texts of holy Scripture; for though the not knowing who those few are, may seem an Encouragement to all to hope and prove they themselves are of those few, by their Care and Diligence in well-doing; yet it is a much greater Encouragement to know that God and Christ have done their Part, and that the Pardon and the Redemption is general without Exceptions; and that nothing but our own Non-compliance with the Gospel Terms can disappoint us of our Share in it.

(4.) A *fourth* dangerous Principle, which cuts the Sinews of our Obedience, is the Doctrine of

the Irresistibility of Grace; a Doctrine which seems to make all our own Endeavours superfluous, and to tempt us to lie lazy till some wonderful Motion of God's Spirit makes us new Men and Women, without any Pains of our own: Whereas the most effectual Way to promote our Obedience to our Saviour's Precepts is, to stir us up to importunate Prayers and vigorous Endeavours, and in the Use of them, and not otherwise, to put us in Hopes of the divine Aid and Assistance.

(5.) A *fifth* dangerous Principle is, concerning the Impossibility of falling away from Grace; which is a great Temptation to carnal Security; whereas Grace is like a foreign tender Plant, which must be cultivated with the nicest Care; and if ever we remit of our Watch, we are in Danger of relapsing into some of our old evil Habits, and to have the Talent of Grace we made so bad use of, taken away from us.

Time would fail me to speak of the great Number of Inventions they have in the Church of *Rome*, by Confession of their Sins to a Priest, and his Absolution; by Dispensations, Penances, Indulgences; their Doctrines of probable Opinions; *opus operatum*, Infallibility of their Church, and an ignorant implicit Faith, believing as the Church believes, and a great many other false Doctrines, to encourage Mens Hopes, without putting them to the Trouble of the only Thing which our Saviour is all this while securing, Obedience to his Commandments; and it would be endless barely to mention the dangerous Opinions of an infinite Number of loose Casuists, which, like so many false Prophets, destroy the Souls of Men. But it is time to proceed to,

2. The

2. The *second* Thing I mentioned under this Head, namely, the Sheeps Clothing, in which these false Prophets do come: *Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheeps Clothing.* By this *Sheeps Clothing*, I understand, all the Arts they make use of to appear harmless, innocent, and popular, not excepting real Holiness itself; for though they are said here, *inwardly to be ravening Wolves*, I take this to relate chiefly to the Destructiveness of their Doctrine and Principles; for I cannot believe that they are all wicked Men in their Hearts and Lives, who are infected with any heretical, dangerous Doctrine. It is probable, the Sheeps Clothing may extend further than the bare hypocritical outward Shew, even to the good Habits of the Mind, and a regular Course of Life, by which they are much better furnished and qualified to give a Credit to their false Doctrines; yet because it is to be hoped that God will not abandon good Men to destructive Errors, this Description is chiefly to be understood to belong to a Form of Godliness without the Power; and expresses itself commonly in the following Particulars.

(1.) Whatever Sect or Party is most in Request and Reputation in that Place where he lives, the false Prophet employs the chief of his Zeal in contending most eagerly for it; and in opposing the different Sects and Opinions in Religion with the greatest Zeal. What is wanting in the substantial practical Part of Religion, he makes up in his Zeal for dry speculative Points. It is observed, that such false Teachers have little Charity, but a great deal of this bitter Zeal;
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and none are more forward than they to set on Persecution against all that differ from them.

(2.) Particularly, it is observable, that they spend their Zeal in some little Things, which they lay great Strefs upon; such as the being over zealous, either for or against some Rites, and Ceremonies, and Modes, and Forms of Confessions of Faith, for which they contend much more earnestly, than for the true Sense and Substance of the most substantial Articles of the Creed, or Duties of Life.

(3.) They commonly put on a great Shew of Devotion, Fasting, Prayer, and external Mortification, sour Looks, demure Countenances, a mortified Gate and Aspect; and though there is but little Seriousness in their Hearts, they make a greater Shew of Devotion than they who have ever so much sincere Piety: For sincere Piety is contented with God's Eye, and doth not seek to make an Ostentation before Men.

(4.) It is a Part of the Sheeps Clothing, and one of the best and decentest Parts of it, that they who put it on, do carefully abstain from all publick scandalous Vices, and exclaim mightily against them. The Vices which they are most guilty of are, secret Pride, Covetousness, Censoriousness, Malice, secret Lust, Anger, Revenge, fiery Zeal, and Persecution, and such like, which answer their carnal and worldly Ends, without exposing them to the common ill Opinion of the World: So that it is none but such as look very narrowly into their Spirit and Temper, and are very skilful in discerning, can find them out.

(5.) They

(5.) They commonly pretend to much greater Degrees of Familiarity with God; nay, stick not often to lay Claim to immediate Inspirations; and under Pretence of them, carry on their wicked Projects. This requires little more than great Pride and Assurance; and it has such astonishing Effects among the ignorant, vulgar Sort of People, that if there were no more but this, it would be sure to gain them a great following; which is likewise very agreeable to their Spirit: For,

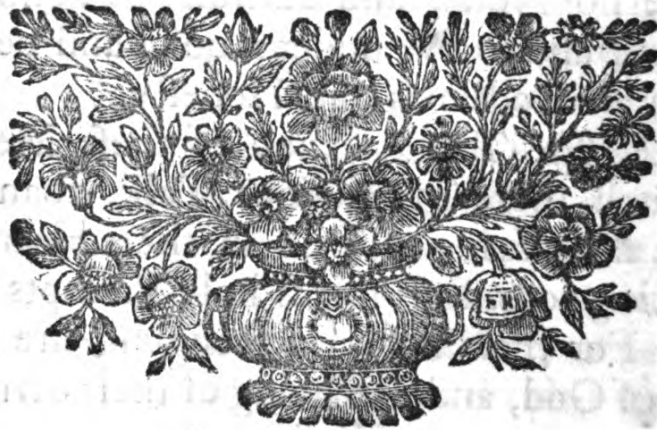
(6.) They are commonly very pragmatical, bold Censurers of Governors and Governments, mighty Sowers of Discord and Divisions; they love to head Parties, and to be admired, courted, respected, and feared upon that Account, and to carry a great Stroke and Management in the Places where they live, all which are taking, popular Arts; whereas Men of true Piety, love to make no Noise, and dutifully to honour Government, and to live under it quiet and peaceable Lives in all Godliness and Honesty.

(7.) *Lastly*, The Religion of these Men consists much more in religious Talk, than in an humble sanctifying of God in their Hearts, and in walking according to his holy Precepts in their Lives. For their Ends in Religion, are not the serving of God, and the saving of their own Souls; but the carrying on of their worldly Projects, for which they find this Pretence of Religion is a very effectual Instrument.

I should now, in the next Place, have gone on and shewed you the internal bad Designs of these false Prophets, how *inwardly they are ravening Wolves*, and what Mischief they commonly work in Church and State; and likewise have shewed

shewed you, what Caution we ought to use against them, that we be not leavened with their Principles, or Practices : But being loth to trespass upon your Patience, I shall refer these Heads of Discourse to the next Opportunity ; praying God to bless what ye have heard, and to give you a right Understanding in all Things.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, let us render, as is due, all Praise, Honour, and Glory, Might, Power, and Dominion, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



S E R M O N XVII.

M A T. VII. 15.

Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheeps clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.

V. 16. *Ye shall know them by their Fruits: do Men gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles?*

V. 17. *Even so every good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit: but a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit.*

V. 18. *A good Tree cannot bring forth evil Fruit: neither can a corrupt Tree bring forth good Fruit.*

V. 19. *Every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the Fire.*

V. 20. *Wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them.*

The Second Sermon on this Text.

I OBSERVED to you in a former Discourse on these Words, that they are a Preservative against the Danger of false Teachers, who, our Saviour foresaw, would rise up, and by their corrupt Doctrine lead away People from
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the Obedience of those holy Precepts which he had delivered. In the Words I observed these *three* Things.

1. A Caution against false Prophets or Teachers, because of their fallacious Character; which is this, that outwardly indeed they make great Pretensions to Piety, but inwardly they are bitter Enemies to it, and to all those who sincerely practise it, their Doctrines tending to the Destruction thereof.

2. A Mark given how we may discern false Prophets or Teachers from true, by their Fruits; that is, by the Fruits of their Doctrine, and Practice on themselves and others.

3. An Illustration of this Mark from the Similitude of Vines and Fruit-trees, which in this resemble good and bad Doctrine, that each of them brings forth Fruit according to its Kind, and likewise that each of them shall be treated well or ill, according to the Goodness or Badness of their Fruit.

I begin with the first of these, the Caution against false Prophets or Teachers; *Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheeps Clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.* For explaining and recommending of which Caution, I proposed to do these *four* Things.

1. To shew what is meant by *false Prophets.*

2. To consider the external Formality of *their Sheeps Clothing.*

3. Their internal bad Designs.

4. What

4. What Endeavours we are to use against them, when we are exhorted here, *to beware of them.*

Now having at that Time gone through the first and second of these; namely, what is meant by false Prophets, and having considered the external Formality of *their Sheeps Clothing*; I proceed now to the *third* and *fourth*, namely, their interior bad Designs; and the Endeavours we are to use against them.

III. The *third* Thing then we are to consider from this Caution is, the interior bad Designs of false Teachers; *inwardly they are ravening Wolves.* Two Things I apprehend are aimed at by this Compellation.

1. The Destructiveness of their Doctrine.

2. Their cruel, persecuting Tempers.

1. They resemble *ravening Wolves*, in the Destructiveness of their Doctrine; for there are a great many Doctrines delivered with a great external Shew of Seriousness and Piety, which yet make as great Havock of the Souls of Men, as downright Atheism and Irreligion itself could do, if it were taught with the utmost Care and Diligence. And though these Doctrines may not perhaps be delivered with any express Design to promote Ungodliness, but by Men, whose Sheeps Clothing gives them a good Off-set; yet really the Tendency of the Doctrines themselves is exceeding pernicious, let there be ever so great Tokens of Sanctity in the Teachers that maintain and propagate them. For such Doctrines are not propagated only by ill Men; the Word *Clothing* in
Scripture

Scripture being often applied to the inward Habits of the Mind, as well as to external Shew and Profession ; and the better the Men are that spread dangerous Doctrines, so much the more dangerous the Doctrines are. *This Sheeps Clothing* then must be taken, I think, in a larger Sense than to be only the exterior or fair Shew of Hypocrites, who purposely dissemble their bad Intentions ; it ought, I believe, to be extended to all the fair Off-sets of pernicious Doctrines, whether proceeding from the real, or only appearing Sanctity of its Teachers. For, were bad Doctrines only propagated by ill Men and Hypocrites, it would not be so very hard a Matter to discover them : that which makes bad Doctrine so dangerous, is, when it comes countenanced with all the Off-sets, not only of Learning and Eloquence, but of Piety and good Life. Instead of prying then into the Designs of the Men, I shall confine this Part of their Description to the Design and Tendency of their Doctrine, for this is properly to consider them as *false Prophets* ; this being a Compellation, which will not only comprehend that grosser Sort of Hypocrites, who designedly deceive others ; but all those who teach dangerous false Doctrine, tending to obstruct that perfect Obedience, which Christ here requires, though they are first deceived themselves, and take the Doctrine for true.

The chief Thing then we are to enquire after, under this Character of the *false Prophets being inwardly ravenous Wolves*, is the Havock the pernicious Doctrine makes of the Souls of Men, under a fair Colour of Holiness and Religion. To set this in a true Light, it will be necessary

to shew the great Danger of some Doctrines of these false Teachers, how destructive they prove to the Souls of Men. And though in my former Discourse on this Text, I mentioned several of these under the Description of *false Prophets*, it will not be amiss to consider the same, or others of the like Nature, under this Notion of Destructiveness to the Souls of Men: for nothing better answers the End of a Caution against them, than to be well informed as to the true Descriptions of them. To instance then in some of the most pernicious of the Errors of false Prophets, in Order to the guarding you against them.

1. Some of the most dangerous seem to be those, which endeavour to weaken our Belief of a future State, whether as to the Immortality of the Soul, or the Resurrection of the Body. There are both antient and modern Sadducees, who have made it their Business to cut off the Faith of these Things; and by that Means they cut the Sinews of all holy Practice: for *if in this Life only we have Hope, of all Men we are the most miserable.*

2. Next to them who weaken the Belief of a future State, I know no Errors more dangerous, and indeed more pernicious to the Souls of Men, than those which, denying all revealed Religion, leave Men to follow the Wild-Fire of Enthusiasm, and the blind Fancies and Imaginations of their own Minds. And though this is exceeding dangerous, even to them who have had the Benefit of the Perusal of the holy Scriptures in their Education, whose Fancies receive a religious Tincture from those good Principles they

then learned, it would be found infinitely more dangerous to the Souls of Men, if that Enthusiasm had no such a Tincture and Restraints of a religious Education, but were wholly guided by its own uninstructed and unpolished Conceptions.

3. It is but a little better than denying revealed Religion, to lock up the Use of the Scriptures from the common People in an unknown Tongue; which is to oblige them, instead of a divine Faith, to depend entirely on their Guides for the Rule both of their Faith and Duty; and if these Guides do err, then, *the Blind must lead the Blind, till both fall into the Ditch.*

4. Of great Affinity with this, is another Error of the Church of *Rome*, limiting the sole Interpretation of the Scripture to themselves, that a Man must not see with his own Eyes, but with theirs. What is this but setting up the Authority of Men to countermand the Authority of God; and instead of Christ, to set up *Masters upon Earth*, that shall have the Dominion over our Faith?

5. Another pernicious Error, which evacuates the Force of these divine Precepts, is, the Doctrine of such false Teachers, who would derogate from their Authority as *Precepts*, and make them only *Advices and Counsels of Perfection*; so that we may chuse whether we will obey them or no.

6. A *sixth* dangerous Error, and most pernicious to the Souls of private Christians, is that of those, who restrain the Doctrine of this Sermon, at least, as much as they think fit of it, to the *Apostles*; by which means they make a large

Gap for all private Christians to creep out from the Obligation of it. But this Error I formerly confuted at large, when I shewed you who were meant by *the Disciples*, to whom this Sermon was first preached.

7. A *seventh* most dangerous Error, which evacuates the Force of these divine Precepts, is, the attributing too much to the Use of our own free Will, as if we could of ourselves, at our Pleasure, reduce these noble Precepts into Practice, by the meer Strength of our own Resolutions and Endeavours. A true Sense of the Necessity of Grace, and of the constant Use of Prayer for obtaining it, of the Exercise of Humility, Repentance, and Diligence for preserving it, and the acting upon these Principles, is absolutely requisite towards reducing these excellent Duties into Practice. And they are false Prophets with a Witness, who deliver any Doctrine derogatory to this Grace of God, which our Saviour has here commanded us, so importunately to *ask, seek,* and *knock* for.

8. It is a most pernicious Error, to think, on the other hand, that no Care or Endeavour of our own is requisite; but that while we are careless and negligent, and disuse the Means, God's Grace will do all for us. There must be a due Concurrence of these two, the Grace of God, and our own Endeavours, to produce a due Obedience to those excellent Precepts; as there must be a Seasonableness of Weather, and a Diligence of the Husbandman, to make a good Crop; and one of these without the other will not do.

9. It is a most pernicious Error to place Religion more in Soundness of Opinions, than in

Holiness and Exactness of Practice. If that great Zeal Men shew against Errors, were exerted against Vices; and if the Contention were as great to outdo one another in holy Living, as in having the better in an Argument, we should see another sort of Progress in good Life than we do; but as long as we think ourselves safe in joining ourselves to such a Church or Party, and in contending eagerly for the Faith, and think that, or any Thing else, will atone for the Badness of our Lives, this proves one of the most dangerous of Heresies.

I shall not need to use many Words to convince you either of the Falseness or Danger of such Doctrines; it appearing at first Sight what Havock they make of the Souls of Men; no ravening Wolf, let in among a Flock of Sheep, could make more Destruction than any one of these, or such like Doctrines, thoroughly believed, and followed with a Practice suitable to the false Doctrine. And this is the *first* Thing meant by that Part of the Description of false Prophets, that *inwardly they are ravening Wolves*, for it is chiefly true as to the Destructiveness of their Doctrine.

2. Another Thing I told you was meant by this Character of *false Prophets*, was their cruel, persecuting Temper; for in nothing more than this, can they resemble the Ravenousness of the Wolf. It is an Observation of *St. Paul's*, that wicked Men, both of old and of late, persecuted good Men, *Gal. iv. 29. As then, says he, he that was born after the Flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.* And we shall

shall find but few Exceptions to this Observation through the whole Course of History. For the better Christians Men are, the more they are endowed with a mild and Christian Spirit, and the more remote from Cruelty and Persecution; and the more obstinate and wedded to their Errors, the more violent they are, and so much the more for cramming down their Errors with such improper Arguments as Persecution is. The *Arians* of old, and the *Papists* of late, have been great Examples of this Truth; bloody, beyond the very *Heathen*, and meer Wolves amongst Christ's Sheep. It is true, they think they have a Colour for these their Severities from the old Law of *Moses*, for, *Deut. xiii. 5. the false Prophet, or Dreamer of Dreams, that should entice them after other Gods, is commanded to be put to Death*: And, *Lev. xxiv. 16. He that blasphemeth the Name of the Lord, is commanded to be stoned*: And from thence they would conclude, that it is lawful to persecute to Death all that differ from them in Principles of Religion. But to say nothing now of the Difference between the Law and the Gospel, they do not consider, that those severe Punishments were only decreed against Apostates and Blasphemers; but that by no Parity of Reason they can be applied to other Differences in Opinion in religious Matters. Among the *Jews* themselves, we find great Heresies were tolerated, so they did not renounce or blaspheme the God of *Israel*; as that of the *Sadducees*, who denied the Resurrection. It is a preposterous Argument then, from what is enacted in the Law of *Moses*, to ground their sanguinary Laws

and Persecutions against all Hereticks whatsoever.
And this leads me to,

IV. The *fourth* and last Thing I observed in this Caution against *false Prophets*; namely, What Endeavours we are to use against them, when we are exhorted here to beware of them.

It is plain from the Mildness and Moderateness of this Expression, *Beware of false Prophets*, or be upon your Guard against *false Prophets*, that they deceive you not with any of their cunning or insinuating Arts and Sophistry; it is plain, I think, that we are not exhorted here to be upon *the Offensive*, but *the Defensive*, as to them. We are to fortify ourselves and others, as well as we can, against the dangerous Doctrines of false Teachers; but there is not one Word of letting loose the Sword of the Magistrate against their Persons, and of destroying them, like the Apostates under the Law, from the Face of the Earth. But some think, though this Sermon being made to private Men, they were not exhorted to be instrumental in cutting off *false Prophets*, yet that it is the Duty of the Christian Magistrate to do it: they may think what they will, but I see no Encouragement for any such Doctrine from the New Testament; in which our Saviour often prepares his Disciples for bearing Persecution, but not one Word for their inflicting it, or being active in it: On the contrary, very much to teach them, that they are to be of a different Spirit and Temper, not *for destroying Mens Lives, but for saving them*, Luke ix. 56. Taking it for granted then, that the Wariness
here

here enjoined, doth not reach to the shedding of Blood by the carnal Weapon, let us next enquire, what other Endeavours to fortify ourselves against their pernicious Doctrines it comprehends.

1. We are to be upon our Guard, that we be not imposed upon by the seeming Sanctity of the Persons who vent and propagate these false Doctrines. We are told from my Text, that they will put on a great Appearance of Harmlessness and Innocence, which being joined to the great Confidence with which they deliver their Opinions, pretending often to immediate Inspiration, this is very apt to impose upon the simple and unlearned.

2. We are to be upon our Guard against the Doctrines themselves, which are commonly fitted to sooth our Pride and Vanity, or some other of our Lusts and Passions, and to take off the Difficulty of the Way to Heaven, making it smoother and easier than Christ has made it. Some of these false Prophets feed Peoples Pride, by persuading them that there is no such Thing as any Order of Men set apart for the sacred Ministry of the Word, or the Care of Souls, but that that is every Man's Business, as they shall be moved by the Spirit; and this Motion of the Spirit they prove no other Way, but by the Warmness of their Fancy, and the Volubility of their Tongue, though they speak ever so incoherently, and interpret the holy Scripture ever so widely from the true Sense and Purport of it. The Apostle St. *Paul* too, speaks of some who measure Godliness by Gain; and it is well known, this has been none of the least of their popular Arts, to infuse their false Doctrines, even to

teach how all that is set apart for the Maintenance of divine Service, might be better saved in private Pockets. There have not been wanting some, who limit all that is said in the holy Scripture, of Christ's *little Flock*, and of *the Elect*, to their own Sect and Party; the Tendency of which is, to make Men believe, that if they do but come over to them, they are safe enough; and most uncharitably, that all others are *Reprobates*.

3. We are to be upon our Guard against the fallacious Arguments they make use of to draw away People from the Profession of the Truth: One of the chief of which I cannot forbear mentioning, namely, the Observations they make of the bad Lives of a great many of those who frequent our Church; not considering that our Doctrine is far from approving these, or any other vicious Practices; and that the true Reason why there are so many bad Livers seemingly of our Church and Religion, is, because it is the Religion and Church by Law established; and whatever Church is established by Law, all the profane, worldly and atheistical People, who are only nominal Christians, but really of no Religion at all, do, for their own Ends, flock into it, and thereby do it no real Service, but bring a Scandal and Disgrace upon it.

4. If we would guard ourselves against false Prophets, let us endeavour to be well-grounded and rooted in the Knowledge of the Truth, and in the Reasons upon which our Faith is built. It is a sad Thing that many among us can give no other Reason of their Faith, but the same with that of a *Turk* or a *Jew*, namely, that it was the
Faith

Faith and Religion of their Parents, and that they sucked it in with their Education; but to be able to satisfy our own Consciences, or to answer the Arguments of an Adversary, or indeed to enter at all into the Merits of the Cause, and to give the rational Grounds of their Religion, this is what the greater Part never so much as attempt; and therefore it is no Wonder, if such a slight Faith immediately fails them, whenever it is assaulted with any Strength of Argument from a false Prophet.

5. But in the mean time, till we are better grounded and rooted in our Religion, let us not expose ourselves to grapple with an Adversary upon our own unequal Strength, but taking the Help of our spiritual Guides, let us arm ourselves as well as we can against all the Arts and Insinuations of such as would instil into us their false Doctrines. This is no Disparagement, but a Thing which is done daily in the like Cases. If our civil Rights are encroached upon, we count it no Disparagement to take the Assistance of an able Lawyer, concerning the best Way of defending them; and why we should not make use of the same Precaution to guard ourselves against the Encroachments of false Prophets and Teachers, I can see no manner of Reason.

And till we have attained such a Measure of spiritual Knowledge and Understanding in the Truths of Religion, that they will not suffer through the Weakness of our Defence, it will be but Prudence, neither to read the Books, nor to frequent the Company of such Persons, as we think design to unsettle us in our Principles, without fortifying ourselves with the proper Antidotes

tidotes of what we may be furnished with from the Books and Conversation of learned Men on the other Side. And this, I think, is far from a Design of training Men up in an implicit Faith in their Teachers, as the Way is in the Church of Rome; but only allowing the same fair Play to the Religion they have been instructed in, as to that for which they are tempted to change it. And I think all this is very suitable to the Caution in my Text: *Beware of false Prophets*; and to the Advices of St. Paul in the like Cases: *Rom. xiv. 1. Him that is weak in the Faith, receive ye, but not to doubtful Disputations.* And *1 Tim. vi. 3. If any Man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome Words, even the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine which is according to Godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing; but doting about Questions and Strifes of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, evil Surmisings, perverse Disputings of Men of corrupt Minds, and destitute of the Truth, supposing that Gain is Godliness; from such withdraw thyself.* And, *Rom. xvi. 7. Now I beseech you, Brethren, mark them which cause Divisions and Offences contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own Belly, and by good Words and fair Speeches deceive the Hearts of the Simple.*

So much for the first Thing I observed in this Text, the Caution against *false Prophets*.

The next is, the Mark whereby we may know them, *Ye shall know them by their Fruits*. But this is a Business of Difficulty, and will require a longer Consideration than can be now afforded; and

and therefore I shall refer it to another Opportunity.

In the mean time, observing our Saviour's Caution, let no Unsteadiness of Principles, let no itching of Ears, or Curiosity after Novelties; let no Plainness and Freedom of true Prophets, or Flattery of false ones; let no Deceivableness of Unrighteousness, or Pretensions to shew you easier Ways to Heaven; let no contrary false Maxims or Customs of the World seduce you from the firm Belief, and sincere Profession, and uniform Obedience of the Truth; but *be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your Labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all Praise, Honour, and Glory, Might, Power, and Dominion, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



SERMON

S E R M O N XVIII.

MAT. VII. 15, to 21.

Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheeps Clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.

V. 16. *Ye shall know them by their Fruits, &c.*

The Third Sermon on this Text.

TH E R E were *three* Things I formerly observed from these Words.

1. A Caution against false Prophets or Teachers; *Beware of false Prophets, which come to you in Sheeps Clothing, but inwardly they are ravening Wolves.*

2. A Mark whereby to know them. *Ye shall know them by their Fruits.*

3. The Illustration of this Mark, from the various Fruits of good and bad Vines and Trees.

Now having in two former Discourses considered the first of these, the Caution against false Prophets or Teachers, I proceed now to the *Second* and *Third*.

II. The

II. The *second*, which I judge to be a very difficult Enquiry, is the Mark whereby to distinguish these false Prophets from true; that is, *by their Fruits.* *Ye shall know them by their Fruits.* In explaining of which Words, it will be necessary to clear these *three Things.*

1. That there is a necessary Distinction to be made between true and false Teachers.

2. That the making of this Distinction falls within the Duty and Capacity of private Christians, *Ye shall know them.*

3. What *Fruits* these are, from which even private Christians may know the Difference between true and false Teachers.

I. There is a necessary Distinction to be made between true and false Teachers; for as it concerns us mightily in a Journey by Land, to commit ourselves to skilful and honest Guides, such as will lead us the safest Way to our Journey's End, and the clearest from Robbers and Enemies; and in a Voyage by Water, to commit ourselves to a skilful Pilot, that will conduct us clear of Rocks and Shoals, and all other Dangers; an Error in these endangering our whole Undertaking; it certainly concerns us much more in the Voyage of Life, which will end in everlasting Happiness or Misery, to take Care that we chuse wise Directors, such as will not mislead us into the By-Paths of Sin or Error, but conduct us safely in the straight Way of Truth and Duty. But I need not dwell on this, it being so obvious to the meanest Capacity, that a Distinction

270 *The Fruits whereby to know* [SERM.
ction ought to be made between true and false
Teachers.

2. The *second* Thing I am to explain is more difficult, that the making of this Distinction between true and false Teachers falls within the Duty and Capacity of private Christians. *Ye shall know them by their Fruits.* What *Ye* are these he speaks to? The same *Ye*, to whom he preached all the rest of the Sermon, as has been often said, *all his Disciples*, that is, *all Christians*.

But how can private Christians be able to discern between true and false Teachers? and are they obliged to do it, to examine this Matter themselves? Or is it not sufficient to believe their spiritual Guides in this Matter, and with an implicit Faith to commit themselves to their Conduct? These are Questions of great Importance, and some of the most fundamental Differences between us and another Church; and therefore it will be necessary to take some Pains to set this Matter in a clear Light, which I shall endeavour to do in the following Account of it.

The Church of *Rome* contends, that private Persons are not obliged to satisfy themselves of the Truth of the particular Doctrines which are taught them; that it is enough that they give up themselves to the Conduct of their Teachers, and believe whatever they require of them; but the Reformed Churches unanimously teach, that it is necessary we should see with our own Eyes, and believe for ourselves; and explode that lazy and senseless Faith of believing confusedly, and in the Lump, as the Church believes. And tho' ye may think it difficult for private Men to examine

mine the particular Doctrines, yet without this it is not to be imagined how they can either understand or believe them. They are required, in order to this, to study the Scriptures, to consider what Doctrines are proposed to them, and *to build up themselves on their most holy Faith.* This is not to be so understood, as if we laid aside the Use of Guides; they are certainly great Helps to discover unto us the right Way; only we are not so implicitly to give up ourselves to their Conduct, but that we are to make use of our own Eyes, and Reason, and Understanding, to try the Doctrine of our Teachers, especially if we have Reason to suspect that any of them are *false Teachers*; of which there is no surer Sign, than when they pretend to make us swallow, without chewing, whatever they have a Mind to. Ye know how the *Beræans* were commended for searching the Scripture, and for their examining the Apostles Doctrine by it. And this is so far made our Duty, that we are expressly taught to reject the very greatest Ministerial Authority, if it contradicts that Doctrine which we have already received from Christ and his Apostles. It is a famous Passage, *Gal. i. 8. But though we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*; and then he adds presently, *As we said before, so say I now again, if any Man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.* What signifies all the Doctrine of the Gospel, if it is in the Power of a false Teacher to impose his false Doctrine upon us, by which he can make the Doctrine of the Gospel of none Effect? Before we
thus

thus tamely yield up our own Understanding, we must be well satisfied that there are any such infallible Guides established by Christ, that we are obliged to believe whatever they deliver, whether it agree with the holy Scriptures or no. For if we find no infallible Judge of Doctrines and Controversies established by Christ, but if all Doctrines are to be examined by the Rule of God's Word; if we are to carry them to the Law and to the Testimony, then it is certainly the Duty of private Men to be upon their Guard what Doctrines they receive, that they be not imposed upon by false Teachers, of which we are assured a great many were to go out into the World. Now it is very certain, that no one Set of Men by Name, nor no one Church, has any such Privilege annexed to them, that they cannot err. All Men are liable to Errors and Temptations; and we are not to judge of the Doctrine by the Men, but of the Men by the Doctrine.

One Thing must be remembered, that we do not pretend private Men are to judge of the Doctrine for others, but only for themselves; for every Man shall give an Account of himself unto God; and therefore it is his Duty to guard himself, as well as he can, by the Light of Reason, and the Light of Scripture, (for the understanding of which, among other Helps, he will do well to consult learned Men) and by a careful Consideration of the Purport and Tendency of the Doctrines which are proposed to be believed; and to admit of nothing which will endanger those excellent Morals taught by our Saviour; for after all, this was the Point our Saviour was
aiming

aiming to secure, that we should have no Evasion or Subterfuge from the Obedience he required to these excellent Rules of Duty he had laid down. Since then it is our Duty to know and discern false Teachers, let us,

3. In the *third* Place, enquire what is meant by *those Fruits, by which, our Saviour says here, we may know them.* Some think they are the Fruits of their bad Lives and Conversations; but I can by no means be of this Opinion; because we are told in the Text, that they come *in Sheeps Clothing*; that is, as to the Exterior at least, they put on a great Shew of Holiness, Innocence, and good Life. And for their Interior, who can know it except God?

By their Fruits then, I think, must be meant the natural Tendency and Consequents of their corrupt Doctrines, both on themselves and others; which are visible, and so may be easily known. This seems to be somewhat out of the common Road and Method of examining Controversies; and the directing us to a better Way, both plainer and surer, and a Way of greater Consequence and Importance; and therefore it will be very material to enquire a little into it. Our Saviour, for the discerning of *false Prophets*, doth not send us to any Ecclesiastical Judicatory; for, as I have often observed, he is not treating here of the Government of the Church, but of the Method which every private Man is to take to save his own Soul. For which Reason also we are not limited to a Method, which is very proper indeed for learned Men, but not so fit for the common People, I mean, the critical Search

of the Scripture, the enquiring into the Sense of the Original, with the Propriety of the Translations, the Light which is cast on the Text by the Context, and the Design and Purport of the whole Discourse; all very proper to be enquired into by learned Men, who are capable of this sort of Study and Learning. But now here seems to be prescribed a plain, easy Way of discerning false Teachers from true; and a Way which lies level to the meanest Capacity; it is only by observing the Fruits and Consequents of every Doctrine; what it is apt to produce, where it is thoroughly sucked in and believed; and then judging how far those Fruits resemble the Doctrine and Spirit of Christianity; *e. g.* The Spirit of God, being a Spirit of Order, and not of Confusion, whatsoever Prophet or Teacher shall preach up such a lawless Liberty, as to exempt People from Laws and Order, from Rules and Government, it is an easy Thing, by comparing such Doctrine, both with the Law of Nature, and with the Laws of the Gospel, to find out that such are *false Prophets*, and that their Doctrine, if received, and followed, and obeyed, would introduce abundance of Disorder and Confusion into the World. So again, the Spirit of God having given us a clear Rule to walk by, namely, the Rule of the Holy Scripture, whatsoever Preacher shall deliver any Doctrine, either in general disparaging the holy Scriptures, and preferring Enthusiasm; or in particular, setting up the private Spirit to assert any Thing contrary thereto, it requires no great Depth of Learning to observe, that such Doctrine strikes at the Root of all Revealed Religion, and opens a Door for

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the utter Destruction of it. So again, if any
Teacher should vent a Doctrine contrary to any
of the clear Rules of Morality laid down in the
New Testament, and should act upon that Prin-
ciple, if in other Things he had ever so sancti-
fied an Appearance, ye might know him by the
Fruits of his Doctrine to be a *false Prophet*; e. g.
if any Man should forbid Marriage, (which was
a Doctrine vented in the very Apostles Times,)
it would quickly appear from the vagrant Lust
such a Doctrine would introduce, that it pro-
duced Fruits as contrary to the Christian Morals,
as the Fruit of a Thorn is different from that of
a Vine. If any Man should bring in the old
Jewish Doctrines of Polygamy and Divorce, 'tho'
in other Things he pretended ever so great Sanc-
tity, it would quickly appear, from the Fruits
of such Doctrine, that it would be the opening of
a Door to vagrant Lust: If any one should preach
up the Obligation of cutting off Hereticks by
Death, and then should interpret every Diffe-
rence in Opinion from his own Sect or Party to
be Heresy, it would quickly appear by the Fruits
of such a Doctrine, what a vast deal of Mischief
and Bloodshed it would introduce into the
World. If any such *false Prophets* should start
up, as to preach down all Property, and leave
the World to be possessed in common by all
Mankind; howsoever plausible such a Doctrine
might sound, what a vast Disorder and Con-
fusion would it let in into the World? I might
say the same of a great many other Doctrines,
such as that of Equivocation, mental Reservation,
private Revenge, or the like, which, however,

while they are argued in the Theory, might, in many Cafes, be plausibly defended; yet if the curfed Fruits which they would produce were confidered, they might very eafily be difcerned to be the Productions of falfe Prophecy.

But fome may fay, it is true, the manifefit grofs Contradictions of Christian Morals may be found out by this Rule; but how will it difcover the clofer Heresies, which are more Deviations from the Articles of our Faith, than from the Rules of Life and Morals? This Question may be eafily answered. For, *First*, It is the preceding Doctrine of Christian Duties which our Saviour is fecuring in the End of this Sermon on the Mount, and the chief Thing he had in View at this Time was, to guard againft fuch falfe Teachers as might pervert their Obedience to thefe Precepts; and therefore that this difcerning of *falfe Prophets*, from the Fruits of their immoral Doctrine, was fufficient for that End. But, *Secondly*, I fay, fuch Errors of falfe Prophets as deftroy any of the main Articles of our Creed, may be difcovered by their Fruits, as well as thofe more immediate Deviations from Christian Morals; for they will as effectually deftroy Morality as the other; *e. g.* If any falfe Prophet fhould deny the Being or Providence of God, that would immediately have fuch an Influence on his Morals, that the Fruits of all vicious Practice would naturally follow; for if you take away the Love and Fear of God, you deftroy all the Law and the Prophets; the Love of God, and of our Neighbour for his fake, being the Sum and Substance of the Moral Part both of the Law and Gospel. Again, if any falfe Prophet fhould deny
our

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 our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, what is the terrible Fruit or Consequence of this, but to lessen the Authority of all his Laws, as well as to take away the Virtue of his Merits, and all Gratitude for them? Nay, since there are so many express Sayings of his own and his Apostles to this Purpose, what is the natural Tendency of such false Doctrines, but to invalidate the Authority of the New Testament, and to represent our Saviour and his Apostles to be as fallible as other Men; which at once lays open a wide Door for the Transgression of the Evangelical Precepts, and the running out into a vicious Course of Life; and then I am sure by their Fruits ye may know them. Now what I have said of the two first Articles of our Creed, is true of all the rest. There cannot one of those Foundations be removed, but the Superstructure of Christian Practice will fall to the Ground. I do not say that this will be the Consequence of all the small Errors of every Prophet or Teacher; neither does every erring Teacher incur the Compellation of a false Prophet; that Term not being applicable to any but the Broachers or Maintainers of such fundamental Errors, as destroy Christian Practice. So that upon the whole, I know no better Way to discern and discover false Prophets, than by the cursed Fruits of their Doctrines on themselves, and others who believe them.

So much for the *second* Thing contained in the Words, The Mark whereby false Prophets are known: *Ye shall know them by their Fruits.*

III. The *third* and last is, the Illustration of of this Mark, from the different Fruits of good and bad Shrubs and Trees: For as natural as it is for a good Fruit-Tree to bring forth good Fruit, and a bad Fruit-Tree to bring forth bad Fruit, as natural it is for good Doctrine to bring forth a good Life and Conversation, and for bad Doctrine to bring forth bad Fruits in the Life and Conversation. We are not so to interpret this Simile, as if a good Man might not grow bad, or a bad Man grow good; the Meaning is only, that a good Man, while he continues such, is very apt to bring forth abundance of pious and virtuous Actions, for that indeed it is natural for good Doctrine to bring forth good Life; and that a bad Man, while he continues such, is very apt to bring forth a great many evil Actions: for that the Principle both of good and evil, naturally works according to its kind. This Observation would afford us the truest Mark of Difference between a good and a bad Man; but since it is used here only to put a Difference between true and false Prophets, and the natural Fruits of good and bad Doctrine, I shall only insist upon the Affinity between these two, good Doctrine, and good Life, and bad Doctrine, and bad Life.

It is a great Commendation of the Christian Religion, that it is a Tree which naturally brings forth the Fruits of good Life; it is a Doctrine according to Godliness; and wherever it is rightly understood, and sincerely believed, it will certainly bring forth the Fruits of holy living. What is the Reason then that we see so many vicious Christians? the Reason is plain, they do
not

not thoroughly understand or firmly believe the Christian Doctrine. They are only Christians in Name and Profession, but not *true Believers*. It concerns us then mightily, if we intend in good Earnest to amend our Lives, to take Care first to imbibe the Christian Doctrine, and to stock ourselves with the plentiful Knowledge, and firm Belief of it. In order to this, I would recommend to you a Study, which I am sorry to tell you, is gone very much into Defuetude, I mean, the Study of the holy Scriptures. Let your Heads and Hearts be stocked plentifully with those excellent Notions, wherewith it abounds; let us experience upon our own Spirits the Force of the admirable Doctrines and Precepts of it; and let us consider the Force of that divine Attestation of Miracles which was given to it; together with the wonderful Success it had, while it was firmly believed in the World.

Let us beware of those dangerous Principles, which are to be found both in atheistical and immoral Books, and are freely scattered in the Conversations of Men, and more and more rooted by their evil Practices. For it is not only the formal false Teachers that are the Corrupters of Christian Doctrine and Morals; but there are a great many other false Prophets, who, tho' they do not pretend to be Teachers, poison a great deal of Company with their immoral Maxims, and loose Principles, and vicious Discourse, and bad Examples. There is a great Torrent of unchristian Principles and Practices abounds in this wicked and perverse Generation. Never was there more Pains taken to discourage good, and to propagate bad Principles; and never was there

more Zeal to run down all Strictness of Morals, and living up to our Christian Profession. Vice never appeared with a bolder Face, as if it would look Virtue out of Countenance. It is high time then for all that would preserve their Innocence, to be upon their Guard against the wicked Maxims, and corrupt Examples of the World; and as the Apostles advised, *to save ourselves from this untoward Generation.*

And in order to this, let us, after our Saviour's Example in my Text, take our Characters of Men, not so much from their high Profession, as from the Consequences of their Doctrine, and the Fruits it is apt to produce. Let us learn to value real Holiness and good Life above all other Accomplishments, remembering that as we judge not of Fruit-trees by the Fineness of their Shapes, or the largeness of their Leaves, but by the Plenty and Goodness of the Fruit they yield; so it is neither a fair Profession, nor any, or all other Accomplishments, will recommend us to God's Favour, but only the bringing forth good Fruit in an holy and virtuous Conversation.

There is a terrible End my Text mentions, as the Fate of barren Fruit-trees; *Every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit, is hewen down, and cast into the Fire.* A most dreadful Expression! not only every Tree that bringeth bad Fruit, every one that is exemplary in Wickedness, but every one that is not fruitful in good Works, that is, in the Actions of Christian Virtues, shall be destroyed in Hell-fire. But on the other hand, give me Leave from another Scripture to tell you, what shall become of fruitful
Trees,

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Trees, those fruitful Branches, which believe in Christ, and bring forth Fruit in a good Life. *John xv. 1. I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Husbandman. Every Branch in me that beareth not Fruit, he taketh away: and every Branch that beareth Fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more Fruit.* The unfruitful Branch is abandoned by God, and not only abandoned, but cut off and destroyed; the other is cultivated with higher Degrees of Grace, till Grace is crowned in Glory.

O blessed End; for which God of his infinite Mercy prepare us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To him with the Father, &c.



SERMON

S E R M O N XIX.

M A T. VII. 21.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.

V. 22. *Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?*

V. 23. *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work Iniquity.*

WE are now come to the last Impediment or Obstruction of Obedience to our Saviour's holy Precepts, which he thought necessary to remove, before he ended this divine Sermon on the Mount; namely, the trusting to a great Profession. This he foresaw many would depend upon, without any vigorous Endeavours to live up to it in their Life and Conversation; and therefore he judged it necessary to forewarn them, not to trust to so broken a Reed as this will prove. In speaking to the Words, I shall do these *three* Things.

1. I will consider the Pretensions upon which many Men build their Hopes of Salvation, as they are here described; by saying unto Christ, Lord, Lord; and by pleading the many great Gifts they were possessed of; and their laying them out in Christ's Service.

2. I shall shew how far short all these will come of Acceptance in the great Day of Accounts.

3. I shall consider the great Thing wanting to make our Persons and Services acceptable, namely, sincere Obedience to the Laws of Christ. And these *three* I think will comprehend the whole of the Text.

I. I am to consider the Pretensions upon which our Saviour foresaw many Men would build their Hopes of Heaven: Which are, 1. A bare Faith in Christ. 2. An owning of Christ by Profession for their Lord and Master. 3. The fancying to themselves that they had a great Interest in him. 4. The Knowledge, Skill, and Dexterity, they had in teaching his Religion to others. 5. The high Station and Dignity of Teachers wherein they were employed, with the great Gifts bestowed upon them; and their employing these Gifts in Christ's Service, perhaps with Success: These being all Things of great Honour, Trust, and Distinction, let us consider them a little more particularly; for we are very apt to deceive ourselves, and to build our Hopes upon the same, or as slender Grounds.

I. One of the false Hopes our Saviour mentions is, a bare Faith in Christ. This is included in saying to him, *Lord, Lord*; for this was Faith; the owning Christ for our Lord. Now that there might be many such at that very Time is manifest; because there were many that believed in him, merely on Account of the carnal Expectations they had from him. For having as yet no right Notions of his Kingdom, there was little more requisite in their Sense towards becoming his Disciples, than believing from his Miracles that he was the Messiah; but then being prepossessed with carnal Notions of the Messiah, as if he had been to be a great earthly Conqueror, as to the inward Temper and Disposition of their Minds, it was full of Covetousness, Ambition, Luxury, Cruelty, Injustice, and all other Vices, incident to Men so full of worldly Expectations, as all or most of them were at that Time, when they entred first into Christ's School. Our Saviour had been all along this divine Sermon, forming their Minds and Manners to a better Frame; and now he tells them plainly, in the Close of his Discourse, that without this Change in their Hearts and Lives, he will never own them in the great Day for his genuine Disciples. They may plead as much as they please that they owned him for their Lord, and that they took on with him, and were employed in many great Trusts and Services; but unless they join Holiness of Life to their Faith in him, he will throw them off in the great Day. By the by, we are to observe, that this is a new Argument, with which our Saviour enforces all those Pre-

XIX.] of Heaven. MAT. VII. 21, 22, 23. 285
cepts he had given them in this excellent Sermon, namely, that there is a Day a coming, in which he will bestow Rewards on his true Servants, and reject the rest; for that he will own no others for such but those that submit to these his Laws, and lead their Life accordingly.

Now by a Parity of Reason, this Doctrine will serve to caution us against divers other counterfeit Sorts of Faith; nay indeed against all Faith whatsoever, that doth not include in it Obedience to the Laws of Christ. Some People's Faith is nothing but an implicit embracing the Religion of their Fathers, perhaps without so much as understanding it, far less living up to the Precepts of it. Some think it enough that they join themselves to any of those Parties among Christians that are most in Vogue and Reputation. Some think if they contend earnestly for the Faith against the most noted Heresies and Hereticks in their Time, this is enough to recommend them to Christ's Favour; but it is plain from this Doctrine in my Text, that no Faith separate from Obedience, no not the Faith of Miracles, will be accepted.

2. Another of the false Hopes described in my Text, is a great Profession. To look at this Part of their Behaviour, one would think Christ had no forwarder Servants than these are who are here described; they have Christ much in their Mouth, *Lord, Lord*. They are employed in the highest Services, even those of instructing others, and doing notable Miracles in Christ's Name; and in being very instrumental in promoting his Gospel. It is probable, in this Description our Sa-
viour

viour had an Eye to the Pharisees, who were very great Professors of Godliness, and as to the Exterior, made great Shews of it; but most of their Services were full of Formality, and did not proceed from the true Love and Fear of God, but were chiefly calculated for the Eyes of Men.

Now it would be too tedious to offer to describe in how many Shapes a great Profession will shew itself; or what Hopes Men are apt to build upon it; it is plain from the Text, that the Persons here described reckoned themselves not only among Christ's Servants, I mean his true and genuine Servants, but thought themselves Christians of the first Rank, endowed with extraordinary Gifts, and entrusted with extraordinary Talents, and laying all out, as they thought, faithfully in Christ's Service. This high Profession is a very dangerous Thing, chiefly on this Account, that it procures an high Degree of Admiration from Men; and their Flattery and favourable Judgments of us, meeting with our own Self-love and Self-conceit, feed our secret Pride, and fill us with Hopes, that Christ will have as good an Opinion of us, as we have of ourselves; till our fatal Error appears at last in the great Day.

3. The Words, *Lord, Lord*, imply that the Person who uses them, thought he had a great Interest in Christ, and was a particular Favourite of Heaven. We are all too apt to entertain these favourable Thoughts of ourselves, and to fancy that God thinks as favourably of us, as we do of ourselves; and as if our own Pride and Vanity did not drive us far enough in this Way of Self-conceit,

conceit, there has been great additional Strength brought to it from that wrong Description of Faith, which requires us to believe that, abstractedly from the Consideration of the goodness or badness of our Lives, we are the Elect of God from all Eternity, and so have a particular Interest in him, such as that is which Favourites and Minions have with their Princes. It is a most dangerous Thing to meddle at all with God's secret Decrees; not these, but his Precepts, being the Rules both of our Actions, and of the Judgments we should make of ourselves upon those Actions. Particularly, it is a most dangerous Thing to feed ourselves with spiritual Pride and Self-conceit upon such groundless Fancies, when God has given us his revealed Will to direct us. Had the Persons here described, entertained humble Thoughts of themselves, searching and trying their Ways, and exciting an holy Fear, it is probable they would have made some more vigorous Attempts towards Amendment of their Lives than they did, fancying that all was well. Of so great Importance it is to take the Characters of ourselves from our Obedience or Disobedience to Christ's Precepts, and from nothing else.

4. Another false Ground of Hope they had, was their Knowledge, Skill, and Dexterity in teaching others. There was a famous Heresy in the antient Church, that of the *Gnosticks*, who pretended to vast Degrees of Knowledge and Inspiration, but they were very infamous for great Lewdness of Life. And there are a great many of that same Spirit in all Ages, who strive more after Knowledge, than Practice of their Duty.

Have

Have we not prophesied in thy Name? say they; What if they have? So did Balaam; so did Judas. But this, I think, was so far from being a good Plea in their Favour, that it was very much against them; for it might well be retorted upon them; as St. Paul smartly argues with the Jews, Rom. ii. 17. Behold thou art called a Jew, and restest in the Law, and makest thy Boast of God; and knowest his Will, and approvest the Things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the Law; and art confident that thou thyself art a Guide of the Blind, a Light of them which are in Darknes, an Instructor of the Foolish, a Teacher of Babes, which hast the Form of Knowledge and of Truth in the Law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a Man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a Man should not commit Adultery, dost thou commit Adultery? Thou that abhorrest Idols, dost thou commit Sacrilege? Thou that makest thy Boast of the Law, through breaking the Law, dishonourest thou God? Knowledge then and Gifts may well be further Obligations and Helps to the doing of our Duty, but must never of themselves be set up in the Room of it, or suffered to supplant it.

5. A *fifth* false Hope they built up for themselves was, from the high Station and Dignity to which they were advanced in the Church, together with the eminent Gifts bestowed upon them in that Station, and their laying them out in Christ's Service, perhaps with some Success. All this appears from the Text; that they were Teachers, appears from their prophesying in Christ's Name; that they were endowed with eminent
 Gifts,

XIX]. *of Heaven.* MAT. VII. 21, 22, 23. 289

Gifts, by their Power of casting out Devils, and of doing many other wonderful Works; and that they employed these Gifts in Christ's Service, appears by their exerting all these Powers in the Name of Christ; that is, not only in his Service, but as his Apostles and Ministers, and against his Enemies. Yet one would wonder what there is in all this for any understanding Man to build his Hopes upon; for all these, at best, are but Talents, which will enflame a Man's Account, but cannot be construed to be the Discharge of the Trust, unless they produce the Fruits of Obedience in our Lives and Conversations. But after all, there is nothing more common than to see high Stations, with an ordinary Measure of Gifts, and any tolerable Discharge of our Trust, puff us up to that Degree, that we have at least a good Conceit of ourselves, and expect that we stand as well in God's Favour, as we do in our own. That great Day our Saviour speaks of, will discover to us this great Truth, which it would be well for us if we could believe it in Time, that Faith, and Profession, and Knowledge, and Gifts, and Preferences, are but so many fair Leaves and Blossoms; so many Abilities and Opportunities for well doing; but that it is only the Fruits of Obedience, that will be accepted as clear Proofs of the Goodness of the Tree; and not barely Obedience, in so far as it may prove beneficial to others; for it is probable these Persons might edify others by their Preaching and Miracles in Christ's Name; but it must be such an Obedience as sanctifies our own Hearts, and reforms our own Lives; or else we may be Instruments

in saving others, and yet prove Cast-aways ourselves.

These are the Pretensions upon which our Saviour tells us many deluded Christians will build their false Hopes of Heaven. I come,

II. Next to shew, how far short all these will fall of Acceptance in the great Day of Accounts : *Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you :* That is, I never owned you as belonging to me, or as the proper Subjects of my heavenly Kingdom. Ye were called indeed by my Name, and professed the Religion which I taught in the World, and taught the same to others ; but lived all the while in the Practice of secret Wickedness yourselves ; ye have walked quite contrary to your known Duty, as if ye knew of some easier Way to Heaven than what ye have been teaching other Men ; ye have neither complied with the Terms of Salvation ; nor are such un sanctified Souls as yours fit for Heaven ; therefore *depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity.*

If Christ should accept of wicked Men in the great Day of Accounts, he must both act quite contrary to all the Declarations and Threatnings of the Gospel, and contrary to the Nature of the Thing, which makes it impossible for wicked Men to be happy in Heaven ; and contrary to the true Merits of this particular Case ; for all these Things, which they build their Hopes upon, are really so many Arguments against them, instead of being Arguments in their Favour.

I. I say, if Christ should accept of wicked Men in the great Day of Accounts, he must act
I
contrary

contrary to all the Declarations and Threatnings of the Gospel, which do all run in that Strain, *that except we repent, we shall all perish*; and that *Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, shall be the Portion of evil-doers*; and that *there is no Respect of Persons with God*. And therefore if Men are ever so knowing and learned; ever so well gifted, and ever so famous for their good Parts and Gifts, by the settled Rules of the Gospel, and right Reason, they are to be judged by their Holiness or Wickedness, like other Men, without any Regard to all their other Accomplishments. But,

2. If Christ should accept of wicked Men in the great Day, and admit them to Heaven, he must likewise, contrary to the whole Tenour of the Gospel, renew and change them in the future State, and recal their lapsed Day of Grace, and, by Miracle, make them holy, in order to their being happy: Now what a strange Inversion of all the Gospel-Methods must this be, to turn the Time of Retribution again to a Time of Trial and Preparation, and to extend the Means and Day of Grace, which, by the Gospel are limited to this Life, to the future State? If such a Gap as this were once opened, then farewell all Repentance, and Conversion, and Obedience, and Amendment of Life here; Men would quickly learn to depend on that final Grace of Conversion at the Day of Judgment.

But some may fancy, perhaps, there is no Necessity of their Conversion or Sanctification; they may, if Christ pleases, be taken into Heaven in their wicked, unregenerate State. They that think

so, have no right Notion of Heaven; the Pleasures there, are such as require a great many holy Dispositions to fit and qualify us for them; Dispositions of sincere Love to God and Man, which shall be perfected in that blessed State, without which we should no more be capable of that heavenly Felicity than an ignorant Clown would be capable of the Pleasure of a Mathematical Lecture; or a drunken Sot capable of the Felicity of being perpetually confined to sober Company.

3. If Christ should admit of these wicked Men to Heaven, with all their plausible Pretensions, it would be a very unjust Decision of this Case; because all these Things which they build their Hopes upon, are so many Arguments against them, and so many Aggravations of their Crime, instead of being Arguments in their Favour, or Extenuations of their Wickedness. Faith without Obedience has much less to plead for itself than Infidelity; Knowledge joined with Wickedness is much more inexcusable, than Ignorance joined with the same; Honours, and Gifts, and Success, require higher Degrees of Gratitude, and Obedience, than if the Person had been blessed with no such Gifts; for all Gifts both facilitate Duty, and lay greater Obligations on Men to do it; so that they are more inexcusable than other Men, if notwithstanding all their good Gifts they are as wicked.

So much for the *second* Thing I observed in the Words; namely, how far these Gifts and Services will fall short of Acceptance in the great Day of Accounts.

III. The *third* Thing I promised to consider is, The main Thing requisite towards the Acceptance of our Persons and Services; and that is, Obedience to the Laws of God; for without this, all other Pleas will be in vain, and will meet with the dreadful Sentence in my Text; *Depart from me ye that work Iniquity.* The main Difficulty is, to apprehend rightly the Nature of that Obedience, which is required of us upon Pain of Damnation: For if by *Workers of Iniquity* be meant, all that are guilty of any Sin, it must be confessed to be *an hard Saying; who can bear it?* For clearing of this important Doubt, it will be necessary both to lay down the Truth, and to clear it from some obvious Objections.

The Scripture uses our common Phrases, and takes them in the common Sense; we commonly distinguish good and bad Men by their most usual, and known, and visible Characters. He that makes Christian Duty the Business of his Life, that studies it heartily and sincerely, tho' he has not yet attained it to that Perfection, but that he is guilty of many Errors, Faults, and Infirmities, is reckoned a good Man; but he who either chuses the Ways of Sin, or is negligent or unindustrious in the Amendment of his Life, is reckoned a bad Man, a Worker of Iniquity. This is the Description of, and Distinction between, a good and bad Man in general. But for your further Satisfaction, I will endeavour to give you the same more particularly.

First, Negatively.

(1.) He is not reckoned a Worker of Iniquity, who, howsoever he may have been a great Sinner formerly, heartily repents and amends, and

is daily striving and taking Pains to grow better and better. The Gospel gives great Encouragement to all true Penitents; only they must not be reckoned true Penitents who are for delaying and putting off their Repentance and Amendment as long as they can, and then amend as little as they can. True Repentance is no less than a sincere Endeavour to forsake all Sin, and to put in Practice all Duty. But then suppose the former evil Habits are so strong, that tho' we use our most diligent Endeavour, we cannot as yet obtain a compleat Victory over some predominant Sin, must such a Person be reckoned among the Penitents, or among the Workers of Iniquity? I answer, that if this Case is truly put, that is, that we use our true and hearty Endeavour to overcome every evil Habit, we are certainly in the Number of true Penitents. But we must have a great Care that our Hearts deceive us not in this Matter. For if we do not take Pains to keep out of the Way of Temptations; if we do not diligently, assiduously, and importunately beg God's Grace and Assistance; if after every Lapse we do not strive to restore and recover ourselves by Repentance, it is little Sign that we are serious and hearty in our Endeavours of Amendment.

2. He is not reckoned a Worker of Iniquity, who endeavours carefully to abstain from all Sin, though when he has done his best, he will find it true, that in many lesser Things we offend all of us.

3. Every sudden Lapse, even into a great Sin, doth not constitute a Man a Worker of Iniquity, if he does not remain in it, but quickly repents and amends. But then,

Positively,

Positively.

1. He is a Worker of Iniquity, who gives up himself to any Course of Sin, and lives in it without Repentance, and true Endeavours of Amendment.

2. He is a Worker of Iniquity, whose Resolutions and Endeavours of Amendment are so faint, that he is continually relapsing into the same Sins; he moves indeed, but it is like the Sluggard upon his Bed, or like the Door upon its Hinges; he is much in the same Place still; his imperfect Embryo's of Resolutions seldom breaking out into vigorous Endeavours, or making any good Progress in the Practice of Christian Virtue.

To conclude: We may observe from the whole, that a sincere Obedience to the Precepts of Christ, is the surest Mark of a good Christian; that the living in the Practice of Vice, is the greatest Heresy; and what makes all Errors and Heresies dangerous is the bad Influence they have on Christian Practice. And therefore the only safe Way is, to follow the Advice of St. Peter and St. Paul in this Matter, with which I shall conclude, *2 Pet. i. 5. Giving all Diligence, let us add to our Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and to Brotherly Kindness, Charity. For if these Things be in us, and abound, they will make us that we shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful, in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And according to the Advice of St. Paul, Tit. ii. 12.*

Denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, let us live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World; looking for that blessed Hope, and the glorious Appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works. This is the Way to make our Calling and Election sure; for if ye do these Things ye shall never fall; for so an Entrance shall be ministred unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For which, God of his infinite Mercy prepare us all in due Time, for his dear Son's sake.

To whom, &c,



SERMON

S E R M O N XX.

MAT. VII. 24.

Therefore whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock :

V. 25. *And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House : and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.*

V. 26. *And every one that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand.*

V. 27. *And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House : and it fell, and great was the Fall of of it.*

The First Sermon on this Text.

THIS is our blessed Saviour's Conclusion of his divine Sermon on the Mount : In which, by a lively Similitude, he endeavours to leave upon his Hearers Minds and Memories, and to press home upon their Hearts and Consciences, the absolute Necessity of reducing into Practice the Doctrine which he had been delivering,

But

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But though this is the principal Scope of this Conclusion, there are several other Truths of great Importance, which are here likewise taught by our Saviour, well deserving our Consideration; which I shall endeavour to observe distinctly, as they lie in Order, before I come to this main Scope of the Discourse, the Necessity of living according to the Doctrine of this excellent Sermon.

I. The *first* Thing which presents it self to our Observation, is a Connexion of this part of the Discourse with the foregoing, in the first Particle *therefore*. *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, &c.* The Doctrines laid down in the immediate Context were exceeding apt to infer this Conclusion: namely, that there is a great Day a coming, in which every one's Sincerity or Hypocrisy should be tried and examined to the utmost; that many false Hopes from Faith, and an high profession, and great Gifts, and an employing of them in Christ's Service, would be trusted to, and depended upon, which yet would be all found to be but broken Reeds, if separate from their own personal Obedience to his Precepts: That all the Workers of Iniquity, if they have ever so many other plausible Pleas to offer in their own Defence, shall be detected, and rejected without Mercy, in that great Day of Accounts. Now from these Premises, it follows clearly, that he is a very unwise Man, who bestows his Pains, and places his Hopes in his Knowledge, or Faith, or Profession, or in his Gifts, or in the great Esteem he acquires in the World, if he neglects the
main

main Thing, a sincere Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel. Such a Person our Saviour here compares to a foolish Builder, who built his House only for a fair outward Shew, but not for durable Service; only for fair Summer Weather, but not to hold out against Storms; for so soon as they come, the House proves ruinous, and the fall of it is both sudden, and very great and irreparable. So shall it be with all such who profess Christianity, but endeavour not to live suitably to their Profession; their Labour will be all lost, and their Hopes dissipated, both suddenly and irretrievably: whereas, the conscientious Liver, according to the Precepts of Christianity, who considered well, and firmly believed the Gospel Promises and Threatnings, and built his Hopes upon them in their true sense, believing firmly that God would not be mocked, and therefore applied himself with a vigorous Application to form his Heart and Life according to his holy Laws, shall stand firm both against all great Temptations in this World, and in the great Tryal in the Day of Judgment.

So much for the Connexion, in which I have shewed you both the Premises and the Conclusion, that ye may perceive how aptly they hang together.

II. The *second* Thing I observe from the Words is, that our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount contains all Things which were then necessary to Salvation; and that they who were instructed in it, and conscientiously practised according to the Directions of it, were in a safe way

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way of Salvation. Now let us consider a little
both the Truth and the Importance of this Doc-
trine. As to the Truth of it, I take it from
our Saviour's Words; for the wise Builder here,
whose Labours in Religion shall stand, and be
approved of, is *he that heareth these Sayings of
our Saviour's, and doeth them.* Now what can
be meant by these Words, *these Sayings of mine,*
but the Doctrine which he had been then de-
livering? It is observable that St *Luke*, who gives
us but a part of this Sermon, when he gives an
Account of this Expression of our Lord's, *Luke*
vi. 47. does not restrain it to the Sayings he had
there set down, but extends it indefinitely to all
our Saviour's Sayings, *Whosoever cometh to me,
and heareth my Sayings, and doeth them, I will
shew you to whom he is like; he is like a Man
which built a House, and digged deep, and laid
the Foundation on a Rock, &c.* Now what
St *Luke* calls *my Sayings*, St. *Matthew* calls,
these Sayings of mine, giving us to understand,
that he had given us a perfect Account of that
Discourse, with relation to which our Saviour
pronounced this comfortable Promise, that the
Observers of it should be approved in the great
Day of Trial. Now as to the Importance of
this Observation, it may serve at once to inform
us what it is we are principally to aim at, and
to bend all our Care after; namely, not the
stuffing our Heads with many curious Notions
and Speculations, but the forming of our Hearts,
and the reforming of our Lives according to the
Model of our Saviour's Precepts and Directions,
the Sum and Substance of which we have in
this excellent Sermon on the Mount; and there-
fore

fore we have little more to do, than to acquaint our selves thoroughly with the Doctrine of this Sermon, and study how to put it in Practice.

But against this Doctrine of the great Perfection and Compleatness of this Sermon, as containing all Things necessary to Salvation, I foresee several Things may be objected, relating to the uncompleatness of it, both as to our Faith, and Hope, and Manners. All which I shall easily answer, if ye do but remember that what I assert from my Text is, that it contains all Things that were then wanting and necessary to the Salvation of those Hearers, to whom our Saviour then addressed himself. For it was not every Thing necessary to Salvation that was then wanting to them. They had been taught by the *Jewish* Religion, which they professed, to believe in the true God; they had been well principled against Idolatry, so common in other Nations of the World; they had been instructed to have the Name of God in Veneration, only the Scribes and Pharisees had, in some Things, corrupted that Doctrine of the Third Commandment, and our Saviour had restored it to its native Truth, in this same Sermon on the Mount. So that in so far as related to the immediate Belief and Worship of God, they were very well principled.

Then as to Faith in Christ, it is probable they had it, as far as was then necessary for Persons in their Circumstances. For, they all expected a great and eminent Person, whom they called *the Messiah* or *the Christ*. They greedily embraced our Saviour's Doctrine, that the Kingdom of the
Messiah

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Messiah (in Scripture, called the Kingdom of
Heaven) was at hand. Most of them believed
that *Jesus* was the Person; and that tho' he ap-
peared at present in low Circumstances, he
would, in a short Time, take upon him the
Title and Character of the Messiah; at least
they looked upon him as an extraordinary Pro-
phet sent by God; and this was a divine Faith,
though in a low Degree, and I doubt not it was
accepted at that Time from them who knew no
further. They had such an Ardour too to fol-
low *Jesus*, that they left House and Home, in
hope of making their Fortune in his Service.
Their chief Error was, that they were mistaken
in the Nature of his Kingdom, and of the Dis-
positions and Preparations of Mind fit for it; for,
taking it for a Temporal Kingdom, they were
only prepared to fight and conquer, and hoped
to enjoy all the Wealth and Pleasure of their
Conquests. Now our Saviour had undeceived
them as to all these Things, in this Divine Ser-
mon; and so in their present Circumstances, to
fit them for Happiness, they wanted nothing but
to reduce his Doctrine into Practice.

As to Christian Hope, besides what the *Jews*
knew before of a future State, our Saviour had, in
this Sermon, acquainted them with the great Re-
wards in Heaven, and everlasting Life, to which
the narrow Way of Duty leads, and with that
Destruction which attends the going on securely
in the broad Way of Sin. He had acquainted
them likewise with the great Day of Accounts,
and what would, and what would not, be ac-
cepted as a Discharge of their Duty.

Some

Some perhaps may think they were not sufficiently instructed in the great Mysteries of the Trinity, and the Divinity and Humanity of Christ. But to this, two Things may be answered: *First*, That we know not to what Degree the Knowledge of these is necessary to Salvation; it must be confessed, that to this Day, we know them only by an Implicit, that is, by a very dark sort of Faith; and that under the Law, they were known in a yet much darker Manner: And, *Secondly*, it is to be considered, that there had been a late Revelation of these Things at our Saviour's Baptism, when a Voice came from the Father, giving Testimony to our Saviour's being the Son of God; and the Holy Ghost too descended in a visible Shape, the Shape of a Dove, and rested upon him; so that it is probable, they had some Knowledge of these adorable Mysteries of the Trinity, and the Divinity of Christ, as far as was necessary in that imperfect State. As for our Saviour's Sufferings, Resurrection, and Ascension, and the Descent of the Holy Ghost, all these became afterwards the Objects of Belief, but were not necessary to be expressly believed at the Time of this Sermon. Some perhaps may fancy, that even the Morals here taught, are not a compleat System of that Part of Religion, as saying little or nothing of the first Table of the Law, and spending itself wholly about the second. But besides what I have already said to this, from the *Jews* being well principled in the Knowledge and Worship of the true God, I desire it may be further considered, that our Saviour has expressly assumed into the Doctrine of this Sermon, the whole
Moral

304 *General Observations from the Sermon* [SERM. Moral Law, *Matth.* v. 17, 18. with the Explanations of the Prophets; and besides, he has taught us all along this Sermon, to do all our Duties with an Eye to God, and has extended them all to the very Thoughts of the Heart, of which God only is the Inspector; he has taught us, on all Occasions, to flee to God for Supplies of Grace; and has laid down our whole Inter-course with God in a Pattern of a most excellent Prayer, the first Word of which, teaches us the grand Duty of the Love of God, which is the Sum and Substance of all our other Duties to him. So that our Duty to God is excellently interspersed, and it is one of the chief Excellencies of this Sermon, and what distinguishes it from, and raises it above all Heathen Morality, that it makes the Duty to our Neighbour but the bare outward Carcase of Duty, unless it be animated with the Love of God, and an Aspect to him, and with an Eye of Faith to that Recompence of Reward, which he alone has in his Hand to bestow.

But what is that to us, may some think, if the Sermon on the Mount was so adapted to the Circumstances of the *Jewish* Hearers in those Days, that it contained all Things necessary to their Salvation? There are many more Articles of Faith, and Duties of Life, required of us Christians, and therefore we have not the same Encouragement to study and obey the Doctrine of this Sermon which they had. In answer to this, it would be no hard Matter to shew, that there is very little Addition either to the one or the other, and the Additions which are, bear home this Doctrine upon us with greater Advantage.

Advantage. What they knew but obscurely, we know now with all Certainty, that this *Jesus* is the Christ, or the Messias; what they were then ignorant of as to the Nature of his Kingdom, we know now distinctly, that it is not a worldly, but a spiritual Kingdom, *viz.* the Kingdom of Grace and Glory, with the due Dispensation of the Means of each. As to Christ's Sufferings, Resurrection, Ascension, sitting at the Father's right Hand, Intercession for us, and his coming again to Judgment; and the Holy Ghost's miraculous Descent at first, and his still working by his Grace in our Hearts; these Things are more clearly and fully communicated to us than to them, and therefore our Duty in that respect is so much the more facilitated. And for any additional Duties, which are chiefly the Sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*, and the new Commandment of *Brotherly Love*, they are rather additional Helps to the performing of these same Duties, than any Thing differing from them. And therefore to us, as well as to them, this Sermon on the Mount is an excellent System of Christian Morals, and whosoever learns, and takes due Care to reduce the Precepts of it into Practice, shall still prove the wise Builder, whose Hopes of Heaven shall not deceive him.

III. A *third* Thing I observe from the Words is, that this Doctrine of our Saviour's, contained in this Sermon on the Mount, belongs to all Men. For the Words cannot be expressed in more general Terms; *Whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them*; he doth not say, *If any of you Twelve shall hear these Words of*

mine, and do them, as some fancy upon very slight Grounds, that he gave the Twelve Apostles these Lessons and Instructions apart; but all of you that are now my Hearers, which in the very next Words we are told, was *the Multitude*; and by a Parity of Reason, whosoever shall hereafter hear these Sayings of mine, and do them, he takes the only wise Course for his own Salvation. It is a great Mistake to think, that God has, by any Act of his, precluded any Man from Salvation without, or antecedently to any Fault of his own; some Men indeed give horrid Notions of God, such as are more proper for the Devil, as if he were the great Hinderer of Mens Salvation; but the Scripture every where corrects these wicked Notions, and gives us to understand, that Christ offers Salvation to all, upon the gentle Terms of Faith, Repentance, and new Obedience; and that if we perish, our Damnation is of ourselves. It is true, this Doctrine is not without its Difficulty; we are poor, weak, impotent Creatures of ourselves, and if we were to depend only on our own Strength, it might be thought a Mock-Proposal to offer us Salvation, even upon these Terms. For removing then the Difficulties attending this Doctrine,

1. We are not to understand, that in this corrupt and depraved State, we are able of ourselves to yield any tolerable Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel; it is only by the Grace of God we are enabled to yield Obedience; this Grace prevents us with its good Motions, and concurs with our own Endeavours, and blesses us in the Use of Means, whenever we fervently ask it, and diligently use it.
2. But we are not to think, that

that by any Measure of Grace bestowed upon us in this Life, we shall be enabled to keep the Commandments of Christ so perfectly, as never in the least to transgress. Such an high Degree of Holiness as this is, is reserved for Heaven: the best Obedience we can attain to here, is a sincere and unfeigned Obedience, but still capable of further Perfection, to which it grows up by Degrees, as we advance in Holiness and Virtue. Nor, 3. Are we in a Condition at all Times to yield even this sincere Obedience. We are sometimes so weakened with evil Habits, and so intoxicated with the deceitful Pleasures of Sin, that at those Times we are utterly indisposed for all Good, and ready for Mischief; but we must take Pains, by avoiding the Occasions of Sin, and by Consideration of our Ways, to shake off our spiritual Sloth and Lethargy, and to do the best we can to put our Souls in Tune, and to bring ourselves into a right Temper for doing good. With these Explications and Limitations we may safely aver, that Salvation is offered to all in the Gospel, and that it is solely our own Fault, if we build not our Hopes of Heaven upon solid Foundations.

IV. A *fourth* Thing I observe from the Words is, that Christ's Doctrine is a practical Doctrine. Whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, *and doth them.* There is nothing he has taught in this excellent Sermon, but what both may, and ought to be reduced to Practice.

I. It is such a Doctrine that in its own Nature it is all reducible to Practice; I mean that holy Practice, which consists in regulating and amend-

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ing our Lives and Conversations. It is not then a System of hard and unintelligible Terms and Distinctions; it is not a prying into adorable Mysteries; it is not an Art of arguing and disputing; it is not a Jargon or Rhapsody of religious Cant, such as *taking hold of Christ*, or *rolling ourselves over upon Christ*; it is not a speculative Science, which ends all in Faith and Knowledge; but it is a practical Science, which directly teaches good Life. Let any one look back upon this Sermon on the Mount, and see if it has not all a direct Tendency this Way, to clear us of those worldly and carnal Notions and Dispositions, which the *Jews* were prepossessed with concerning the temporal Kingdom of the *Messias*; and to raise us to a higher Degree of Virtue than their best Doctors taught them out of the Law of *Moses*.

2. As the Doctrine of the Sermon is all reducible to Practice, so it is our Saviour's great Design, that it be applied to this Use: and that chiefly for these three Reasons; the Glory of God; the Good of our Neighbour; and the Benefit of our own Souls.

1. The Glory of God. There is nothing tends more to God's Honour, than that they who profess themselves his Servants, live suitably to their Profession; and shew the Beauty of his Precepts in the Exemplariness of their Lives and Conversations. For indeed bare Precepts are but a dead Letter, in Comparison of living Examples. As well behaved Children or Scholars, are a great Honour to their Parents and Masters; and as a well disciplined Army brings great Honour to the General; so such Christians as live up to the
Laws

Laws of their holy Religion, bring great Honour to God and Christ. They give a lovely Idea of the Christian Religion to the World, and adorn the Doctrine of God their Saviour in all Things. And therefore it is no Wonder our Saviour prescribed this as the most proper Way to glorify God, *Matth. v. 16. Let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.*

2. The obeying the Commands of Christ, tends very much to the good of our Neighbour, both as it gives him a good Example, and as it frees him from many Inconveniencies, and actually procures him many Benefits. (1.) The Example of Christian Duties gives our Neighbour a clearer Understanding of them, and convinces him that they are feasible and practicable, and lovely and excellent, and consequently is a great Spur to his Practice of them; as a good Mixture of Men of Courage in an Army, inspires the like Spirit and Bravery into the rest of their fellow Soldiers. (2.) Obedience to the Commands of Christ, does our Neighbour great Service in freeing him from all the great Evils and Inconveniencies that flow from unmortified Lusts and unruly Passions, and all the Mischiefs which Covetousness, and Ambition, and Drink, and ill Nature, and wicked Company, and Pride, and Malice, and Repentments, prompt Men to. If the Fear of God had fast hold of the Hearts of Men, it would restrain them better than all human Rewards and Punishments. (3.) There is no manner of Blessings and Benefits, which Obedience to the Laws of Christ would not procure to Men. It would draw down God's Blessing

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sing upon the City and Country where they live.
They would be *the Horsemen of Israel, and the
Chariots thereof*. Peace, and Love, and Friend-
ship, good Rulers, and good Subjects, good
Neighbourhood, and all manner of Blessings,
would attend the Exercise of Christian Virtues.

3. Innumerable are the Blessings this con-
scientious Discharge of our Duty will bring upon
our own Souls. It produces an inward Tran-
quillity of Mind, and Peace of Conscience; it
casts great Light into the Understanding, which
is commonly muddied with the Fumes of Wine
and Lust, and strangely biaised with Self-love;
it makes the Will inclinable to good Things,
and keeps a great Regularity among the Passions
and Affections; it fills the Mind with joyful
Hopes, and even Assurance of Heaven, and
makes the Troubles of Life easy to be born;
the Heart of such a Person being first resigned
unto God. It is the sure Way to obtain greater
Measures of Grace, by making so good Use of
what we had; and it is the best Sign of our
Sincerity, that our Faith is not a dead, but a
lively Faith, and that it brings forth the Fruits
of all Christian Duties and Virtues.

V. The *fifth* and principal Observation I should
have made from the Words, is the Distinction
of the different Sorts of Hearers, which gives us
a Description of good and bad Christians; and
the Application of the Similitude of wise and
foolish Builders to them, according as their Hopes
are right or wrong founded. But this being
a Thing which will require a longer Considera-
tion, I must refer it to another Opportunity.

The

XX.] *on the Mount.* MAT. VII. 24. 311

The best Use we can make of all that has been said, is to stir up ourselves to vigorous Endeavours of living according to the Direction of our Saviour's Precepts; particularly to transcribe this divine Sermon on the Mount into our Hearts and Lives, that from this our Saviour's Promise, we may, through the Grace of God, entertain a well-grounded Hope of eternal Life. Which God of his infinite Mercy, &c.



S E R M O N XXI.

M A T. VII. 24.

Therefore whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock :

V. 25. *And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House : and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.*

V. 26. *And every one that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand.*

V. 27. *And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House : and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.*

The Second Sermon on this Text.

IN a former Discourse from these Words, I shewed you how aptly this concluding Simile, concerning the Wisdom of adding Practice to the Knowledge of our Duty, follows from what went immediately before, concerning the Day of Judgment, and our Saviour's disowning in it all the Workers of Iniquity. I observed to you
likewise,

likewise, what a compleat System of Duties we have in this Sermon on the Mount; for that he who reduces the Doctrine thereof into Practice, is compared to the wise Builder, whose Labours in Religion shall, through the Mercy of God, stand the Test both of all Tryals in this World, and of the great Judgment in the World to come. I observed, *Thirdly*, the Universality both of the Duties and of the Promises contained in this Sermon, that they are freely proposed to all, and that none is excluded from them; And, *Fourthly*, how all this Business of our Salvation is put upon Practice. I proceed now to another, which is indeed the most material Observation of all from the Words.

V. *Fifthly* then, the greatest and most proper Observation we are to make from this whole Parable or Simile, is concerning the two Sorts of Hearers; one, whose Hearing is attended with a suitable Practice, of whom our Saviour affirms, that he is like a wise Builder, whose Work will answer the End of his Labour, and hold out in the Day of Trial and Temptation; the other, whose Hearing doth not bring forth good Life or holy Practice, whom our Saviour compares to a foolish Builder, whose Labour proved all in vain, and his Work ended in a great Ruin.

This is the Observation we are now to pursue; and that I may discourse it in some Order, I shall distinctly consider these two Things. We have here the Description both of a good and of a bad Christian; with the Success of the Labours

bours of the one, and the Unsuccessfulness of the Labours of the other. To begin with the first:

1. The Description here given of a good Christian, it is very plain and short; he is one that heareth and doth these Sayings of our Saviour's.

2. His Felicity; his Labours in Religion shall prove solid, and shall, through the Mercy of God, stand good, both against Temptations here, and the great Trial in the Day of Judgment hereafter.

I. The *First* Thing we are to consider here is, the Description of a good Christian; he is one that heareth these Sayings of our Saviour's, *and doeth them*; that is, he is a Man both well-instructed in the Christian Doctrine, and one that frames his Life and Conversation according to the Direction thereof. There are two Things you see concur to this Description: The *First* relating to his Instruction; the next, relating to the goodness of his Life and Conversation. Some part of his Duty and Character we may learn from each of these.

1. From that Part which relates to hearing of Christ's Doctrine, we are to learn the Duty of Hearers; for we must not think that by this part of the Description of good Christians, *Who-soever heareth these sayings of mine*, are to be meant only the immediate Hearers of these blessed Sayings, from our Saviour's own Mouth; the Words, I doubt not, have a much further Prospect, even to all that should in any time thereafter come to be acquainted with that same Doctrine of Christianity, whether by his own teaching

teaching, or the teaching of his Apostles, or their Successors, the Bishops and Pastors of the Church, or whosoever shall have the Opportunity to inform themselves of them by reading them, or hearing them read, to the end of the World. All these, provided their Knowledge is backed with a suitable Practice, are entitled to the good Character in my Text, that they may well be compared to wise Builders, who build not for the present only, but for Eternity.

To answer the Design of this Part of the Description of a good Christian, I can think of nothing more proper, than to consider the right Qualifications of an Hearer, such as are most like to be followed with a suitable Practice.

(1.) It is necessary that he shake off whatever may obstruct his Hearing, or attending to what he hears. There are too many, whose Time and Thoughts are so taken up with their worldly Projects and Business, that they can afford no Time to hear or consider the Doctrine of the Gospel; they are like those in the Parable, who, when they were invited to the Marriage-Feast of the King's Son, had abundance of Excuses, all taken from their worldly Business, why they could not come. And so it is to this Day; many such Excuses from our worldly Affairs, and many much more frivolous ones than those were, do keep us from giving due Attendance to God's Word read or preached, often meer Laziness, and Aversion from taking a little Pains, will do it. These Hearers in our Saviour's Days will rise up in Judgment, and condemn the Sluggish no Hearers of our Time; they left House and Home, and neglected all
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their worldly Concerns, to follow Christ; we will not forego the least worldly Conveniency, nor forbear the least idle Visit, nor deny ourselves the least Inclination to Ease and Sloth, nor venture the least Threatning of Weather, to wait upon Christ in the Ministry of his Gospel.

But it is not only those who are backward to attend the publick Service of God, who are to be reckoned culpable in this Business of hearing God's Word; there are a great many likewise who neglect the Opportunities they might have of acquainting themselves better with the Word of God at Home, if they would afford the Time, and be at the Pains to peruse in their Closets and Families that sacred Book, which contains the Doctrines of the Christian Religion. What a strange Degeneracy among Protestants have we to bewail on this Account? About 100, 150, and 200 Years ago, (for this is the two hundredth Year since *Luther* first began the Reformation) how diligently did our Forefathers study the holy Scriptures, to find out the Errors of Popery; and what a Seriousness and Strictness in Life and Conversation followed thereupon? But now a Bible is either not thought a necessary Piece of Household Furniture, or it lies by scarce ever looked into or perused, so that we are as ignorant, as our Forefathers were knowing and skilful in the holy Scriptures.

(2.) But to come to them who afford their Attendance at God's publick Worship and Service, which, praised be God, is duly set up and continued among us; alas, how many are there, who, though they afford their bodily Presence,
by

by their Unattentiveness, give too great Reason to suspect that their Hearts and Minds are absent? They bring their Cares and Lufts; their Shops and Farms, and worldly Projects and Contrivances along with them, which either divert their Attention, that what they hear, never enters into their Hearts at all, or if it does, it is quickly choaked with abundance of Weeds, Thoughts of an inferior and more hurtful Nature, which too naturally, as Weeds in neglected Gardens, spring up in our Hearts, and kill and choak all the good Flowers and Plants. Attention then, and due Consideration, are as necessary as our bodily Presence. Attention, that we may apprehend the Sense and Meaning of the divine Truths proposed to us in the Gospel; Attention, that we may apprehend the Strength and Force of the Arguments which it offers for our Persuasion; and Attention, that we may duly lay it up in our Hearts and Memories, and have it ready for our Use in our Lives and Conversations.

(3.) We must take Care that the Truths of Christianity be mixed with Faith in them that hear them. For it is this Faith, if it be lively and operative, will stir us up to Obedience, which crowns all: Whereas, if our Faith is dead or wavering, it will never sprout out into Action. We must not then hear the Word of Christ, as we hear News of some remote Country, which we are indifferent and unconcerned whether it be true or false; but we must hear it as the Oracles of God, by which we intend to frame our Life, and by which we expect to be judged at the last Day.

(4.) It

4. It is the Part of a Christian Hearer to contrive that the Things which he hears, slip not out of his Memory, but that he preserve a lively Sense of them upon his Spirits. And this is to be done by these three or four Methods: Meditation, Conference, Memorials, and frequent Practice. By Meditation, we view them on all Sides, we grow more intimately acquainted with them, we fix the Notions and Ideas of them in our Minds and Memories, and excite a lively Sense of them: So that we can say with the Psalmist, *O how I love thy Law! it is my Meditation all the Day*, Psal. cxix. 97. By Conference, we communicate the same good Things to others, and consequently grow more familiar with them ourselves. This was one Way God appointed the Memory of the great Things they had seen and heard, to be preserved by the *Israelites*, even by recounting them on all Occasions to their Children. *Deut. vi. 6. And these Words which I command thee this Day, shall be in thine Heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy Children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine House, and when thou walkest by the Way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.* By Memorials, as the *Jews* did in their Feast of the Passover, in which their Escape out of *Egypt* was again annually represented before their Eyes; and as we Christians do in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, if we would observe it, in which, by a lively Commemoration of Christ, the Sum and Substance of our Religion is brought to our Remembrance. But, *lastly*, the best Way of all to preserve sacred Things in our Memory, is, by frequent practising upon them. For by
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this Means they become customary and habitual, and grow into a second Nature; they incorporate with us, and cannot be forgotten.

So much for the first Part of the Description of a good Christian, in so far as relates to the hearing of Christ's Sayings.

2. The other Branch of the Description, relates to the doing of them: *Whosoever beareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them.*

Now there are a great many good Christian Exercises comprehended under this practical Part; namely, holy Resolution; Vigilance against Temptations; fervent Prayer for Grace; Repentance after Lapses; Courage against evil Examples; and Patience and Perseverance to the End: All which I shall consider a little more particularly.

(1.) I begin with holy Resolutions; which are the most natural and genuine Fruits of a Heart and Mind well principled in the Knowledge of the Christian Doctrine. For that Doctrine, as I told you, is not a barren, speculative Doctrine, but practical, lively, and operative. Our Saviour well compares it to Seed, which when sowed in good Ground, presently sprouts out, and grows on gradually, till it brings forth Fruit to Perfection. Now holy Resolutions are like the first Sproutings of the good Seed sown in our Hearts. If you ask me what is a good Christian Resolution; such a good Resolution I call a firm and deliberate Act of the Mind, to put in Execution our Saviour's Precepts, proceeding from Consideration and Choice. And by this Description it is distinguished from all sudden, precipitate, half Purposes; from all Fluctuation,

tuation, Wavering, and Inconstancy of Mind, when a Man is off and on, hot and cold, uneasy and undetermined; but in the mean time, continues a fast Slave to his Vices and evil Habits; by this Description likewise it is distinguished from a bare Determination of the Judgment, without engaging the Will, Affections, and executive Powers: for it is one Thing for a Man by an Act of the Judgment to conclude that such a Thing is best in itself, or even best for him; and another Thing, by a resolute Determination of the Will and the Affections, to disentangle himself from all Indispositions and Impediments, and courageously to set about it. This Description doth likewise distinguish this holy Christian Resolution from a suspended Determination of the Will, which is not to take Place at present, but is to be put off to some future Time; of which Nature are the faint Purposes of too many, being indeed rather Delays of the Thing at present, than any determinate Resolutions of putting it in Practice hereafter.

(2.) The *second* Thing I mentioned in the practical Part, is Christian Vigilance; now this is of two Sorts. A Vigilance against Temptations to Sin; and a Vigilance for Occasions and Opportunities to do good. Both must be carefully minded, by every good Christian. *First*, A Vigilance against Temptations; it requires a great Knowledge, both of the World and of our own Temper and Circumstances, so much as to know or foresee the Temptations, to which we shall be exposed. There is such an infinite Number of them from the Devil, the World, and the Flesh; our corrupt Natures, and our evil Habits, and
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vicious Custom and Education, and our Age and Complexion, and Weakness and Inclination, that it is not so much as possible to foresee them all, far less to be well fortified against them. Yet it is certain that Christian Vigilance is a great Help both to foresee and to prevent the Danger. And if we would take due Pains to study our own Infirmities, and to observe the usual Temptations to which we are exposed, we should be infinitely better furnished against Satan's Devices, than we commonly are; especially, if our Resolution should extend to the Means, as well as to the End: that is, if we do in good Earnest design to conquer such and such Vices, then let us resolve to decline, cut off, or avoid all the Causes, Occasions, Inducements, Inlets, Helps, and Instruments, by Means whereof we are usually led into Temptation. The same Christian Vigilance we must use, to find out Occasions and Opportunities to do good. For God has so ordered it in his wise Providence, that as a Man cannot build up a material House without a great deal of Pains, Charge, Skill, and Contrivance, it is much more so in this spiritual Building, where, with the Help of God's Grace, we must build all ourselves, and cannot hire Workmen and Labourers to do it for us. We must then carefully consider our own Abilities, Talents, and Opportunities, and improve them all to the best Advantage of doing good. Especially let us not forget to add to the Study of every Virtue, the Study of the Helps, Occasions, Means, and Inducements to the Practice of those Virtues; *e. g.* Do we know in general, that the reading of the holy Scriptures, the hearing them read and explained,

Meditation, publick and secret Prayer, Self-examination, Preparation for the holy Sacrament, and the devout receiving of it, frequenting good Company, and the like, are great Helps towards the attaining of all Virtue? then let us resolve diligently to make use of all such Helps and Means of Grace. And so in every particular Virtue, if we know any Thing which is a great Help for attaining or preserving it, let us have a particular Regard to that, and reduce it to Practice.

(3.) A *third* Thing I mentioned, as absolutely necessary to the putting in Practice our Saviour's Doctrine, is fervent Prayer. And this follows well after Vigilance; *watch and pray*. For God's Blessing and our own Endeavours must go hand in hand together, if we intend to labour with Success in this spiritual Building: For as the Apostle says in another Simile, but to the same Purpose, *Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but it is God who gives the Increase*. Christian Virtues are an Exercise too exalted for any bare human Endeavour. It must be nothing less than the Grace of God which must qualify us for this noble Employment. And if a Man should resolve ever so sincerely to apply himself to the Study of Christian Duties, without betaking himself first to God, by continual Application to the Throne of Grace, he will quickly find all his other Endeavours to be in vain, and to no Purpose. Let Prayer then begin, and let Prayer end all our own Endeavours; and let Prayer be ever intermixed in our religious Duties, to oil the Wheels of Action. It will not only contribute mightily towards the Virtues we aim at,

as one great Means in itself; but it will derive down a Blessing on all the other Means and Instruments of Religion. And therefore where this is well plied, I take it for granted this great Work will go well on; and that although now and then we are surprized with a Temptation, we shall not be abandoned, but by God's Grace renew the Combat against our Lusts and Corruptions, and come off victorious at last. For,

(4.) There is continual Occasion, and an absolute Necessity to exercise Repentance for our daily Lapses and Infirmities. It is a sad Case, in this imperfect State, that we are continually kept so low with frequent Lapses into either greater or lesser Sins; which is enough to make every good Man utterly to distaste this wretched Life. But we must submit to it, and not be out of Heart, but apply ourselves daily to Repentance, and to begging of God Forgiveness; the great Danger is, that being so frequently foiled, we at last despond, and give over the Use of Means. No, we must stir up ourselves so much more vigorously to the Combat, and *put on the whole Armour of God*, Eph. vi. 11. considering that it is in some Sense a nobler Courage, when weak and beaten, to renew the Battle, than to hold on if we were still flushed with fresh Victories.

(5.) A *fifth* Thing I mentioned as necessary in order to the reducing of our Saviour's Precepts into Practice, is Courage against evil Examples. For so universal and so prevalent is the Corruption of the World, that if we are to be shaken with either Shame or Fear, it will be impossible for us to preserve our Innocency. How hard a Thing it is to overcome Shame, we may observe

by the univerfal Prevalency of Custom or Fashion, which, if an exact Calculation were to be made, would be found to carry more after it than either Law or Religion. How few Persons are there of *Jofhua's* Refolution, that whatever others did, as for him and his Houfe they would ferve the Lord? The many State Revolutions in Matters of Religion, and the many particular Changes they have carried along with them, are fufficient to convince us, that Custom, backed with Authority, and legal Rewards and Punifhments, is much more univerfally followed, than the Scripture and good Confcience. Then as for Fear, we fee the fatal Effects of Perfecutions for Religion; how many are fcared from their Principles with any light fudden Fright? *Peter*, for all his Courage, was furprized into a Denial of his Mafter, upon the fudden Accufation of a poor Servant Maid; and all the Apoftles ran away for Fear, upon the apprehending of their Mafter. If any Man has the Boldnefs to act out of Confcience againft his Intereft, where one fpeaks well of him for it, there is an infinite Number that fhall impute it to an unreafonable Stiffnefs or Opiniatrete, if not to fome fchifmatical, rebellious, turbulent Principle. It requires then a very ftayed, refolute Courage, far above the Opinions and Cenfures of Men, and all worldly Intereft whatfoever, with a pure Eye to Chrift, to adhere refolutely to our Duty, though we fhould be fingular in it, and expofed, ridiculed, or to all Intents and Purpofes ruined, as to this World, on Account thereof.

(6.) The *sixth* and last Thing I mentioned as necessary towards reducing of our Saviour's Precepts into Practice, is Patience and Constancy. The observing of these Precepts is not the Work of a Day, or a Month, or a Year; but the Work of our whole Life. It is terrible to think how many have begun in the Spirit, and ended in the Flesh; how several, who have had the best Opportunities for Company and Education (as *Judas* in Christ's own Family) have proved much worse than others that had no such Advantages. We must then gird up the Loins of our Minds, and set ourselves so much more steadily to the running of our Christian Course, as we see the Day approaching; as Runners in a long Race, reserve most of their Strength and Courage to the last; so we must never reckon our Work done, till we have finished our whole Course we have to run in this World. There is no Man so perfect in his Duty, but that he has still some Corruption to mortify, some more Grace to acquire, some Talents to improve, some Duties to learn more perfectly, and his Peace with God to make more secure, at least to clear up the Evidence and Assurance of it more plainly; and therefore we have no Reason *to be slothful, but to be Followers of them who through Faith and Patience inherit the Promises,* Heb. vi. 12.

So much for the plain Description here given of a good Christian, as he is one that heareth and doeth these Sayings of our Saviour's. I find Time will not serve to consider his Success, how his Labours shall stand firm both against all Trials here, and the great Trial in the Day of Judgment

ment hereafter: and therefore I must refer it, together with the Description and Unsuccessfulness of a bad Christian, to another Opportunity. I have briefly recommended to you several Christian Duties of great Importance, namely, as to Hearing, a Diligence to use the Means and Opportunities, Attention, Faith, Consideration, Meditation, Conference, especially Instruction of your Children, Commemoration in the holy Sacrament, and, above all, frequent Practice; then as to the practical Part, holy Resolutions, Christian Vigilance, fervent Prayer for Grace, Repentance after Lapses, Courage against bad Examples, and Patience and Perseverance to the end. God of his infinite Mercy grant, that we may conscientiously practise these Things, and daily grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To him with the Father, &c.



S E R M O N

S E R M O N XXII.

M A T. VII. 24.

Therefore whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock :

V. 25. *And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House : and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.*

V. 26. *And every one that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand.*

V. 27. *And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House : and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.*

The Third Sermon on this Text.

NOT to spend your Time in repeating or recapitulating what in two former Discourses I have observed from these Words : The last Observation I made from them was, That we have here a short Description both of a good and of a bad Christian ; with the Success of the Labours of the one, and the Unsuccessfulness of

the Labours of the other. I began, as my Text doth, with the Description of the good Christian, which is, that he is one *that both heareth*, that is, learneth, *and doeth these Sayings of our Saviour's*. And having dispatched that at the last Occasion;

The next thing the Text requires us to consider is, The good Success of his Labours, in these Words; *I will liken him unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock; and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House: and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.* In which Words I shall briefly consider these five Things:

1. In general, the Comparison between the Fabrick of Religion, and the Fabrick of an House.

2. The Comparison between a lively Faith in Christ, and the laying a good solid Foundation for building upon.

3. The Superstructure of a fair Building, or a good Life, which made an handsome Shew; but in fair Weather could not well be distinguished from the Religion of an Hypocrite; they made each of them so good an Appearance.

4. The Proof of the Excellency and Solidity of his Religion, beyond that of the Hypocrite, in that it stood firm against all Shocks and Trials.

5. The Consequence of this, that his Religion served him not only for his present temporary Ends, but like a good well built durable House, answered the Ends of a lasting Habitation.

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I. We are in general to consider the Comparison between the Fabrick of Religion, and the Fabrick of an House. As building a great House is one of the greatest Designs Men commonly undertake, a Design which ought to be well laid, and the Expence of it to be well considered, before it is gone about; a Work which requires a skilful Master-Builder or Architect, and good Artists under him of all Sorts; a Work, which requires a great Preparation of good Materials, and a mighty Diligence to carry it on; a Work, which must not be done by halves; for if it remains unfinished, it is only a lasting Monument of the Folly and Inability of the Undertaker; but turns to no manner of Account as to the Accommodation and Conveniencies designed thereby; so it is with Religion, it is the greatest Design a Man can set about, and should be the most seriously weighed and considered. To go thorow with it, it will put us to the Charge of every other Thing that is most dear and valuable; a Design, in which, under God, the great Architect, there are abundance of Under-Labourers and Fellow-Workers with Christ; a Design, which of all other, requires the most intent Pains and Diligence, and Constancy, and Perseverance; and which, if we do not accomplish it, will be the most eternal Monument of our Shame and Folly; but will answer nothing as to our eternal Accommodation and Felicity. But though all these might be usefully insisted on, yet because it seems not to be our Saviour's Design in this Place to urge any more of this Simile, than what will fall in properly enough under
some

some or other of the other Particulars mentioned, I shall therefore apply myself to these, without dwelling longer on the general Comparison.

II. *Secondly* then, We are to consider what is to be meant by the solid Foundation here spoke of, the building the House upon a Rock. St. *Luke* expresses it a little more fully, for he calls it *digging deep, and laying the Foundation on a Rock*. By all which put together, I apprehend are meant these *three* Things :

1. Serious Consideration and Forecast ; this is the *digging deep*.

2. Faith in Christ ; this is hearing Christ's Sayings.

3. A firm Resolution to add Practice to our Knowledge of Christ's Doctrine. These three are the *digging deep*, and laying the Foundation of Religion so solidly, that it will never fail. They deserve a more particular Consideration.

1. The *first* Thing towards the laying a solid Foundation in Religion is, deep Consideration and Forecast. And there is nothing more commonly wanting than this. For we take up our Religion, as we do other Customs, from our Parents. This Childrens Devotion, as slight as it is, is usually all the Foundation in Religion we lay, and therefore it is no Wonder it holds out so badly in a Day of Trial and Temptation. The Duties, the Promises, the Threatnings, and the Examples of Religion, if they are ever so weighty and momentous, cannot exert their Force, when we have so superficial a Glance of them as we commonly take through the Levity of our Minds ; for as it is not a sudden, quick
passing

XXII.] *The wise Builder.* MAT. VII. 24, 25. 331

passing by, which will acquaint us with the Features of a Man's Face, so as to make us know it again; so neither is it any slight, transient View of Religion, which will work a deep Impression of it upon our Spirits, so as to engage our Affection, and stir us up to Action. And therefore wherever we observe that any Man makes a Conscience of obeying, as well as of knowing, and believing our Saviour's Doctrine, we may assuredly conclude, that such a Person has deeply considered the Truth and Importance of that Doctrine beforehand, and is very fully resolved to venture his Salvation upon it. For considering that the Temptations to the transgressing our Duty are present, (the Objects of Sense) and both the Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel are not present, except to the inquisitive considering Mind, we must needs believe, where we observe a Man to walk contrary to the Dictates of Flesh and Blood, and by the Rules of an hidden unseen Life, that he is not only acquainted with the Theory and speculative Knowledge of these Things, but that they have made deep Impressions upon his Spirit, and have taken deep Root, when they bring forth such plentiful Fruit in his Life and Conversation.

To Consideration, I added Forecast, in preparing for a future State. This is a certain Consequence of the believing and considering of it. For who can seriously believe and consider that there is such a Place of Glory and Happiness as Heaven is, and likewise that there is no coming at it for impure Souls living in the voluntary Pursuit of their evil Courses, that will not make Preparation suitable to that future State? It is true, there

there is a strange Stupidity possesses most Men, that they employ most of their Time and Labour about this present, perishing, transitory State; but I think this is not to be accounted for, any otherwise than that it is a great Want of a lively Faith, which keeps them so much in the Dark about all Things to come, and consequently the Soul in a State of Inactivity as to all those Things.

2. A *Second* Thing belonging to the solid Foundation, wherein the good Christian resembles a wise Builder is, his digging till he comes to a Rock, to lay his Foundation upon. Now this Rock, I take to be Faith in Christ: for it is *he that beareth these Sayings* of our Saviour's; that is, he who becomes his Disciple, he that listens to and believes his Doctrine. This is the Foundation of all; and includes these two Things: *First*, The saving Nature of Christ's Doctrine; and then, the Efficacy of Hearing or Believing it: Two Things admirably fitted to lay a Foundation for a good and happy Life. *First*, I say, the saving Nature of Christ's Doctrine, *Whosoever beareth these Sayings of mine*; there is a mighty Virtue both in Christ, and in his Doctrine; *He only has the Words of Eternal Life*; and, *the Words which I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are Life*, says he. *First*, Abstracting from the explicit Consideration of the Christian Doctrines, the Faith we have in the Person of Christ, is a good Foundation for all the following Superstructure of religious Practice. For as when the People of *Israel* in *Egypt*, were once satisfied in the Person of *Moses*, that he was duly
 autho-

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authorized by God to conduct them to the Land of Promise, by the Miracles which he wrought, before they knew any thing as yet of the Excellency of that Law, which he afterwards delivered to them, they had then Foundation enough for that Faith in his Conduct, upon which they adventured themselves and all their Concerns in that Expedition; so every one who was acquainted with the Person of Christ, and saw and believed the Miracles he wrought, had Foundation enough for the Superstructure of Christian Doctrine and Practice. And much more they, who, from the heavenly Voice at his Baptism, believed him to be the Son of God; for whosoever believes this, is well disposed and prepared to believe all his Doctrine, and to live according to it. And if this Foundation can be well laid, only from the Belief of Christ's Person, the Founder of our Religion, how much more from the express Belief of the great Articles of our Faith; such as God's Works of Creation and Providence, the Redemption wrought by Christ, his Resurrection from the Dead, his Ascension to Heaven, his furnishing his Church with the plentiful Gifts and Graces of the holy Spirit, the Immortality of the Soul, and Resurrection of the Body, the Judgment to come, an Eternity of Happiness prepared for the Believers, who walk according to this Faith; and an Eternity of Misery for the Unbelievers, and wicked Livers. What a noble Foundation is all this for the Superstructure of a good Life! and how impossible for any one, who firmly believes these Things, if he acts consistently
to

to his Principles, not to live a good Life! This is then the laying the Foundation on a Rock, which will very well bear this noble Superstructure. But now, supposing the same Superstructure to be built, not upon the Foundation of Faith in Christ, but upon some worldly Considerations, as the fair Life of an Hypocrite is; it is an easy Thing to imagine what follows here, that in a Day of Adversity, the Foundation of worldly Encouragements failing, this Superstructure of good Life will all fail too.

3. The *third* Thing belonging to a solid Foundation, is a firm Resolution to follow our good Principles with a suitable Practice; not only in a Time of Peace and Quietness of the Church, but when we must take up our Cross and follow Christ. Ye may perhaps think this belongs more to another Part of the Similitude, between the Successfulness of the good Builder and the good Christian; namely, the Proof of the Solidity of his Religion, beyond that of the Hypocrite, in that it stood firm against all Shocks and Trials, than to this of the good Foundation of Faith in Christ; but I think a Resolution at least of Constancy to the practical Part, must enter into the Description of the Foundation itself; for as our Saviour elsewhere describes the wise Builder, and one of the first Measures he takes, to be the sitting down, and counting the Cost, and weighing all the Dangers and Difficulties; so this Foundation cannot be well laid without a View of the Difficulties we are to undergo, and a firm Resolution, with the Grace of God, not to be overcome by them. Otherwise it is to be feared, that Trials and Temptations assaulting us by
Surprize,

XXII.] *The wise Builder.* MAT. VII. 24, 25. 335
Surprize, will be too strong for our weak
Faith.

So much for the *second* Thing we were to
consider in the Successfulness of a good Chri-
stian, his laying the Foundation on a Rock,
which is his firm Faith in Christ.

III. The *third* Part of the Successfulness of
a good Christian, described in my Text, is in
the Superstructure of a good Life. This is put
here as a Part of his Success and Felicity, as well
as of his Duty; and it follows very naturally
from laying a good Foundation of Faith in Christ.
For all Virtue may be easily built upon the Be-
lief of Christ's Doctrine, I mean the Doctrine of
this very Sermon on the Mount; the excellent
Morals here taught, with the Belief of the Pro-
mises and Threatnings relating to a future State
therein contained, and the Means of Grace di-
rected to. And when good Life is built upon
this holy Faith, what a stately Structure and
Pile of Building does it make? The good Chri-
stian has the Comfort to reap the daily Fruits of
his Labour, in subduing his Corruptions, in re-
moving that Rubbish, and then in rearing the
comely Fabrick of all Christian Virtues, not only
such Virtues as are calculated for a Time of
Peace and Quiet; for these the Hypocrite can
likewise seemingly put in Practice; but the other
more difficult Virtues, which are necessary to en-
counter Persecution, and all Hardships from the
World, as well as some strong evil Habits, fixed
in our corrupt Natures, or acquired by long
Custom. When we thus add to our Faith, Vir-
tue, and make a regular Progress, learning one
Virtue

Virtue after another, and one Degree of Virtue after another, it is like making a strong Building of well-polished Stones, and other well-seasoned Materials, with all the Finishing and Ornaments of the best Artists, both comely to the Sight, and commodious for Habitation.

IV. The *fourth* Part of the Successfulness of the good Christian, in this his spiritual Building, is in the Firmness and Durableness of it, in that it stood firm against all Shocks and Trials. Now this is not so to be understood, as if a good Christian were altogether impregnable against Sin in this World, or that Temptations never made any Impression upon him; but only, that he is not totally overthrown by any Temptations, so as to become either an Apostate to the Christian Faith, or totally overcome by vicious Practice; as a well built House may, by Strefs of Weather, have some of its Tyles or Shingles blown off, which may be easily repaired afterwards, while the House itself stands; such Damages are not like the overthrowing the House itself, when it was built upon a bad Foundation. Now it is no hard Matter to apprehend the Reason of the different Effects of Persecutions, or other great Temptations, upon the Religion of the Hypocrite; for that all his Religion was built on a slight, sandy Foundation. Such, for Example, is the Principle of being always of that Religion, which is uppermost in the World, and has the most secular Honours and Wealth annexed to it. This being a slippery Foundation, which is only contrived for fair and Summer Weather, must naturally give Way to the great Storms of
Persecution

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Persecution and other Temptations, set forth here by the excessive Rains, Floods, and Winds assaulting that House. Some ingeniously conjecture, that by these three, the falling of the Rains, the coming of the Floods, or Freshes, and the blowing of the Winds, are meant the several Ways that Temptations prevail; namely, by their Suddenness, their Impetuosity, and their Importunity; by which three, the Devil easily oversets the weak Foundations and slight Buildings of fashionable Religions, outward Civility, imperfect Resolutions, and good, but feeble Desires, which are no more able to abide the Shock of such Batteries, than a slight Damm is able to resist a strong Fresh or Current.

V. The last Part of the Successfulness of a good Christian is, that his Religion, like a well built House, answered the Ends of a lasting Habitation: It is not to serve a Turn in this World, as a great many take up a Profession, and perhaps drive on violently in it; but it is a Religion fitted for Eternity. And as a well contrived and well built House, after all the Trouble and Expence of building, yields a Man abundance of Ease, Conveniency, and Accommodation, and sweetly answers all the Designs of the Builder; so it is with this Building of Religion, when it is solidly laid on good Principles, and an handsome Superstructure of all Christian Virtues built upon it; and when it hath resisted the various Shocks of Temptation in this World, it will afford a lasting, and quiet Habitation to all Eternity.

So much for the Successfulness of the Labours of a good Christian, as far as it is described in the Text, by comparing him to a wise Man, who built his House upon a Rock; and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.

I find Time will not allow our considering the Description here given of a bad Christian, who is one that heareth Christ's Sayings, and doth them not, nor the Unsuccessfulness of his Labour; which I must therefore refer to another Opportunity.

The proper Use we are to make of what has been said, is, to consider seriously the Happiness of that Christian, who, to his Knowledge and Faith of Christ's Doctrine, adds sincere Obedience to his holy Laws. Let us lay the Foundation of our spiritual Building aright in our Faith in Christ, that is, in a serious Belief of his Doctrine; then, upon this Foundation let us superstruct all manner of Christian Virtue; and whatever Defects we discover from Time to Time by the Prevalency of Temptations, let us continually repair them by Repentance; and not only so, but let us always study to add new Ornaments of Christian Graces to our Building in Religion, and to keep those shining and bright which we have. For if our Foundation is ever so well laid, and Christian Virtues ever so well superstructed, as Houses that are not kept clean and sweet by constant Care and Diligence, will quickly grow noisome, like nasty Prisons; so it is with our best Buildings and Labours in Religion; if there is not a constant, daily Care to
purge

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purge out the Filth of Vice, and to brighten our
Graces and Virtues, all Things will quickly run
into great Disorder. And if the Devil can once
lull us into this Drowsiness and Security, we shall
quickly be in the Case of *Solomon's Sluggard* with
his House. *Eccl. x. 18. By much Slothfulness the
Building decayeth, and through Idleness of the
Hands the House droppeth through.* To all other
Properties then of a wise Builder, let us add this
of a continual Diligence to keep every Thing in
good Order and Repair, according to the Advice
of the Apostle *St. Peter*, with which I shall con-
clude, *2 Pet. i. 5. Giving all Diligence, says he,
add to your Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Know-
ledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to
Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godli-
ness; and to Godliness, Brotherly-kindness; and to
Brotherly-kindness, Charity. For if these Things
be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall
neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the Know-
ledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

To him, with the Father, and the Holy
Ghost, &c.

S E R M O N XXIII.

MAT. VII. 26.

And every one that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand.

V. 27. And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House: and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.

The Fourth Sermon on this Text.

AFTER the Description of a good and wise Christian, with the good Success of his Labours, which we had in the two preceding Verses: Here follows now the contrary Description of a bad Christian, together with his Imprudence, and the Unsuccessfulness of his Labour. These are the three Points I shall speak to from the Words; namely,

1. The Description of the bad Christian; he is one who hears our Saviour's Doctrine, but obeys it not; that is, he contents himself to be a professed Scholar of Christ, without sincerely endeavouring to live up to the Christian Doctrine and Precepts.

2. His

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2. His Imprudence ; he is like *a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand.*

3. His Unsuccessfulness ; *the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon his House ; and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.*

I. We are to consider the Description given here of a bad Christian ; he is *one that heareth our Saviour's Doctrine, but doth not reduce it into Practice.* In which Description, there are two Things to be considered. 1. Something this bad Christian does, both to satisfy himself and others that he is a Christian ; and this is described here by his *hearing of Christ's Sayings.* 2. Something in which he is deficient, and that is, he is but a bare Hearer, and not a Doer of Christ's Precepts.

1. The Title or Character of an Hearer of Christ's Sayings, signifies in general, a Disciple of Christ's, and comprehends all that belongs to the receiving Knowledge and Instruction in the Christian Doctrine. So that such Persons may have all the following good Qualities. (1.) They may have entred themselves Christ's Disciples, and have given up their Names to him, and be called Christians. (2.) They may have been baptized in his Name. (3.) They may be eminent Professors, and very zealous in owning the Christian Cause. (4.) They may be great Proficients in the Knowledge of the Doctrine of Christianity. (5.) They may be eminent Teachers, Defenders, and Asserters of this Doctrine to others. (6.) They may carefully observe all the external Rites and Ceremonies, and Sacraments

of the Christian Church. (7.) They may yield too a partial Obedience in many Things, especially such as are not inconsistent with their Lusts and carnal Interests. So far a mere Profession of Christianity will carry them. But now,

2. Let us consider wherein this bad Christian is deficient; namely, in his Obedience to our Saviour's Precepts: *He beareth these Sayings of Christ, and doeth them not.* But now, because it is certain the bare Professor of Christianity yields some sort of Obedience to our Saviour's Precepts, here lies the Difficulty, to open up this Mark of Obedience so clearly, that we may know how far it is a certain Mark of a good Christian, and how far the Neglect of it is the Character of a bad one; for as the Knowledge of this is necessary to the understanding of the Text, it will be likewise of excellent Use in a Christian Life, to guard us against all those other false Marks, from which we believe ourselves good Christians, when we are not; or bad Christians, when we are good.

There are three Marks of Obedience, by which we may know that it is of the right Stamp; namely, when it is sincere, universal, and constant. All which want some Explication to set them in a true Light.

(1.) I call that Obedience *sincere*, which is performed with a pure Eye to God, and which proceeds from a firm Belief of his Promises and Threatnings; for though, I doubt not, it is very lawful to take in the Consideration of other Motives to Obedience, such as are all the evil Consequences of Sin in this World, and all the good Consequences of Virtue; yet the main Wheel in
all

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all this Affair should be, the inward Love and Fear of God, and all the rest are to be admitted but as inferior Considerations; and whenever they fail, we are to proceed in our Obedience notwithstanding.

(2.) I call that Obedience *universal*, which doth not pick and choose to obey this, and to disobey that Commandment, but diligently labours to comply with every Duty; not but that the most sincere Christian is guilty of the Transgression of some Commandments more than others, and has much more struggling with his own evil Nature and vicious Habits, to live up to the Obedience of some Duties, more than others; but still the good Christian excepts no Duty out of his Care, indulges himself in no Vice, so as to rest quietly in the Practice of it, but takes true Pains to overcome every Corruption, and to learn the Exercise and Habit of every Christian Virtue.

(3.) I call that Obedience *constant*, which is not taken up by Fits and Starts, but is an uniform Tenour of Life; not that all good Men are at all Times equally in the like good Temper, or that they never falter in their Obedience, and are never overcome with Temptations; but that they do not fall away into a Course of Disobedience, but aim at and endeavour a steady, and uniform, regular Course of Duty; and upon every Trip or Transgression, make haste to recover themselves by Repentance, and Amendment of Life.

From what has been said of the true Characters of Obedience, we may easily gather, what is to be meant by such as profess Christianity,

but add not Obedience to their Profession. But that ye may know them the better, I shall briefly distinguish them into several Sorts or Classes.

(1.) There are some, who, though they profess Christianity, are meer Scandals to their Profession, and make no Conscience of living according to it. Whether they go upon a stupid Inconsideration, as if Profession alone, without good Life, could answer the Obligations of their Religion; or whether they have wrong Notions of Faith, separating it from good Works; or whether they depend upon a future Repentance and Amendment of Life, it is certain, that at present, they give up themselves to the Service of their Lusts, and make no Conscience, and are at no Pains, to live holy and good Lives; whatever it is these Men build their Hopes of Salvation upon, it is certain, it is a Bottom and Foundation which will utterly fail, and all their Hopes will certainly perish.

(2.) But passing by this profane and openly wicked Sort of Christians, there are others, who make a much better Appearance, and abstain from all gross Vice, and comply, at least outwardly, with all Duty; but all this they do, not out of the Love and Fear of God, or any Regard to a future State, but purely from low carnal Ends, and the better to carry on their worldly Interests. But these People generally live in secret Wickedness, as having no Fear of God to restrain them, where their worldly Interest does not oblige them to Duty. These are secret Hypocrites, and if they rise up to any Hopes of Happiness in a future State, it is an easy Thing to see how these their Hopes are built upon a
wrong

wrong Foundation, and will fail them not only in the great Day of Accounts, before a Judge that is the Searcher of Hearts; but whenever they are to undergo any great Trial in this World, on account of their Religion.

(3.) There is a third Sort, who come much nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet miss of it, and they are such as believe the Christian Religion, and have a good Opinion of it in all its Parts, and do many Things to comply with the Precepts of it, yet live in the Practice of some beloved Sins, and voluntarily indulge themselves in that Practice; without earnest Endeavour, by the Use of the Means of Grace, to conquer and overcome them. I confess if this Remainder of sinful Practice were an involuntary Thing; if we were striving against it with our most sincere Endeavour, and for that End trying all the Means of Grace, and were only pulled back with the Violence of our Corruptions, it might be then interpreted in a more charitable Sense; but if it is indulged and acquiesced in, and no Endeavours, at least no vigorous Endeavours, used against it, it is like a neglected Leak, which endangers the sinking of the Ship. In this Sense we are to understand what St. *James* saith, Chap. ii. 10. *Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all.* This one Point, as appears by the Context, is one of the great Commandments; for it follows immediately; *For he that said, Do not commit Adultery; said also, Do not kill.* Now if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a *Transgressor of the Law.* By which Doctrine it appears plainly, that the indulging ourselves in
the

the Practice of any known Sin, is inconsistent with a State of sincere Obedience.

So much for the Description both of Obedience and Disobedience, from which we may know whether we are good or bad Christians. The only Difficulty in Enquiries of this Nature is, when a very strong Corruption meeting with a weak Faith and feeble Repentance, and unconstant Resolutions, there is a long Struggle between the Flesh and the Spirit, and it is uncertain which of them shall at last prevail; and indeed it is hard to determine this Case, as long as the Person is thus almost equally influenced by two such opposite Principles. The only sure and comfortable Way of deciding this Controversy is, not to halt long between two Opinions, but to make haste out of this dangerous State, and by frequent and fervent Prayers, and doubling our Diligence in vigorous Endeavours to grow in Grace, and in every good Work, and to gain such an entire Victory to the Spirit over the Flesh, as may give us the Comfort that we are the Children of God, as walking *not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit.*

II. After the Description of the bad Christian, which is taken from his evil Practice; we come now to the *second* Thing contained in the Words; namely, his Imprudence, described here by the Similitude of a foolish Builder, *He is like a foolish Man, says my Text, which built his House upon the Sand.* For understanding this Part of the Text, it will be necessary,

I. To

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1. To discover something of the Nature of these sandy Foundations, upon which Men build their Hopes of Heaven.

2. The Folly of trusting to them.

1. As to the sandy Foundations, our Saviour has given us here a general Character of them; namely, that they are all such Doctrines, upon which we build up our Hope of Heaven, without being at the Pains to practise Christian Duties. This General will include a great many Particulars under it, which it would not be improper to insist upon, if I had not already mentioned most of them from some of the foregoing Texts, as when I guarded you against the pernicious Doctrines of false Prophets; and when I discovered to you the false Hopes of them, who are brought in pleading their Faith and high Profession, and their preaching and working Miracles in Christ's Name, who yet will be disowned in the great Day of Accounts as Workers of Iniquity. And therefore all I shall now do, shall be to caution you in general against this Stratagem of Satan's, which he has very dexterously managed under a great many various Forms and Shapes; which is, to take Men off from that main, most necessary Part of Religion, Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel; in which Design he finds a treacherous Partner in our own Hearts, which are glad to strike in with any thing that will excuse us from the Difficulties of Christian Obedience to those Precepts of Perfection which our Saviour has given us. O how welcome are all those Doctrines which either directly, or in their Consequences, tend to persuade us, that we may be happy hereafter, without
being

being at the Pains and Trouble of living well here. This has introduced strange Opinions and Practices into the Christian Church. This has disposed some Men to believe, that we shall be adjudged to eternal Happiness and Misery, rather by some hidden Decrees of God, than by the Rules of his revealed Will, though most expressly contrary to holy Scripture. This has made the Doctrine of the Antinomian, and Solifidian, and Fiduciary, which places Mens Hopes in believing, without doing and obeying, find Place in the World. This has made Men lay so great Stress on orthodox Opinions, though their Lives are no better than those of the rankest Hereticks: This has made us take every slight Sorrow for Sin, though never forsaken, for the true Repentance required in the Gospel; and imperfect Resolutions of Obedience, for Obedience itself. This has made a Death-bed Repentance to be so much depended on, and the Example of the Thief on the Cross, who, in all Probability, had no Opportunity before, of being acquainted with Christ, or his Doctrine, so confidently applied to them, who have all their Life long been acquainted with the Doctrine of the Gospel, and have utterly neglected the Practice of it. This has made such a Dependance on the Church, or Society and Party to which we addict ourselves, when we take little or no Care to live up to the Rules established by all Churches. It is sufficient to guard us against these and all sandy Foundations of that Nature, that our Saviour has at once condemned all such Doctrines, as build any Hope of Salvation upon any thing less than a conscientious Practice of our Saviour's Doctrine.

2. But

2. But having shewed you the Nature of these sandy Foundations, in the next Place we are to enquire into the Folly of trusting to them. Our Saviour, in my Text, compares the Christian *who hears these his Sayings, and doth them not, to a foolish Man, who built his House upon the Sand.* The Folly of this Action appears in divers Things, in which the Similitude will likewise very patly answer. 1. Here was an Error in the Foundation, which is more dangerous than an Error in the Superstructure. 2. Here was a fatal Inconsideration, to build an House only for the calm fair Weather, which happened to be at the Time of laying the Foundation of it, without taking a View of those Storms, and Tempests, and Land-Floods, which afterwards might assault it. 3. In Consequence of this Inconsideration, here was a most egregious Piece of Folly, in laying out a Man's Money, and Trouble, and Pains, all to no manner of Purpose. Now answerable to these three Branches of Folly in building, the Folly of venturing our Salvation, without vigorous Endeavours after Obedience, may appear in these three Things.

1. The Error of placing our Hopes of Salvation on any Thing without Obedience to the Precepts of Christ, is a fundamental Error, and is never to be retrieved by any other Arts and Inventions. The World indeed has offered at a great many Inventions to make up this Defect; but nothing could ever do. The *Jews* and *Gentiles* both were very profuse in the Costliness of their Sacrifices, which when separate from good Life, God by his Prophets often told them how little

little they signified: *Isa. i. 11. To what Purpose is the Multitude of your Sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the Burnt-offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beasts, and I delight not in the Blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He-goats.* And to these Sacrifices, are added the other ceremonial Parts of their Religion, and all are equally rejected, when separate from Holiness of Heart and Life. *The new Moons and Sabbaths, the calling of Assemblies, I cannot away with, it is Iniquity, even the solemn Meeting. Your new Moons, and your appointed Feasts, my Soul hateth; they are a Trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them, ver. 13.* And all this was because of their Immoralities, *their Hands were full of Blood.* And in order to their purifying, instead of Sacrifices and Ceremonies, they are exhorted to Amendment of Life: *Ver. 16. Wash you, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow;* and upon these Terms they are promised Pardon of Sin; *Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your Sins be as Scarlet, they shall be as white as Snow; though they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the Good of the Land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the Sword: for the Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* There is a great Number of Passages in the Prophets to the same Purpose. I shall quote but one more; and it is, I think, a very remarkable one, both to shew that no costly Services or Sacrifices would have been stuck at,
and

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 and that nothing would be accepted without Obedience to the moral Precepts: It is *Mic. vi. 6.* *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt-offerings, with Calves of a Year old? will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams, or with Ten Thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul?* The Answer to all these extravagant Inventions is this: *He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* Our Saviour and his Apostles go on in the same Strain: *Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill,* says our Saviour. And I think it is very plain, that this whole Sermon on the Mount has made this Text good: being all an Improvement of the Moral Law, and a carrying it to higher Perfection than the Scribes and Pharisees, the best *Jewish* Doctors, carried it. Our Saviour assured all of his Friendship that kept his Commandments; and that he would look upon them that did the Will of his Father in Heaven, as *his Mother, and Sister, and Brother.* And the Apostles despise all the *Jewish* Privileges in Comparison of *Faith which worketh by Love,* or, as they express it elsewhere, in Comparison of a *new Creature.* And this is the chief Mark they give of a Man's being a good Christian; *If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature: old Things are past away, behold, all Things are become new,* 2 Cor. v. 17. The Dispensations,
 and

and Penances, and Masses for the Dead, in the Church of *Rome*, and all Inventions of any Church whatsoever, to spend their Zeal for or against any Things of an inferior Nature, without Obedience to the Gospel Precepts, is all to no Purpose; this is the main Fundamental we ought to secure, sincere Obedience to the Laws of Christ.

2. Inconsideration is not more fatal, in any Thing, than in building our Hopes of Salvation without taking a Prospect of, and preparing for Trials and Persecutions. There was no Part of Christian Morals for which our Saviour took better Care to arm his Disciples, than for the Cross; he taught them all to expect it, and fortified them with the great Duty of Self-denial, and gave them a noble Pattern in his own Sufferings, with what Patience and Constancy of Mind they were to undergo all such Trials for God and their Duty. And it must needs argue a very great Stupidity, that being so carefully forewarned of these Trials, we do not lay in for them, and prepare ourselves accordingly.

3. In Consequence of this Inconsideration, as in the foolish Builder, there appeared a most egregious Piece of Folly, in laying out his Money, and Trouble, and Pains, all to no manner of Purpose; so in this foolish spiritual Builder, who never set about the Severity of Duty, the greatest Folly and Imprudence appeared in laying out his Time and Talents upon what stood him in no stead in a Day of Trial, especially in the Trial of the great Day of Judgment. We think it an Argument of great Folly in any Man, to have spent his Estate on an idle Project,
which

XXIII.] *The foolish Builder.* MAT. VII. 26, 27. 353
which turns to no manner of Account; such will be found the Folly of all such Projectors in Religion, who think to gain Heaven by their Knowledge, or Faith, or high Profession, or Zeal for the ceremonial Part, or any Thing else separate from sincere Obedience to the Christian Precepts. And this leads me to the Third and last Thing I observed in the Words.

III. The Unsuccessfulness of this foolish Builder: *The Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon his House; and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.* By this Part of the Similitude, our Saviour foretels the sad Fate of such nominal, formal, and hypocritical Christians, who build their Hopes of Salvation upon such sandy Foundations. In this Part of the Text, we may briefly observe these three Things:

1. The great Temptations and Trials which in our Christian Course we may expect to be exposed to, signified here by the Rain descending, the Floods coming, and the Winds blowing, and beating upon the House.

2. That that Christian who builds upon a bad Foundation, will not be able to hold out in a Day of Trial. *His House shall fall; i. e. all his Profession and Hopes shall come to nothing.*

3. The Greatness and Irretrievableness of that Fall; intimating that there will be no Recovery of it: *And great is the Fall of it.*

But I need not insist particularly on these Heads, there being little or no Difficulty in them; it was fairly and freely done in our Savi-

our, to forewarn his Hearers of the Trials they were to undergo; and of the Deceitfulness and Fallacy of all their Expectations in his Service, if they did not first take Care to amend their Lives according to the Doctrine he had delivered them: That unless they designed that, they should never be able to hold out against the many Troubles and Persecutions to which they should be exposed; and if after they had taken upon them the Christian Profession, they should then fall away, it would be a most ruinous Downfal to themselves, and most dangerous to their Fellow-Christians for the bad Example of it, and exceeding scandalous to the World.

And therefore the natural Conclusion of all is this, that if they intended to become his Disciples, they must first, by a diligent practising upon his Precepts, learn the Habits of all Christian Virtue, which in this Sermon he had plainly taught, that so they might be prepared for undergoing cheerfully those great Trials which were to attend the Christian Profession, for that *through many Tribulations they were to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*: And that if any of them was not willing to go by this Way of his Precepts, but thought to be Christians at a cheaper Rate, by indulging themselves in their sinful Courses, they would only egregiously deceive themselves, and had better never take on with him at all, than after a fruitless Profession, to lose all their Labour, and end shamefully and scandalously in Ruin and Destruction.

XXIII.] *The foolish Builder.* MAT. VII. 26, 27. 355

The Design then of this Conclusion is, to persuade us all of the utter Necessity of learning the true Spirit of Christianity, which is to be done by a diligent putting in Practice our Saviour's Precepts. This is a Foundation on which we may hope daily to build a noble Superstructure of all Virtue. This is the Way to grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To him, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.



S E R M O N XXIV.

M A T. VII. 28.

And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these Sayings, the People were astonished at his Doctrine.

V. 29. *For he taught them as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.*

OUR Saviour's divine Sermon on the Mount being now finished, St. *Matthew*, the Relator of it, as he had introduced it with a very useful Prologue, in the two first Verses of the fifth Chapter, which gave us a great Light into the Occasion and Scope of the whole Discourse; so he now concludes it with this Epilogue, giving us an Account what Effect it had among the Hearers; namely, that they were struck with Admiration, astonished at his Doctrine, and at the Divine Power, Force, and Energy, wherewith he had delivered it; in both which, I mean, both in the Matter and Manner of the Doctrine, they observed a great Difference between Jesus, and their usual Teachers, the Scribes.

In the Words, there are several Things well worthy of our Observation, and which, I think, had they been carefully minded, would have prevented

vented divers Errors, and loose Interpretations, with Relation to the Sermon itself. I shall endeavour, *First*, to speak to some Observations from the Words, and, if Time will allow, make some Application of them to ourselves.

I. From the first Words of the Text, *And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these Sayings*; I observed that this Sermon was all delivered at one Time to this Auditory, and should therefore be interpreted as one uniform Discourse. I cannot see what St. *Matthew* could do more to give us this Conception of it. For in the Beginning he acquaints us, that the Discourse was occasioned by our Saviour's *looking on the Multitudes*; that is, as I then interpreted it, from his Consideration of their Condition, and Circumstances; which gives us an Intimation, that it was all designed to answer their present Occasions; then he tells us of *his going up into the Mountain*, and his Disciples following him, and his making this Discourse. And that it was designed to the Multitudes, as well as to them, we learn from my Text, which informs us, that the People stayed to the End of the Sermon, and were mightily struck with Admiration of it, for that our Saviour taught them with *Authority, and not as the Scribes*; ye may justly wonder why I should be at any Pains to prove this was one Discourse, all spoke at one Time to one and the same Auditory, when St. *Matthew's* Account is so very clear and plain in this Matter. But as clear as it is, some very considerable Authors have represented the Matter quite otherwise, as if St. *Matthew* had made a Collection of our

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viour's moral Instructions, spoken at different
Times and Places, and thrown them altogether
into this Sermon : but how to reconcile this with
the Sincerity of the Evangelist, who gives us a
quite different Account of the Thing, in as ex-
press Words as he could put it, as of a Discourse
all delivered at one Time, and in one certain
Place, and to one and the same Auditory, I confess
is beyond my Capacity. And if this could be
solved, I think it is much more for our Saviour's
Honour, to represent him, as the Evangelist here
doth, as delivering a most pertinent, regular Dis-
course, all calculated for the immediate Occa-
sions and Circumstances of his Hearers, than as
these others do, to bring in an Heap, as they
make them, of incoherent Directions, some for
all Men, some for all Christians, some for Apostles,
so intermixed, that without any other Reason,
besides the Puzzle they give the Interpreter,
they are jumbled without any Order or Method
whatsoever. I am apt to think this Opinion is
owing chiefly either to the Interpreters Igno-
rance, or their Inadvertency of our Saviour's true
Scope and Design, and consequently of the Co-
herence and Connexion of the several Parts of
the Discourse, which reduced them to this mis-
erable Shift, that they made it a strange Mixture
of incoherent Doctrines; whereas to take it in
its right Sense, it is a most regular and methodi-
cal Pursuit of one Design, all fitted to correct the
wrong Notions the *Jews* had of the Kingdom
of the Messiah, and to teach them the right
Dispositions of Mind that were necessary for the
Messiah's Disciples.

. Now

Now I think it is no reasonable Objection against this that I observe, concerning this Sermon being all delivered at once, that some Parts of it are found repeated on some other Occasions. For I think it was very suitable with our Saviour's Wisdom, frequently to inculcate and press Truths of such great Importance, whenever there was any Occasion given for it, as there was oftener than once.

II. *Secondly*, I observe from what is said here, that *when Jesus had ended these Sayings, the People were astonished at his Doctrine, for he taught them with Authority*: I observe, I say, that the chief Auditors for whom this Sermon was intended, were the People in general. It was to take off the general Errors and Prejudices of Mankind, with relation to the Messiah and his Kingdom, and to acquaint all Men what Dispositions of Mind were necessary for them, if they intended to be his Disciples, that this Sermon was preached. And therefore to strain any of these Sayings of it to find out the Duty of Pastors or Magistrates, as some have done, is in so far a missing of the Scope, and a wandring from the main Design of this Discourse. And if so, what wild Interpretations must these be, which exclude ordinary private Christians from the Obligations to observe several of the Precepts here delivered? If the People were here designed to be taught, as is very plain, both from the Prologue and Epilogue, and the whole Subject Matter, as I shewed in the Explication of the Prologue, then let no Man think to creep out from any of the strict Duties here enjoined, under Pretence that they belong to

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Apostles, or Bishops, or Pastors; for this whole
Sermon was preached to, and designed for all
Mankind, that either were, or intended to be
Christians.

III. A *Third* and main Thing we are to observe is, what good Qualifications these were in this divine Teacher, which proved so effectual towards the Conviction of the Hearers. I shall reduce them to these Three:

1. The Excellency of the Doctrine: *They were astonished at his Doctrine.*

2. The admirable Design, Order, and Contrivance of the whole Discourse; for it was *when he had ended these Sayings, they were astonished at his Doctrine.*

3. The wonderful Authority of the Speaker, in comparison of the corrupt Teachers of those Days: *For he taught them with Authority, and not as the Scribes.*

1. The *first* Thing I observe took with them was, the Excellency of his Doctrine: *They were astonished at his Doctrine.* A great Light was thereby darted into their Minds; and the Doctrine is in all Respects the most to be admired of any Doctrine that ever was delivered to the World. Instead of a Discourse of Rites and Ceremonies, Customs and Traditions, wherewith the Scribes and Pharisees used to entertain them, here was an Instruction of the purest Morals the World had ever been taught before. Morals, which do not rest in regulating only our external Behaviour, but such as reach to the Root of all our Disorders, the Thoughts and Imaginations of the Heart. For our Saviour's Doctrine, as it
was

was here delivered, stored the Heart with such a rich Treasure of Devotion toward God, and Love toward our Neighbour, that wherever it is taken in, it will furnish the Tongue with good Words, and the Life with good Designs and Actions. And as the most admirable Rules are given for all Virtues, so they are the best guarded by our Saviour's Doctrine, with Directions how to avoid all Occasions of Sin, and to damm up all the Inlets of it, that if that Part of Christian Duty were understood, and duly put in Practice, we should find good Life to be no such hard Matter, as it appears to wicked Men, who, instead of guarding against Vice, make it their chief Study and Contrivance; and turn Tempters and Devils to themselves. But all the Excellency of our Saviour's Doctrine about Christian Duties, does not lie barely in the great Perfection and Purity of these Precepts; one of the chief Things to be admired in it is, that all along there is a due Consideration had of our Weakness and Infirmities, and we are supported with such Promises of God's Grace, to facilitate all our good Endeavours, and directed to such powerful Means of Grace, that laying all these together, we may confidently affirm, there never was such a Contrivance for the Reformation and Sanctification of Men, as is contained in this same Sermon on the Mount.

Then, as the Doctrine was admirable in itself for its own inward Excellency, it is another Property of it to be much esteemed, that it was so well adapted to the Condition and Circumstances of those Hearers; a People bred up in great Ignorance

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norance and Corruption, through the Badness
of the Times, and the Seductions of false Pro-
phets, that they had been taught to prefer the
meer Shell and Outside, and Ceremonials of Re-
ligion, before the most substantial Duties of it;
and the bare outside of Duty, before the inward
Power and Life of it. Certainly nothing could
be more proper for Men in their Circumstances,
than to undeceive them as to all these Things,
and to instruct them anew in the true Doctrine
of the Law, taken in its genuine spiritual Sense.
To Men that have been long shut up in a Dun-
geon, open Daylight is very surprizing, and very
pleasent, and it is no Wonder they were strange-
ly struck with it, as the original * Word, here
rendered *astonished*, signifies. Much such a sur-
prizing Light was that of the Reformation two
Hundred Years ago; for the Light of the Gos-
pel was much more surprizing to them, and con-
sequently much better attended to by them, than
by others now-adays, who are used to it.

2. But we are not only to consider the Excel-
lency of this Doctrine in itself, though ever so
well fitted for those Hearers; but likewise the
Frame and Contexture of it in this excellent Ser-
mon, to which these Words are the Epilogue;
for it seems, by the Words, that this likewise
made a great Impression upon their Spirits; for
it is observed in my Text, that *when he had finished
these Sayings, the People were astonished at his
Doctrine*. Besides the Particulars of the Doctrine,
which

* ἐξεπλήσωντο, *perculsi essent*.

XXIV.] *the Hearers.* MAT. VII. 28, 29. 363

which are all admirable in themselves, like so many excellent Materials for building a noble House; there is a second and a further Degree of Admiration, when those Materials come to be handsomely put together in a regular well-contrived Building. This Sermon was so contrived, that though every particular Part of it was beautiful, there is a new Beauty results from the Whole. There is not one of the many Doctrines here contained, but affords Truth, solid, important, and seasonable Truth, if considered by itself; but if we consider how the Whole is put together, and how excellently then it answers the End, which was to teach Christ's Hearers and Disciples true Holiness and Virtue, we may observe that it is admirably fitted for that Design. And because it would take more Time than can be now afforded, to take it all to pieces, to demonstrate this Truth, I shall only observe to you the three great Parts of which it is composed, and shew you how well fitted they are for this great End. The first Part, in which the Beatitudes are treated of, *Matth. v. ver. 1, to 13*, meets with the carnal Expectations of Men, from the Messiah's Temporal Kingdom, as they imagined it would be. And this gave our Saviour an Opportunity to guard his Disciples against all gross Immorality and Prophaneness, and to principle them in the contrary Virtues. Then in the second Part, which exposes the Pharisaical Righteousness, from *Matth. v. ver. 13, to Chap. vii. ver. 7*. and describes at large how the Christian Morals are to exceed it, we find the several Parts of Duty set off to an higher Degree of Perfection than

than ever the World knew before; and those Vices of Pride, Covetousness, and Cenforiousness, which are apt to stick to the better Sort of People, most excellently guarded against. Then, *Lastly*, Chap. vii. *from ver. 7, to 28.* being now well principled against both Profaneness and Hypocrisy, great Care is taken in the End to direct us to the best Means to reduce these Precepts into Practice, and to guard against all the Ways, whereby Holiness and Virtue are commonly undermined; and we are excellently instructed how to stand impregnable against all these. These are the three principal Parts of the Discourse; and each of them so well supported with Promises and Threatnings, and other good Reasons and Arguments, conveniently, and in their proper Places interspersed, that nothing is wanting to make it a most complete System of Duties, or Treatise of Christian Morals, in the sincere Observation of which, we shall certainly both be genuine Members of Christ's Church and Kingdom here, and in due Time attain to the Kingdom of Glory hereafter.

3. Among the good Qualifications mentioned in my Text, whereby our Saviour prevailed so much with his Hearers, I observed his own wonderful Authority; for *he taught them with Authority, and not as the Scribes.* This is a distinct Thing, both from the Matter of his Doctrine, and the Frame of his Discourse. But it is no easy Matter to tell precisely wherein it consisted. Without troubling you with any Opinions in this Matter, which I do not approve myself, there are three Things, I think, may be meant by this Expression.

Expression. (1.) That he spake not like a common Interpreter of the Law, confirming his Doctrine as the *Jewish* Doctors commonly did, by the Authority of their learned Men, but with the Air and Authority of a Prophet, and by that Authority took upon him to correct the Doctrine even of the Scribes and Pharisees themselves. And he shewed his Authority for this his Mission and Commission from God, by the many Miracles which he wrought. He shewed them that he had a superior Authority to the *Jewish* Doctors; their Authority was the ordinary Authority of the *Jewish* Church, which though at that Time very corrupt, yet our Saviour advised the People, *Matth.* xxiii. 2. to submit to it. But whenever there came a Prophet, that is, an immediate Messenger from God, *that* was reckoned an Authority much superior. And that they commonly reckoned our Saviour's such an Authority as this, appears by their Sentiments of him, which they now and then uttered; which were, *that he was a Prophet, and a great Prophet, and sometimes, that Prophet which should come into the World;* that is, the Messiah. (2.) By his speaking with Authority, I believe, may be meant, his delivering those Divine Truths with a Seriousness, Gravity, and Majesty suitable to the great Weight and Importance of them, and not drily and coldly, as the Scribes did the Doctrines about their Traditions and Ceremonies. Now we know there is a very great Difference in this Matter as to the Influence which the same Doctrine has upon the Hearers, when delivered by an extraordinary good Man, that firmly believes himself
what

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what he delivers to others, and by another, who delivers it with an Air of Unconcernedness, and seems not to value or regard, whether it makes any Impressions upon the Hearers or no. But especially we have all Reason to believe, that our Saviour had a most extraordinary Energy or Power in delivering divine Truths, beyond not only the *Jewish* Scribes, but beyond all other Men; as the Officers told the chief Priests, giving that for the Reason why they had not apprehended him, as they had been commanded, *John* vii. 46. *Never Man, say they, spake like this Man.* And a great deal of Reason there is for it; for no other Person understood so well the Hearts of Men, to speak Home to them; nor did any Person understand so well, or had so right a Sense of the Worth of Souls, or of the Importance of those Truths, which make for the eternal Salvation of them. (3.) By his speaking with Authority, or with a powerful Influence, so as to touch the Hearers, may be meant, the inward Grace, which accompanied his outward Preaching: As the two Disciples travelling to *Emmaus* observed, concerning his Discourse with them in that Journey, *Luke* xxiv. 32. *And they said one to another, Did not our Heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the Way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?* Our Saviour had Power, (as the original Word, ἐξουσία, here signifies) both to command what Measure of Grace he thought fit to go out with the Word preached, and had Power likewise over the Hearts of Men to open them, that they might receive what Measure of it he thought fit. So much for the
good

good Qualifications in the divine Teacher, which proved so effectual on this Occasion. I shall make but one Observation more; namely,

IV. Concerning the good Effects of this divine Sermon on the Hearers of it, intimated in these Words, *They were astonished at his Doctrine.* There are two Things I would briefly observe from this Part of the Text; namely,

1. The great inward Impression this Sermon made.

2. That this Impression was not upon one or two, but generally upon all, or at least the greatest Part of the People. *The People were astonished at his Doctrine.*

1. Let us consider the great inward Impression this Sermon made. This is signified to us in that Word which we translate *Astonished*. It seems to me much more emphatick in the Original, ἐξεπλήσοντο, that is, they were *struck, terrified, astonished, and mightily wrought upon*, for all this the Word signifies: And that this was a working the right Way, appears from the very next Verse, in the beginning of the next Chapter, which tells us, that *when he came down from the Mountain, the Multitudes followed him.* They were certainly smitten; for tho' they had come a great Way, and had been now some Days from Home; and though now in this Sermon, they were undeceived as to their carnal Expectations from the Messiah's Kingdom, and all the Wealth, Ease, and Luxury they had hoped for from it; yet all this does not discourage them, but they are resolved to stay with him, and become his Disciples.

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Disciples. But I need not carry the Matter so far, the Scripture being silent, whether this present Impression went so far as *a full Conversion*. The Design of the Evangelist seems to be only to acquaint us with the present Impression this Sermon made upon their Hearts and Spirits; which was enough, if duly cultivated, to make a thorough Conversion, and entire Profelytes of them. They were struck, they were awakened, they were pricked in their Hearts, they were brought to a Discovery of their Error, and to a Sight and Sense of their Duty; and it looks very well that it is not said of any of them, that they were offended, and deserted Christ, but the quite contrary; that instead of dispersing, when the Sermon was ended, they kept following of him still. Now this great Impression here taken Notice of, besides the Power and Energy of the Preacher, which has been observed already, discovers to us two good Qualities in the Hearers, which are well worthy of our Imitation; namely, that they had been very attentive; and that they had done nothing to obstruct the Influence of the good Doctrine upon their Hearts and Minds. For want of which good Qualities it is, that the best Doctrine commonly proves but *like Water spilt upon the Ground*, and so is quite lost to the Hearers. For if the Mind is unattentive, and wandering after any other Objects or Projects, or if it is sleepy and drowsy, that it do not both thoroughly understand, and deeply ponder and lay to Heart the good Doctrines, which are proposed to it; or if understanding and adverting to them, through any
Prejudice

Prejudice to the Teacher, or the Doctrines, they are not kindly admitted into the Heart, it cannot be expected they will have the good Effects here mentioned; far less produce the full Harvest of Amendment of Life. But,

2. It is yet stranger, that this Impression was so general, not upon one or two, but upon the Body of the People. *The People were astonished at his Doctrine.* It is a very rare Thing that there are such mighty Harvests of whole Multitudes at once gained over to Christ; yet several Instances we have of it in our Saviour's and his Apostles Days, according to the Prophecy of the Psalmist, *Psal. cx. 3. Thy People shall be willing in the Day of thy Power.* And, *Isa. ix. 2. The People that walked in Darkness, have seen a great Light.*

And now for Application. It were much to be wished, that our Christian Congregations had more of the Spirit of these Primitive ones, that they were assisting to one another in exciting, by good Counsel and Example, to the Exercise of all Christian Virtues. But, alas, we are sadly degenerate; for instead of conferring together upon the good Things we hear in the Publick Assemblies for Teaching and Worship, we think all is over so soon as we get out of Church, and that there lies no further Obligation upon us *to exhort one another to Love and good Works*, or to put in Practice any of the good Things we learn in publick; but do rather help what we can to wear off all Sense of them, by such a trifling or sinful Conversation, as is only apt to dissipate Devotion, and all

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serious Sense of Religion, and to encourage us
to lead a careless inconsiderate Life. These
Hearers were not soon weary of their great
Teacher's Company; what they had learned,
only quickned their Appetite for more; and
they resolved to cultivate the good Beginnings
they felt upon their Spirits, by going along
with Christ, and by observing and following his
Example as well as his Doctrine. This is
one great Point of spiritual Prudence, when-
ever we find any good Impressions made upon
our Minds, not to run presently into promif-
cuous Company, or to betake ourselves imme-
diately to our worldly Affairs, but either to
go alone, and by Meditation fix in our Hearts
what we have been hearing with our Ears;
or else if we can find a pious well-disposed
Friend, to confer with him about what we
remember, and observed most tending to Edi-
fication. Alas, how few have we in our Days,
who are thus struck and pricked at the Heart
with any Sermons they hear, or have any last-
ing Impressions made upon their Spirits from
the best Doctrine that can be preached to
them? This same Sermon on the Mount,
which made such Impressions on the Hearers
in those Days, how coldly do we now read,
or hear it read and explained? Or if a Ser-
mon makes any present Impression, how quick-
ly is it gone? For if we like it ever so well,
and afford perhaps to say it was a very good
Sermon, that is all; we take no Time to
apply it to our own Use, and to say, I must
amend such and such a Thing from what I
have

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have heard to Day; I am convinced I am in an Error, let me now set about the amending of it, while the Remembrance of it is fresh, and the Conviction lively upon my Spirit. These are Things of great Consequence, and the Text gives us a fair Opportunity for them, that we be excited to Attention, that we hear without Prejudice the most touching and awakening Truths, that we cherish and cultivate such Convictions and Admonitions as our awakened Consciences do suggest, upon the hearing of Duty fairly represented; and that we endeavour to make Application of what is said, all of us to our own Hearts and Consciences, and take Care to make suitable Amendment and Reformation of our Lives. This is the Way to reap Benefit from all Sermons, not to mind so much carping and censuring of such little Things as we may perhaps think deserve Censure; but to mind the censuring of ourselves, where we are convinced we deserve it, and the cultivating those Convictions to a thorough Reformation and Amendment of Life.

I have now done my Part as to the Explication, not only of this Text, but of the whole Sermon on the Mount. I shall think my Labour well bestowed, if I can but leave you convinced of this one Truth, that it contains the choicest Rules of Life, and such, that if ye will duly weigh them, and meditate and practise conscientiously upon them, ye shall not fail of attaining to a true Chri-

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stian Life here, and the Kingdom of Heaven hereafter. Which God of his infinite Mercy, in due Time, bestow upon us all, for his dear Son Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all Praise, Honour, and Glory, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.



A N

I N D E X

O F

S C R I P T U R E S quoted in these Four Volumes.

There being many Passages of the Holy Scripture explained in this Work, it was thought necessary to add the following INDEX of the Scripture-Quotations in all the Four Volumes, that if any one would know the Sense of any of them, he may easily turn to it.

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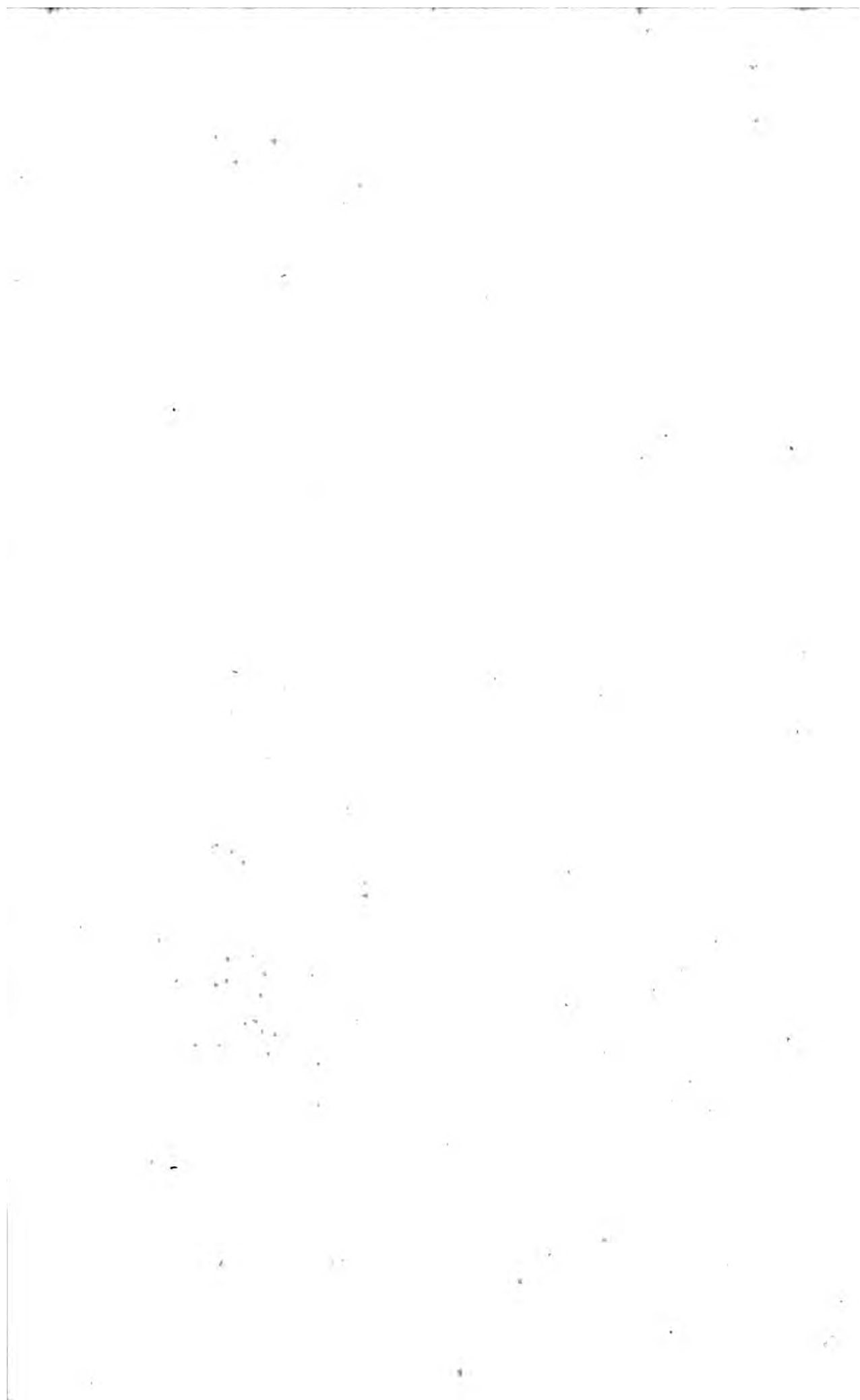
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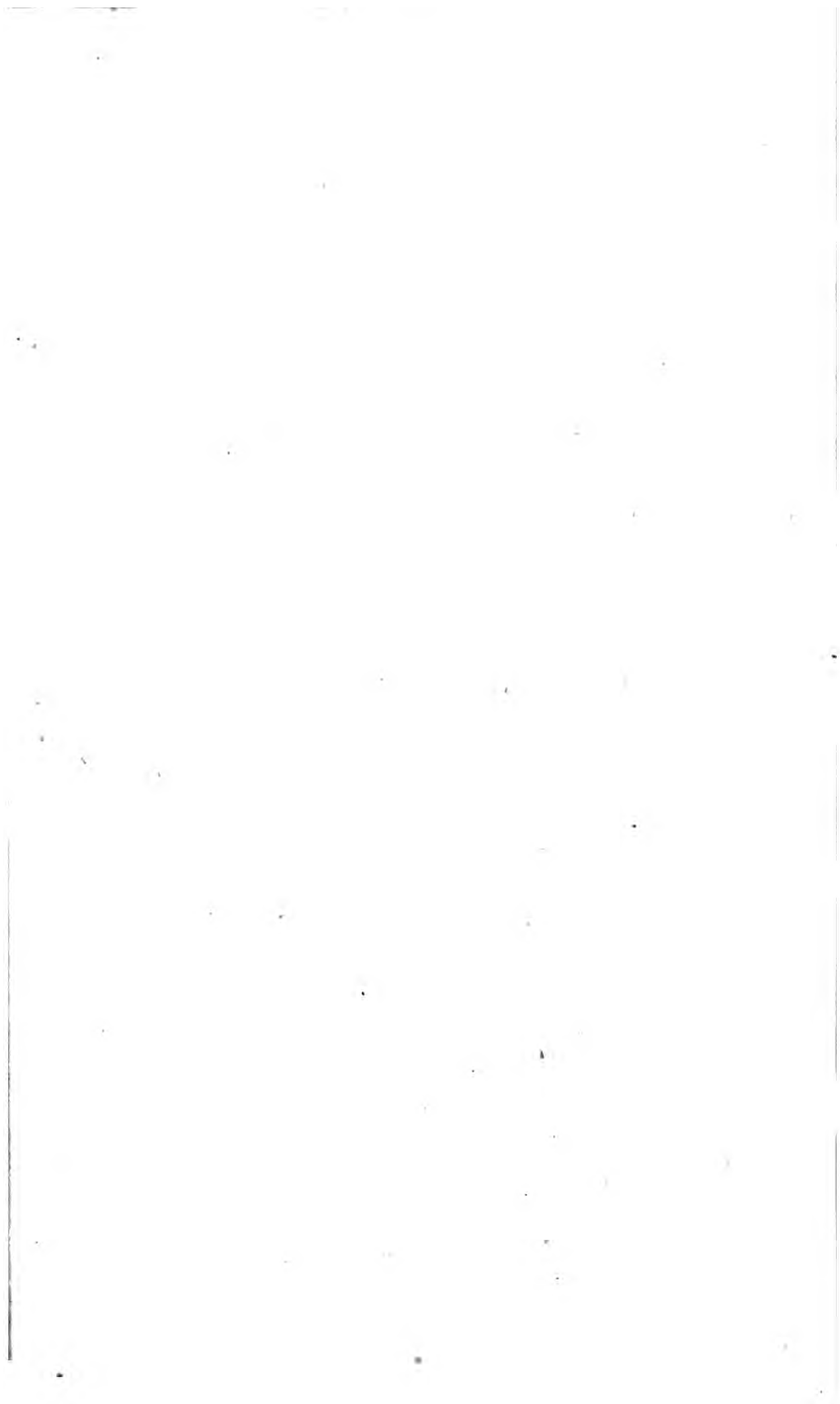
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