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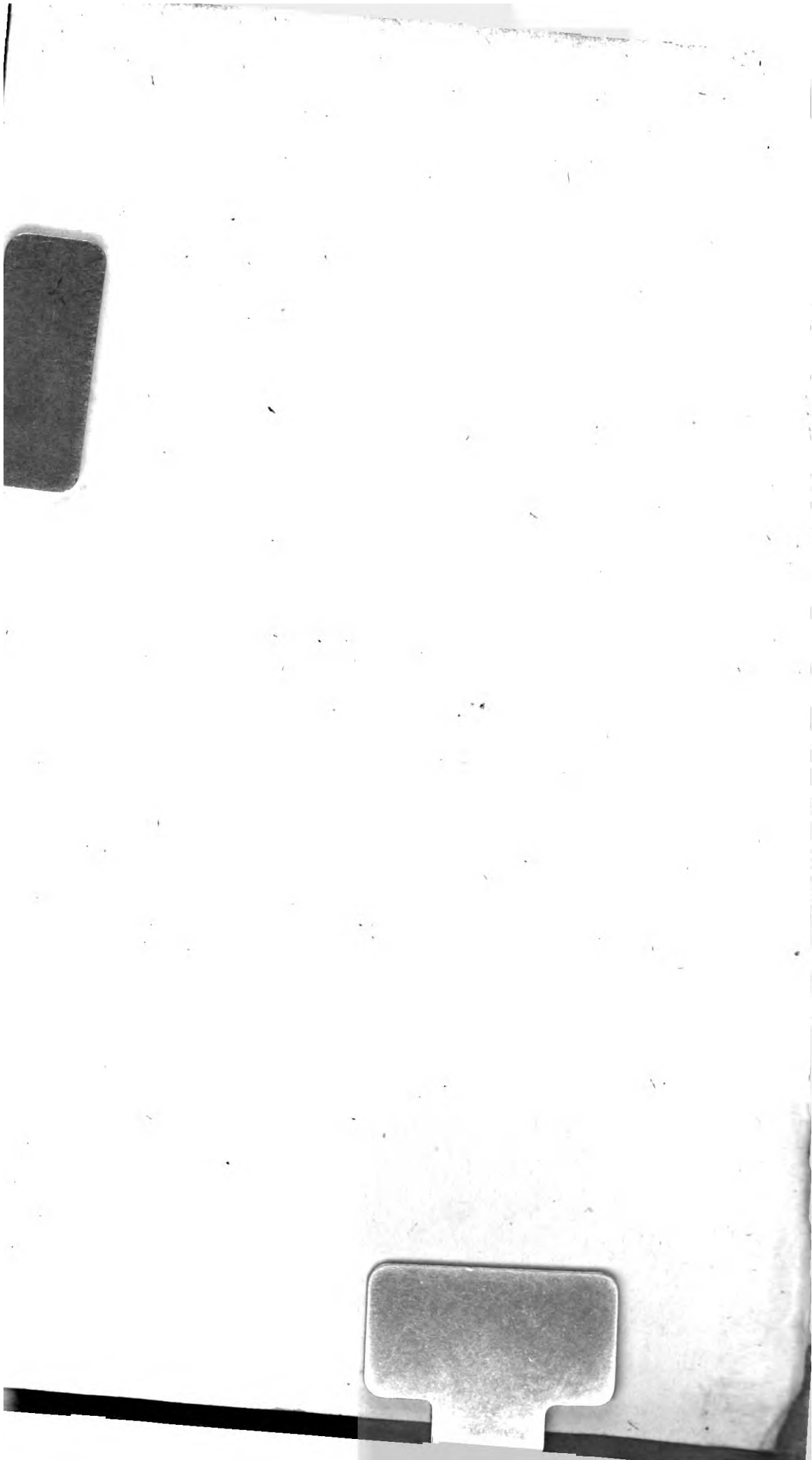
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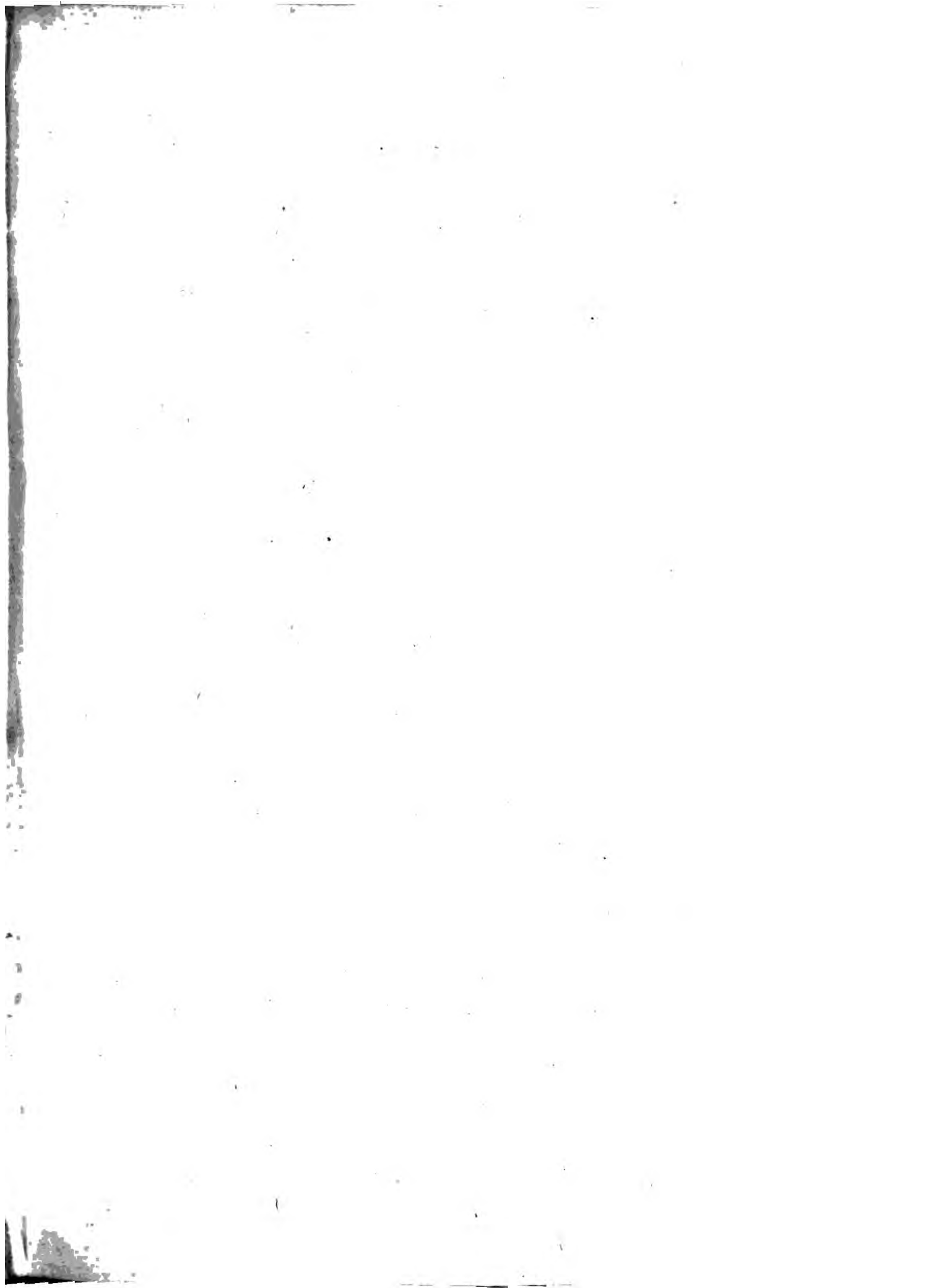


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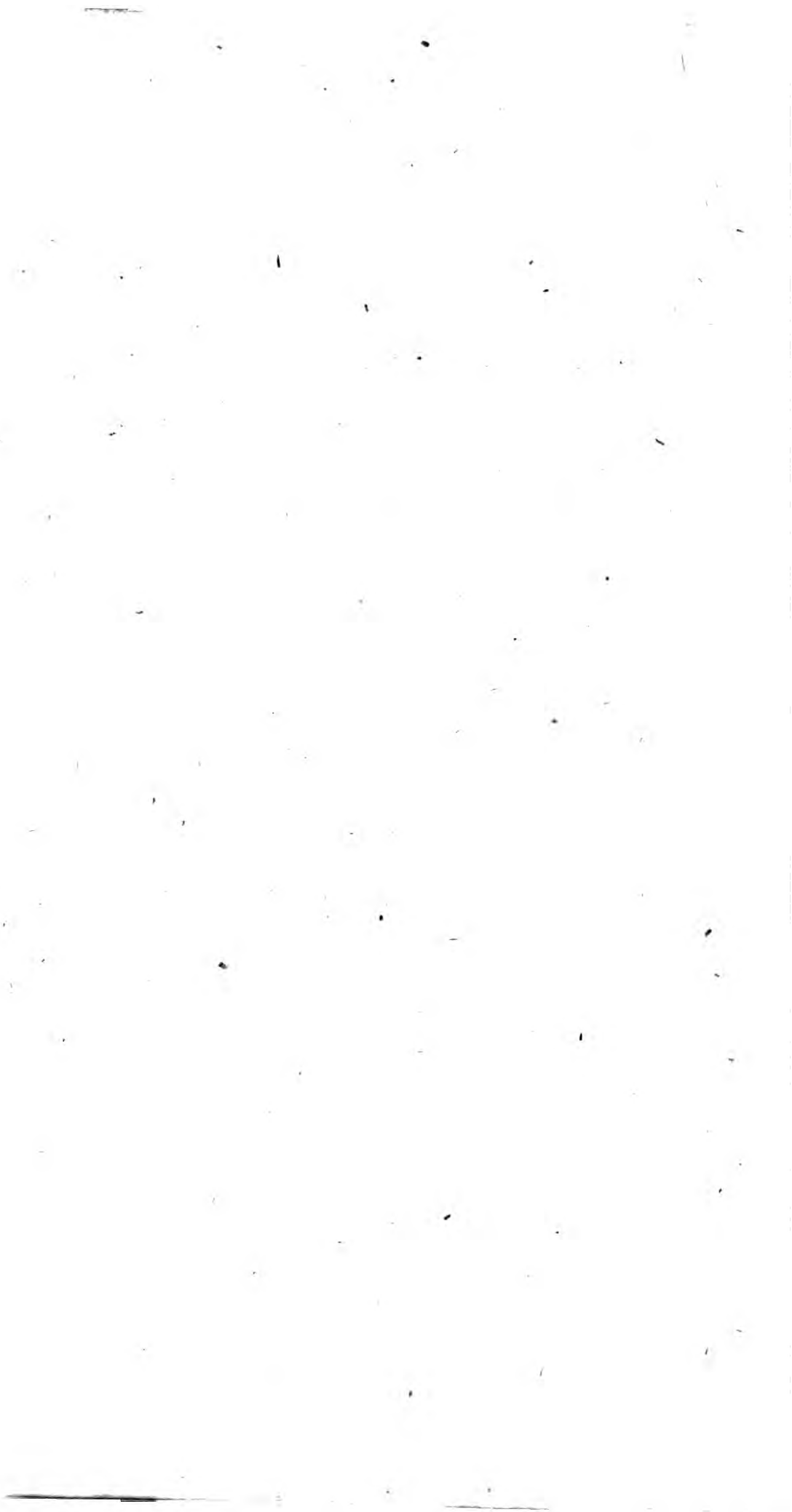












# DISCOURSES

PREACHED AT

THE TEMPLE CHURCH,

AND ON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

## DISCOURSES

ON THE

USE AND INTENT OF PROPHECY:

TOGETHER WITH

DISSERTATIONS;

A CHARGE TO THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF  
LONDON;

A LETTER ON THE EARTHQUAKES IN MDCCL;

AND

THE TRIAL OF THE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION  
OF JESUS.

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BY

THOMAS SHERLOCK, D. D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON, AND MASTER OF  
THE TEMPLE.



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A NEW EDITION, IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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VOL. I.

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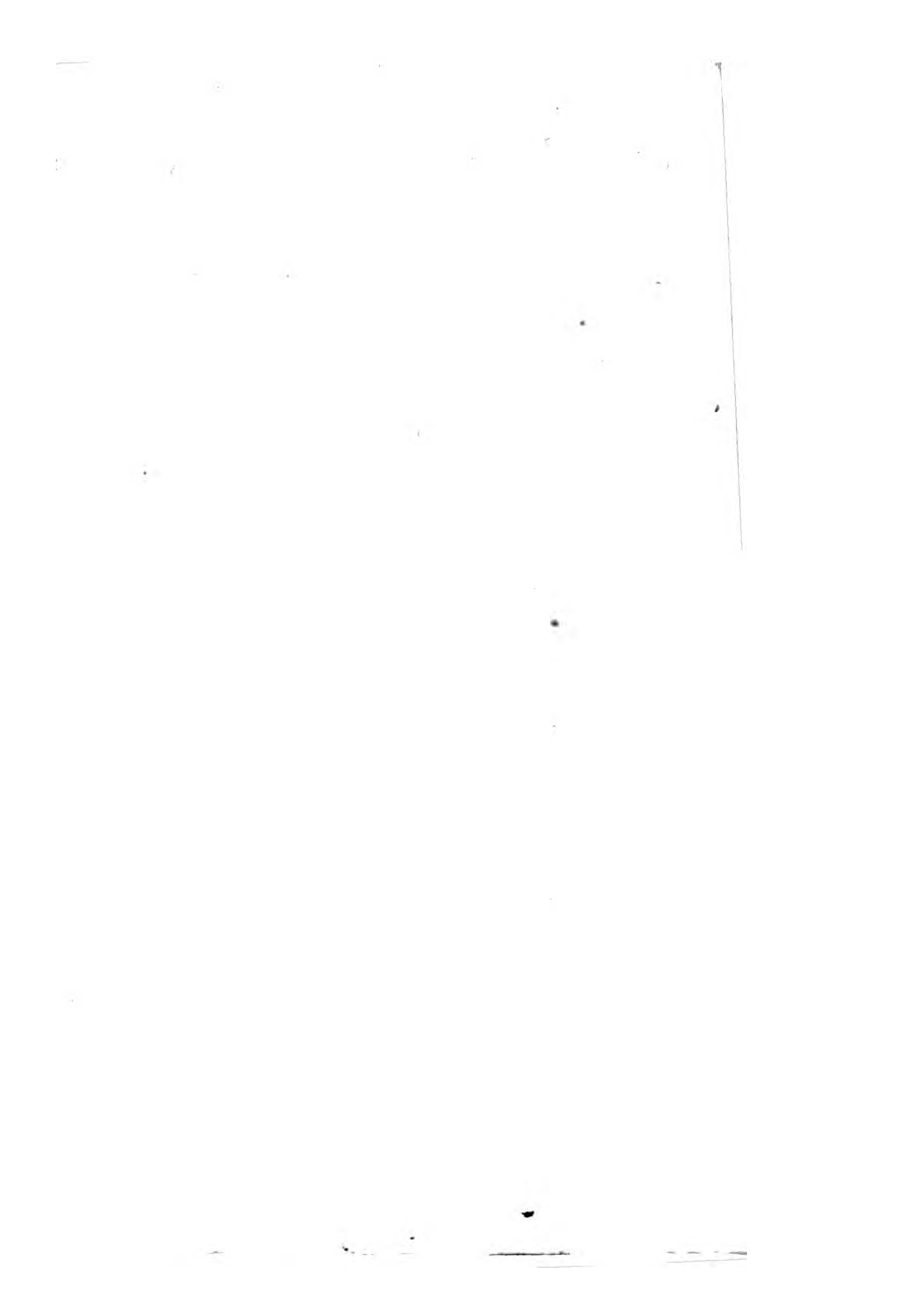
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C O N T E N T S

OF

THIS EDITION.

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VOL. I.

*Discourses preached at the Temple Church,*  
I—XXV.

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VOL. II.

*Discourses preached at the Temple Church,*  
XXVI—LII.

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VOL. III.

*Discourses preached at the Temple Church,*  
LIII—LXIII.  
*Occasional Discourses, I—XIV.*

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VOL. IV.

*Six Discourses on the Use and Intent of Pro-  
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- II. *The Sense of the Ancients before Christ upon the Circumstances and Consequences of the Fall. With an Appendix.*
- III. *The Blessing of Judah, Gen. xlix.*
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*A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of London.*

*A Letter to the Clergy and People of London and Westminster on Occasion of the Earthquakes in 1750.*

*The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus.*

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# DISCOURSE I.

## PART I.

JOHN vi. 67—69.

*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

IN the foregoing part of this chapter we read, that the doctrine of our Saviour had given such offence to his hearers, that many even of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him: upon which occasion our Saviour put this question to the twelve, *Will ye also go away?* To which St. Peter, in the name of all, made answer, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.* In this answer there are three things expressed, or implied, as the ground of their constancy and adherence to Christ:

I. The first is, The miserable condition they should be in if they did forsake him, having no other in whom they could trust: *Lord, to whom shall we go?*

II. The second is, The excellency of his religion, and the certain means it afforded of obtaining that which is the great end of religion, a blessed life after this: *Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

III. The third is, The authority and divine commission of Christ, upon which their faith and confidence were built: *We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.* To believe, because we have sufficient reason to determine our belief, is a rational faith; and this is what is meant in the word ἐγνώκαμεν: *We believe, because we have, from the things we have heard and seen of you, determined with ourselves, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

These three reasons, which St. Peter gives for adherence to Christ, refer to as many general principles or maxims:

As first, that religion, the only means by which men can arrive at true happiness, by which they can attain to the last perfection and dignity of their nature, does not, in the present circumstances of the world, depend on human reasoning or inventions: for, was this the case, we need not to go from home for religion, or to seek farther than our own breast for the means of reconciling ourselves to God, and obtaining his favour, and, in consequence of it, life eternal. Upon such supposition, St. Peter argued very weakly, in saying, *To whom shall we go?* For to whom need they go to learn that which they were well able to teach themselves?

The second principle referred to is, that the great end of religion is future happiness; and con-

frequently the best religion is that which will most surely direct us to eternal life. Upon this ground St. Peter prefers the Gospel of Christ: *Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

The third thing is, that the authority and word of God is the only sure foundation of religion, and the only reasonable ground for us to build our hopes on. Thus St. Peter accounts for his confidence in the religion which Christ taught: *We know and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

In this state of the case, the necessity of religion in general is supposed; and the only question is, from what fountain we must derive it. The dispute can only lie between natural and revealed religion. If nature be able to direct us, it will be hard to justify the wisdom of God in giving us a revelation, since the revelation can only serve the same purpose, which nature alone could well supply.

Since the light of the Gospel has shone throughout the world, nature has been much improving; we see many things clearly, many things which reason readily embraces, which nevertheless the world before was generally a stranger to. The Gospel has given us true notions of God and of ourselves, right conceptions of his holiness and purity, and of the nature of divine worship: it has taught us a religion, in the practice of which our present ease and comfort, and our hopes of future happiness and glory, consist; it has rooted out idolatry and superstition; and, by instructing us in the nature of God, and discovering to us his unity, his



omnipresence, and infinite knowledge, it has furnished us even with principles of reason, by which we reject and condemn the rites and ceremonies of heathenism and idolatry, and discover wherein the beauty and holiness of divine worship consist: for the nature of divine worship must be deduced from the nature of God; and it is impossible for men to pay a reasonable service to God, till they have just and reasonable notions of him. But now, it seems, this is all become pure natural religion; and it is to our own reason and understanding that we are indebted for the notion of God and of divine worship: and whatever else in religion is agreeable to our reason, is reckoned to proceed entirely from it: and, had the unbelievers of this age heard St. Peter's piteous complaint, *Lord, to whom shall we go?* they would have bid him go to himself, and consult his own reason, and there he should find all that was worth finding in religion.

But let us, if you please, examine this pretence, and see upon what ground this plea of natural religion can be maintained. If nature can instruct us sufficiently in religion, we have indeed no reason to go any where else; so far we are agreed: but whether nature can or no, is, in truth, rather a question of fact, than mere speculation; for the way to know what nature can do, is to take nature by itself, and try its strength alone. There was a time when men had little else but nature to go to; and that is the proper time to look into, to see what mere and unassisted nature can do in religion. Nay, there are still nations under the sun, who are, as to religion, in a mere state of nature: the glad

tidings of the Gospel have not reached them, nor have they been blessed, or (to speak in the modern phrase) *prejudiced* with divine revelations, which we, less worthy of them than they, so much complain of: in other matters they are polite and civilized; they are cunning traders, fine artificers, and in many arts and sciences not unskilful. Here then we may hope to see natural religion in its full perfection; for there is no want of natural reason, nor any room to complain of prejudices or prepossession: but yet, alas! these nations are held in the chains of darkness, and given up to the blindest superstition and idolatry. Men wanted not reason before the coming of Christ, nor opportunity nor inclination to improve it: arts and sciences had long before obtained their just perfection; the number of the stars had been counted, and their motions observed and adjusted; the philosophy, oratory, and poetry of those ages are still the delight and entertainment of this. Religion was not the least part of their inquiry; they searched all the recesses of reason and nature; and, had it been in the power of reason and nature to furnish men with just notions and principles of religion, here we should have found them: but, instead of them, we find nothing but the grossest superstition and idolatry; the creatures of the earth advanced into deities, and men degenerating and making themselves lower than the beasts of the field. Time would fail me to tell of the corruptions and extravagances of the politest nations. Their religion was their reproach, and the service they paid their gods was a dishonour to them and to themselves:

the most sacred part of their devotion was the most impure ; and the only thing that was commendable in it is, that it was kept as a great mystery and secret, and hid under the darkness of the night ; and, was reason now to judge, it would approve of nothing in this religion, but the modesty of withdrawing itself from the eyes of the world.

This being the case wherever men have been left to mere reason and nature to direct them ; what security have the great patrons of natural religion now, that, were they left only to reason and nature, they should not run into the same errors and absurdities ? Have they more reason than those who have gone before them ? In all other instances nature is the same now that ever it was, and we are but acting over again the same part that our ancestors acted before us : wisdom and prudence and cunning are now what they formerly were ; nor can this age shew human nature in any one character exalted beyond the examples which antiquity has left us. Can we shew greater instances of civil and political wisdom than are to be found in the governments of Greece and Rome ? Are not the civil laws of Rome still had in admiration ? and have they not a place allowed them still in almost all kingdoms ? Since then in nothing else we are grown wiser than the heathen world, what probability is there that we should have grown wiser in religion, if we had been left, as they were, to mere reason and nature ? To this day there is no alteration for the better, except only in the countries where the Gospel has been preached. What shall we say of the Chinese, a nation that wants not

either reason or learning, and in some parts of it pretends to excel the world? They have been daily improving in the arts of life, and in every kind of knowledge and science; but yet in religion they are ignorant and superstitious, and have but very little of what we call natural religion among them: and what ground is there to imagine that reason would have done more, made greater discoveries of truth, or more entirely subdued the passions of men, in England or France, or any other country of Europe, than it has in the eastern or southern parts of the world? Are not men as reasonable creatures in the east, as they are in the west? and have not they the same means of exercising and improving their reason too? Why then should you think that reason would do that now in this place, which it has never yet been able to do in any time or place whatever?

This fact is so very plain and undeniable, that I cannot but think, that, would men consider it fairly, they would soon be convinced how much they are indebted to the revelation of the Gospel, even for that natural religion which they so fondly boast of: for how comes it to pass, that there is so much reason, such clear natural religion, in every country where the Gospel is professed, and so little of both every where else?

But is there then, you will say, no such thing as natural religion? Does not St. Paul lay the heathen world under condemnation for not attending to the dictates of it? *Because, says he, that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things*

*of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.*—A sad account this of the state of religion in the heathen world, and a manifest proof how much nature stands in need of assistance! What we learn from St. Paul is plainly this; That, notwithstanding the care which God had taken to display the evidences of his own being and godhead in every work of the creation, so that men could not but have a notion of the Deity; yet, so little did they profit by that knowledge, that it served only to render them inexcusable in their superstition and idolatry: for, when they *knew God*, (as indeed all the heathen world had a notion of a supreme Being,) yet they *glorified him not as God; but changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* And was not nature an excellent guide to follow, that thus stumbled at the very threshold; and, having from natural reason the notion of a supreme Deity, sought to find him among the four-footed beasts and creeping things of the earth? Can you say what it was that thus debased the reason and understanding of mankind? What evil was it that



had diffused itself through the whole race, and so possessed their senses, that *seeing they did not perceive, and hearing they did not understand?* Or, do you think that you alone are exempt from this common, this universal blindness, and that the same reason and nature, that hitherto have misguided all the world into error and idolatry, would lead you, out of the common road, into truth and pure religion?

Is it not the utmost presumption to think thus, and to imagine that we alone are able to surmount the difficulties which all the world before us has sunk under? And yet thus every man must think, who sets up natural religion in opposition to revelation: for has mere nature ever yet, in any one part of the world, extricated itself from error? Do the nations of old, or those which now are, afford any instance of this kind? But still you think that nature is sufficient to direct you; and what else is this but to distinguish yourself from all the world, as if you only were privileged against the common failings and corruptions of mankind?

But you will say, Are there not complete schemes of natural religion drawn from principles and axioms of reason, without calling in the help of revelation? and are they not evident demonstrations that nature is able to furnish us with a religion that is pure and holy, and agreeable to the divine attributes? Allow this; but let us then be informed how it came to pass, that never any system of this pure religion was in use and practice in any nation, or indeed ever fully discovered, till the Gospel had enlightened the world. You may boast

of Socrates and Plato, and some few others in the heathen world, and tell us perhaps of their great attainments upon the strength of mere reason. Be it so. But what is this to the present question? Must millions in every age of the world be left in ignorance, because five or six among them may happen to extricate themselves? Would it be reasonable to suffer a whole nation to perish without help in a plague, because some few were not tainted with the distemper? Or, will you say all men are seven feet high, because we see now-and-then some who are?

I question not but the wise Creator of the world formed us for his own service, and that he gave us whatever was requisite either to the knowledge or the performance of our duty: and that there are still in nature the seeds and principles of religion, however buried under the rubbish of ignorance and superstition, I as little question. But what was it, I beseech you, that oppressed this light of reason and nature for so many ages? and what is it that has now set it free? Whatever the distemper was, nature plainly wanted assistance, being unable to disengage herself from the bonds and fetters in which she was held: we may disagree perhaps in finding a name for this evil, this general corruption of nature; but the thing itself is evident; the impotence of nature stands confessed; the blindness, the ignorance of the heathen world are too plain a proof of it. This general corruption and weakness of nature made it necessary that religion should be restored by some other means, and that men should have other helps to resort to, besides their own



strength and reason. And, if natural religion is indeed arrived to that state of perfection so much boasted of, it gives a strong testimony to the Gospel, and evidently proves it to be an adequate remedy and support against the evil and corruption of nature. For, where the Gospel prevails, nature is restored; and reason, delivered from bondage by grace, sees and approves what is holy, just, and pure: for what else can it be ascribed to, but the power of the Gospel, that, in every nation that names the name of Christ, even reason and nature see and condemn the follies, which others still, for want of the same help, are held in subjection to?

Can this truth be evaded or denied? And what a return then do we make for the blessing we have received? and how despitefully do we treat the Gospel of Christ, to which we owe that clear light even of reason and nature which we now enjoy, when we endeavour to set up reason and nature in opposition to it? Ought the withered hand, which Christ has restored and made whole, to be lifted up against him? or should the dumb man's tongue, just loosened from the bonds of silence, blaspheme the power that set it free? Yet thus foolishly do we sin, when we make natural religion the engine to batter down the Gospel; for the Gospel only could, and only has restored the religion of nature: and therefore there is a kind of parricide in the attempt, and an infidelity heightened by the aggravating circumstance of unnatural baseness and dissimulation.

Nor will the success of the attempt be much greater than the wisdom and the piety of it: for,

when once nature leaves her faithful guide, the Gospel of Christ, it will be as unable to support itself against error and superstition, as it was to deliver itself from them, and will by degrees fall back into its original blindness and corruption. Had you a view of the disputes that arise even upon the principles of natural religion, it would shew you what the end will be; for the wanderings of human reason are infinite. Under the Gospel dispensation we have the immutable word of God for the support of our faith and hope. We know in whom we have believed; in him, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived; and, poor as our services are, we have his word for it, that our labour of love shall not be forgotten. But to them who rely on nature only, it is not evident, nor can it be, whether any future reward shall attend their religious service. Well therefore did St. Peter say to Christ, *Thou hast the words of eternal life*; for no other religion can give any security of life and happiness to its votaries. Whither then shall we go from Christ, or to whom shall we seek for succour, since he only has the words of eternal life?

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# DISCOURSE I.

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## PART II.

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**T**HE second thing to be considered is, that the excellency of religion consists in affording certain means of obtaining eternal life.

Religion is founded in the principles of reason and nature; and, without supposing this foundation, it would be as rational an act to preach to horses as to men. A man, who has the use of reason, cannot consider his condition and circumstances in this world, or reflect upon his notions of good and evil, and the sense he feels in himself that he is an accountable creature for the good or evil he does, without asking himself, how he came into this world, and for what purpose, and to whom it is that he is, or possibly may be, accountable. When, by tracing his own being to the original, he finds that there is one supreme all-wise cause of all things; when by experience he sees, that this world neither is, nor can be, the place for taking a just and adequate account of the actions of men; the presumption that there is another state after this, in which men shall live, grows strong and almost irresistible: when he considers farther the fears and hopes of nature with respect to futurity, the fear of death

common to all, the desire of continuing in being which never forsakes us; and reflects for what use and purpose these strong impressions were given us by the Author of nature; he cannot help concluding that man was made not merely to act a short part upon the stage of this world, but that there is another and more lasting state, to which he bears relation. And from hence it must necessarily follow, that his religion must be formed on a view of securing a future happiness.

Since then the end that men propose to themselves by religion is such, it will teach us wherein the true excellency of religion consists. If eternal life and future happiness are what we aim at, that will be the best religion, which will most certainly lead us to eternal life and future happiness: and it will be to no purpose to compare religions together in any other respects, which have no relation to this end.

Let us then by this rule examine the pretensions of revelation, and, as we go along, compare it with the present state of natural religion, that we may be able to judge, *to whom we ought to go.*

Eternal life and happiness are out of our power to give ourselves, or to obtain by any strength and force, or any policy or wisdom. Could our own arm rescue us from the jaws of death and the powers of the kingdom of darkness; could we set open the gates of heaven for ourselves, and enter in to take possession of life and glory; we should want no instructions or assistances from religion; since what St. Peter said of Christ every man might ap-

ply to himself, and say, *I have the words, or means, of eternal life.*

But, since we have not this power of life and death; and since there is One who has, who governeth all things in heaven and in earth, who is over all God blessed for evermore; it necessarily follows, that either we must have no share or lot in the glories of futurity, or else that we must obtain them from God, and receive them as his gift and favour: and consequently, if eternal life be the end of religion, and likewise the gift of God, religion can be nothing else but the means proper to be made use of by us to obtain of God this most excellent and perfect gift of eternal life: for, if eternal life be the end of religion, religion must be the means of obtaining eternal life; and, if eternal life can only be had from the gift of God, religion must be the means of obtaining this gift from God.

And thus far all religions, that ever have appeared in the world, have agreed: the question has never yet been made by any, whether God is to be applied to for eternal happiness, or no; but every sect has placed its excellency in this, that it teaches the properest and most effectual way of making this application. Even natural religion pretends to no more than this; it claims not eternal life as the right of nature, but as the right of obedience, and of obedience to God, the Lord of nature: and the dispute between natural and revealed religion is not, whether God is to be applied to for eternal happiness; but only, whether nature or revelation can best teach us how to make this application.



Prayers, and praises, and repentance for sins past, are acts of devotion, which nature pretends to instruct and direct us in. But why does she teach us to pray, to praise, or to repent, but that she esteems one to be the proper method of expressing our wants, the other of expressing our gratitude, and the third of making atonement for iniquity and offences against God? In all these acts reference is had to the overruling power of the Almighty; and they amount to this confession, that the upshot of all religion is to please God in order to make ourselves happy.

This will shew us what must necessarily be understood by any person's, or by any religion's, *having the words of eternal life*: for, since eternal life can only be had by pleasing God, no person, no religion, can be said to have the words of eternal life upon any other account, than because it teaches and enables us so far at least to please God, as to obtain eternal life from him.

If we consider God as the ruler of this world as well as of the next, religion indeed will be as necessary a means of obtaining the blessings of this life, as of that which is to come. But this will make no alteration in the nature of religion: for, if the blessings of this life are the gift of God, they must be obtained by pleasing God; and the same services must entitle us to the blessings of this life and of the next, unless you can suppose that there are different ways of pleasing God; one way to please him, in order to obtain the blessings of this world; and another, in order to obtain the blessings of heaven.

From this account of the nature of religion, that it is the knowledge of pleasing God, and serving him acceptably, (I speak of religion now considered only as a rule,) there are some consequences which naturally follow, that may be of great service to us in directing us in our choice of religion.

First then; Since it is the perfection of religion to instruct us how to please God; and since to please God, and to act according to the will of God, are but one and the same thing; it necessarily follows, that must be the most perfect religion, which does most perfectly instruct us in the knowledge of the will of God. Allow then Nature to have all the advantages that ever the greatest patrons of natural religion laid claim to on her behalf; allow Reason to be as clear, as uncorrupted, as unprejudiced, as even our fondest wishes would make it; yet still it can never be supposed, that Nature and Reason, in all their glory, can be able to know the will of God so well as he himself knows it: and therefore, should God ever make a declaration of his will, that declaration must, according to the nature and necessity of the thing, be a more perfect rule for religion, than reason and nature can possibly furnish us with. Had we the wisdom and reason of cherubims and seraphims to direct us in the worship and service of our Maker, nevertheless it would be our highest wisdom, as it is theirs, to submit to his laws, that is, to the declarations of his will.

Secondly; From hence it appears, how extremely wrong it is to compare natural religion and revelation together, in order to inquire which is



preferable; for it is neither more nor less than inquiring, whether we know God's will better than he himself knows it. False revelations are no revelations; and therefore to prefer natural religion before such pretended revelations, is only to reject a forgery: but to suppose that there is, or may be, a true revelation, and yet to say that natural religion is a better guide, is to say that we are wiser than God, and know better how to please him without his directions than with them. Upon this state of the case then, a revelation must be entirely rejected as a forgery, or entirely submitted to; and the only debate between natural religion and revelation must be, whether we really have a revelation, or no; and not whether revelation or nature be, in the nature of things, the best and surest foundation of religion: which dispute but ill becomes our condition, and is a vain attempt to exalt ourselves and our own reason *above every thing that is called God.*

Since then revelation, considered as such, must needs be the surest guide in religion, every reasonable man is bound to consider the pretensions of revelation, when offered to him; for no man can justify himself in relying merely on natural religion, till he has satisfied himself that no better directions are to be had. For, since it is the business of religion to please God, is it not a very natural and a very reasonable inquiry to make, whether God has any where declared what will please him? at least, it is reasonable when we are called to this inquiry, by having a revelation tendered to us, supported by such evidence, which, though it may

be easily rejected without reason, yet to reason will ever approve itself.

But the inquiry into the evidence for any particular revelation is excluded by those who argue against all revelation *a priori*, as being inconsistent with the wisdom of God. What they say amounts to this; That God, having given us reason, has bound us to obey the dictates of reason, and tied himself down to judge us by that rule, and that only: to suppose otherwise, they imagine, would be to maintain that God gave us an imperfect rule at first, and which wanted to be mended; a thing, they imagine, inconsistent with his wisdom: and, the rule of reason being sufficient, all revelation, they judge, must be useless and impertinent, and consequently can never derive itself from God. But, as it is too apparent to be denied, that reason and natural religion never did in any age universally prevail; to help out the argument, it is farther supposed, that whatever happens in the world is agreeable to the original design of God, and consequently, that those who have least of reason and natural religion are in the state for which God designed them; and, if so, it is absurd to suppose a revelation should be given, to take men out of that state in which God originally designed to place them.

This is the sum of the argument against revelation *a priori*: to consider it particularly will take more time than can be allowed: but in brief we may observe,

1. That to argue, from the perfection of human reason, that we are discharged from receiving any

new laws from God, is inconsistent with as clear a principle of reason as any whatever, and which necessarily arises from the relation between God and man ; which is, that the creature is bound to obey the Creator, in which way soever his will is made known to him : and this surely is true with respect to the highest order of beings, as well as to the lowest ; for this plea, now made for human reason, would be presumptuous in the mouth of an angel, and inconsistent with the subjection he owes to God.

2. As to the perfection of human reason, it cannot be, nor, I suppose, will it be maintained, that human reason is absolutely perfect ; and therefore the meaning must be, that reason is relatively perfect, considered as the rule of our obedience. But this is true only upon supposition that reason is the only rule of our obedience ; for, if there be any other rule besides, mere reason cannot be the perfect rule of our obedience : and therefore this argument is really begging the thing in question ; for it supposes there is no other rule but reason, which is the thing not to be supposed, but to be proved. As much may be said for every law, as is said in this case for human reason : every law, being the only law in the case, is a perfect rule for the subject's obedience, because the subject is bound to no more than the law requires : but, if the law be amended and enlarged by the same authority that made it, it is no longer a perfect rule of obedience ; but, to make it such, it must be taken jointly with the corrections and enlargements made by the proper authority.

3. Hence it follows, that to alter or add to a law once considered as a perfect rule of obedience, when an alteration of circumstances requires it, is neither useless nor impertinent, but oftentimes the effect of wisdom and necessity.

4. To say that revelation is unnecessary, because reason is a perfect rule, and at the same time to affirm that those who have but an imperfect use of reason have no need of revelation, is a manifest contradiction: to say farther, that those who are in such a state that actually they do not obey the laws of reason, and, morally speaking, cannot obey, are nevertheless in such a state as God intended they should be in, is not only making God the author of evil, but it is ascribing to him two inconsistent intentions: for to argue that God gave men reason to be the rule of their obedience, is supposing that his original intention is, that men should obey reason; to argue at the same time that those who live in disobedience to this law are in the state which God intended them to be in, is to suppose that God intended the law should be obeyed, and not obeyed, at the same time. But to return:

We are not now arguing in behalf of any particular revelation, which may be true or false for any thing that has hitherto been said: but this I urge, that revelation is the surest foundation of religion; and this wants no other proof than an explication of the terms: religion, considered as a rule, is the knowledge of serving and pleasing God: revelation is the declaration of God, how he would be served, and what will please him: and, unless we know

what will please God better than he himself does, revelation must be the best rule to serve and please God by, that is, it must be the best religion.

From hence then, I say, it is incumbent on every man of sense and reason, upon every one who judges for himself in the choice of his religion, first to inquire whether there be a revelation, or no: nor can the precepts of natural religion singly be drawn into question, till it is first certain that there is no revelation to direct us: and therefore there can be no comparison stated generally between natural and revealed religion, in order to determine our choice between them; because the revelation must be first rejected before natural religion can pretend to the sole direction.

And yet this is the beaten path that unbelievers tread: they consider in general, that revelation is subject to many uncertainties; it may be a cheat at first, or it may be corrupted afterwards, and not faithfully handed down to them; but in natural religion there can be no cheat, because in that every man judges for himself, and is bound to nothing but what is agreeable to the dictates of reason and his own mind: and upon these general views they reject all revelations whatever, and adhere to natural religion as the safer guide. But attend to the consequence of this reasoning, which is this; that, because there may be a false revelation, therefore there cannot be a true one: for, unless this consequence be just, they are inexcusable in rejecting all revelations, because of the uncertainties which may attend them.

But now to apply what has been said to the



Christian revelation : it has such pretences, at least, as may make it worthy of a particular consideration : it pretends to come from heaven ; to have been delivered by the Son of God ; to have been confirmed by undeniable miracles and prophecies ; to have been ratified by the blood of Christ and his Apostles, who died in asserting its truth. It can shew likewise an innumerable company of martyrs and confessors : its doctrines are pure and holy, its precepts just and righteous ; its worship is a reasonable service, refined from the errors of idolatry and superstition, and spiritual like the God who is the object of it : it offers the aid and assistance of heaven to the weakness of nature ; which makes the religion of the Gospel to be as practicable as it is reasonable : it promises infinite rewards to obedience, and threatens eternal punishment to obstinate offenders ; which makes it of the utmost consequence to us soberly to consider it, since every one who rejects it stakes his own soul against the truth of it.

Are these such pretences as are to be turned off with general and loose objections ? Because miracles may be pretended, shall not the miracles of Christ be considered, which were not so much as questioned by the adversaries of the Gospel in the first ages ? Because there may be impostors, shall Christ be rejected, whose life was innocence, and free from any suspicion of private design, and who died to seal the truths he had delivered ? Because there have been cheats introduced by worldly men, endeavouring to make a gain of godliness, shall the Gospel be suspected, that in every page declares

against the world, against the pleasures, the riches, the glories of it; that labours no one thing more than to draw off the affections from things below, and to raise them to the enjoyment of heavenly and spiritual delights?

But, whether you will consider it, or no; yet there is such a call to you to consider it, as must render your neglect inexcusable. You cannot say you want inducement to consider it, when you see it entertained by men of all degrees. The Gospel does not make so mean a figure in the world as to justify your contempt of it: the light shines forth in the world, whether you will receive it, or no; if you receive it not, the consequence is upon your own soul, and you must answer it.

Were men sincere in their professions of religion, or even in their desires of salvation and immortality, the controversies in religion would soon take a new turn: the only question would be, whether the Gospel were true, or no. We should have no reasoning against revelation in general; for it is impossible that a sincerely religious man should not wish for a revelation of God's will, if there be not one already: we should then see another kind of industry used in searching the truths of God, which are now overlooked, because men have lost their regard for the things which make for their salvation. Were the Gospel but a title to an estate, there is not an infidel of them all who would sit down contented with his own general reasonings against it: it would then be thought worth looking into; its proofs would be considered, and a just weight allowed them: and yet the Gospel is our

title, our only title, to a much nobler inheritance than this world knows; it is the patent by which we claim life and immortality, and all the joys and blessings of the heavenly Canaan. Had any man but a pedigree as ancient as the Gospel, what a noise should we have about it! and yet the Gospel is despised, which sets forth to us a nobler pedigree than the kings of the earth can boast; a descent from Christ, who is head over the whole family; by which we claim as heirs of God, and coheirs with Christ: and, did we not despise our relation with Christ, and secretly abhor and dread the thoughts of immortality, we could not be so cold in our regard to the Gospel of God.

I wish every man, who argues against the Christian religion, would take this one serious thought along with him; that he must one day, if he believes that God will judge the world, argue the case once more at the judgment-seat of God: and let him try his reasons accordingly. Do you reject the Gospel because you will admit nothing that pretends to be a revelation? Consider well; is it a reason that you will justify to the face of God? Will you tell him, that you had resolved to receive no positive commands from him, nor to admit any of his declarations for law? If it will not be a good reason then, it is not a good reason now; and the stoutest heart will tremble to give such an impious reason to the Almighty, which is a plain defiance to his wisdom and authority.



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## DISCOURSE I.

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### PART III.

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A FAIRER issue there cannot be for the trial of any religion : for, since eternal life is the end that all men aim at by religion, that must necessarily be the best religion, which most certainly leads us to this great and desirable blessing. But the difficulty is, how to apply this rule, so as to form our judgments upon it, and direct our choice, since all religions pretend *to have the words of eternal life* ; which makes it necessary for us first to enable ourselves to determine which are, and which are not, *words of eternal life*, before this rule can be of any service to us in distinguishing true and genuine religion from the specious pretences of counterfeits and impostors. In order to this, we must consider, that there are some principles which in all religions are allowed, and from the consideration of which we may possibly come to some fixed determination in this matter : such are these ; that life eternal can be had only from God, who is the author and fountain of all being : that from him the only way to obtain it, is, by living and conversing in this world agreeably to his holy will : from

whence it evidently follows, that, since to do the will of God is the only way of obtaining eternal life, the words which instruct us in the knowledge of God's will, must needs be *the words of eternal life*. Thus far we can go upon mere principles of reason.

From hence the way lies open and plain to another consequence of some importance in the present question: for, since it is the perfection of religion, considered as a rule or institution, to direct us in all things to act according to the will of God, when we inquire from what principle we ought to derive our religion, we do in truth inquire from what principle we may best derive the knowledge of God's will; for the knowledge of God's will is universally acknowledged to be the true and proper rule and measure of our religious obedience in all things.

There are but two ways by which we can possibly arrive at this knowledge: one is, by following the dictates of reason and nature; when from that knowledge of God and his attributes, which reason and nature furnish us with, we infer his right of governing, and our duty of obeying; and when from the holiness and purity of God, and the necessary difference between good and evil, we infer wherein our obedience must consist, namely, in serving an holy God in holy things, and in keeping ourselves pure and undefiled from evil, even as he is pure: and this is called natural religion. The other way by which we may possibly arrive at the knowledge of God's will, is, by having it declared to us, either immediately by God himself, or by others sufficiently authorized and commissioned by him to make

such declaration in his name : and this is what we call revelation. And, as nature and revelation are the only ways by which we can come to the understanding of God's will ; so, for that reason, they are the only principles from which religion can derive itself.

Between these two, considered purely as principles of religious knowledge, it is no hard matter to judge which is the safest and securest for us to rely on ; it being a matter that will bear no dispute, whether our own reason or God himself can best instruct us in the knowledge of his will ; upon which single point the whole controversy between nature and revelation turns, as long as they are considered only as principles of religion, without drawing into the question the merits of any particular revelation, or of any particular scheme or system of natural religion : the consequence of which is plainly this ; that, as nature is a better guide than any pretended revelation, so every true revelation, as far as it goes, is a better guide than nature.

The last consequence, and for the sake of which I have made this deduction hitherto, is, that, when any particular revelation is to be examined, when it lies before us to be received or to be rejected, it is absurd, in the very nature of the thing, to put the determination upon a comparison between natural religion and revelation, considered in themselves ; since, if the revelation be false, there want no arguments to make it yield to nature ; and, if it be true, no arguments can be sufficient.

And thus it appears, that the very topic itself is

excluded, from which the Deists of the present age fetch their main support, and all the plausible arguments by which they labour to explode the Gospel, and to render it useless and insignificant, and consequently vile and contemptible in the opinion of the world.

Upon the same principle we may proceed to examine other general objections made use of in opposition to the revelation of Christ Jesus. The Gospel is a dispensation of providence in regard to mankind, which the reason of man cannot fathom, nor his utmost sagacity search into; which the Angels themselves *desire to look into*, and, after all their inquiries, are content to reverence and adore at an awful distance. These methods of salvation are matter of great complaint with unbelievers: they think it highly unreasonable, that God should propose such things as objects of faith; and from the unreasonableness of the imposition they argue, (which presupposed, they conclude not much amiss,) that these terms of salvation were not of God's contrivance, but are owing to the guile and deceit of cunning impostors, who took pleasure in abusing mankind.

Though this objection is levelled against the Christian revelation particularly; yet it must conclude equally against revelation in general, considered as a principle of religion, if it makes any addition to the things to be done or believed beyond what reason teaches us. The question then will be, whether it can be reasonable for God to propose any articles of faith, or any conditions of salvation, the reason and propriety of which does not appear to

man? And this is a question of great importance, it being confessedly the case of the Gospel.

In the sense of the Gospel, whatever is the effect of God's secret counsels, in order to the redemption of the world, is a mystery. That men ought to obey God in truth and holiness, that they may obtain his blessing—that sinners ought to be punished—are not, nor ever were, mysteries; because these things were sufficiently published to the world, when men were endued with reason. But all the methods of religion beyond these were, and still are, mysterious: the intention of God to redeem the world from sin by sending his own Son in the likeness of man, is a mystery unknown to former ages; it is a mystery still, inasmuch as we cannot penetrate into the depths of this divine economy, or account by the principles of human reason for every step or article of it. But let it be remembered, that not human reason, but the will of God, is the rule and measure of religious obedience; and, if so, the terms of religious obedience must be tried by their agreeableness to the will of God, and not measured by the narrow compass of man's reason. If reason can discover, either by internal or external signs, the conditions of salvation proposed to us to be the will of God, the work of reason is over, and we are obliged to use the means, which are prescribed by God, as we hope to obtain the end, which is the gift of God: and, how little soever reason can penetrate into the mysteries of God; yet, if it can discover them to be indeed the mysteries of God, and by him proposed to us as necessary to salvation, it discovers plainly to us, that these myste-



ries of God are *the words of eternal life*; which is all, I think, that a reasonable man would desire to find in his religion: for, since all that he desires to obtain by his religion is eternal life, what more has he to look for in his religion, than *the words*, or means, *of eternal life*?

This is true, you will say, upon supposition of God's requiring the belief of mysteries, or the practice of any positive duties from us; then it will be our duty to hearken to his voice, and entirely submit our wills and understandings to him: but how does this prove it reasonable for him so to do, or remove the prejudice that lies against the Gospel, because of its mysterious doctrines?

To come then to the point: it will, I suppose, be easily granted to be agreeable to the wisdom and goodness of God to reveal whatever is necessary to be revealed in order to perfect the salvation of mankind; as, on the other side, it must be allowed, that it is not consistent with infinite wisdom and goodness to reveal mysteries merely to puzzle the minds of men. These allowances being made on each side, the question is reduced to this; whether it can be ever necessary to reveal mysteries in order to perfect the salvation of mankind? Whenever it is necessary, it must be reasonable, unless it be unreasonable for God to save the world; and upon this foot it will be found, that a revelation cannot have *the words of eternal life*, without opening to us all necessary truths, how abstruse and mysterious soever some of them may be.

With respect to infinite wisdom, there is no such thing as mystery in nature: all things are equally



clear in the understanding of the Deity; all things lie naked before his eye, having no darkness, obscurity, or difficulty in them. A mystery therefore is no real or positive thing in nature; nor is it any thing that is inherent or belonging to the subjects of which it is predicated. When we say this thing or that thing is a mystery, according to the form of our speech, we seem to affirm something of this or that thing; but, in truth, the proposition is not affirmative with respect to the thing, but negative with respect to ourselves: for, when we say this thing is a mystery, of the thing we say nothing, but of ourselves we say, that we do not comprehend this thing. With respect to our understanding, there is no more difference between truth that is, and truth that is not mysterious, than, with respect to our strength, there is between a weight which we can lift, and a weight which we cannot lift: for, as defect of strength in us makes some weights to be unmoveable, so likewise defect of understanding makes some truths to be mysterious.

The complaint then against mysteries in religion amounts to no more than this; that God has done something for us, or appointed something for us to do, in order to save us, the reason of which we do not understand; and requires us to believe and to comply with these things, and to trust him that we shall receive the benefit of them: for this is all the faith, or positive obedience, that is required of us; as will in its due place appear.

But to return to the question, whether it can be ever necessary for God to reveal mysteries, or appoint positive duties, in order to perfect the salva-

tion of mankind; or, in other words, to use such means for the salvation of the world, the agreeableness of which to the end intended the reason of man cannot discover? This is certain, that, whenever it is out of our power by natural means to save ourselves, if we are to be saved at all, it is necessary that supernatural means be made use of: and, how hard soever it may be to conceive this to be the case of mankind in general; yet of particular men it will not, I presume, be denied, but that they may sin so far, and render themselves so obnoxious to the justice of God, that it shall not be in the power of mere reason and nature to find an infallible method of atoning the justice of God, and, consequently, redeeming the sinner from death: and in this case there is a plain necessity that the sinner must perish, or be redeemed by such means as reason and nature are strangers to; since, in the means that reason and nature can prescribe, there is confessedly no help for him.

What may confessedly happen to one man, or to many, may possibly happen to all: suppose then (since there is no absurdity in the supposition) that all men have so far sinned, as to have lost the rights and pleas of obedient subjects; that an universal corruption has spread through the whole race, and rendered them incapable of performing the duties of reason and nature, or, if they could perform them, precluded the merit and title of all such works to reward; for the works of nature, though they may prevent a forfeiture, yet they cannot reverse a forfeiture once incurred: in this case what shall be done? Is it unreasonable for God to redeem the

world? God forbid! and yet by the means of reason and nature the world cannot be redeemed. Will you allow that God may freely forgive the sins of the world, and remit the punishment, and bestow even on sinners the gift of eternal life? How mysterious would even this grace be, and how far beyond the power of reason to comprehend! Could you, from any of the natural notions of your mind, reconcile this method of redemption with the wisdom, justice, and holiness of God? Consider the essential difference between good and evil, the natural beauty of one, and the natural deformity of the other; compare them with the essential holiness of the Deity; and then tell me the ground upon which he reconciles himself to sin, pities and forgives it, and decrees immortal glory for the sinner: or, if this way please you not, consider his wisdom, by which he rules and governs the world, and try, by all the notions you can frame of wisdom, whether it be not necessary for the good government of the rational world, that rewards and punishments should be divided with an equal hand to virtue and vice; and then tell me, where is the wisdom of dropping all the punishment due to sin, and receiving sinners not only to pardon, but to glory? There may be wisdom and holiness in this, but not human wisdom, nor holiness that human reason can discern; but infinite mysterious wisdom and holiness. If from the notions of wisdom and holiness you can have no help in this case, much less will the natural notion of justice assist you. Is not justice conversant in rewards and punishments? Is it not the essence of justice to distri-

bute both where they are due? Is there not in nature and reason a connection between virtue and reward, between vice and punishment? How then comes nature to be reversed, and the laws of reason to be disturbed? and how, as if justice were more than poetically blind, come finners to be entitled to life and happiness? Even in this case therefore, of God's finally forgiving the sins of the world, which is the lowest that can be put, religion would necessarily be mysterious, and not to be apprehended by reason or nature, but to be received by faith; and our only refuge would be, not in the reason and nature of the thing, but in the unfathomable goodness and incomprehensible mercy of God.

But, should it really be, as to human reason it appears, inconsistent with the wisdom and justice of God, so freely to pardon sin, as not to leave the marks of his displeasure upon it, or to remit the transgressions of men, without vindicating in the face of the whole creation the honour of his laws and government; in what a maze must reason then be lost in searching after the means of reconciliation and redemption! How shall sin be punished, and yet the sinner saved? How shall the honour of God's government be vindicated in the face of all the world, and yet in the face of all the world the rebels justified and exalted? These are difficulties irreconcilable to human reason and nature; and yet they must be reconciled, or the world, once lost, must lie for ever under condemnation. The religion that can adjust this difficulty, and give us the clue to lead us through these mazes, in which human reason must for ever wander, can only have

*the words of eternal life*; which *words of eternal life* must necessarily abound with inconceivable mysteries, but with mysteries of grace and mercy.

So far is it from being an objection against the Gospel of Christ, that it contains many wonderful mysteries of the hidden wisdom of God, that, as our case stands, without a mystery it is impossible for us to be saved: for, since reason and nature cannot find the means of rescuing sinners from punishment, and of making atonement to the justice of God; since they cannot prescribe a proper satisfaction for sin, in which the honour of God and the salvation of men shall be at once consulted; since they cannot remedy the corruption that has spread through the race of mankind, or infuse new principles of virtue and holiness into the souls already subdued to the lust and power of sin; since, if they could procure our pardon for what is past, they cannot secure us for the future from the same temptations, which by fatal experience we know we cannot withstand: since, I say, these things cannot be done by the means of reason and nature, they must be done by such means as reason and nature know nothing of; that is, in other words, they must be done by mysterious means, of the propriety of which we can have no adequate notion or conception.

If you stand in need of no new favour, if you aim not so high as eternal life, religion without mysteries may well serve your turn. The principles of natural religion tend to procure the peace and tranquillity of this life; and the not distinguishing between religion as a rule of life for our present use



and well-being here, and as the means of obtaining pardon for sin and eternal life hereafter, may have in some measure occasioned the great complaint against the mysteries of the Gospel: for mysteries are not indeed the necessary parts of religion, considered only as a rule of action; but most necessary they are to it, when considered as a means of obtaining pardon and eternal glory. And this farther shews, how unreasonably men object against the mysterious wisdom of the Gospel, since all that the Gospel prescribes to us as our duty is plain and evident; all that is mysterious is on God's part, and relates entirely to the surprising acts of divine wisdom and mercy in the redemption of the world. Consider the Gospel then as a rule of action, no religion was ever so plain, so calculated upon the principles of reason and nature; so that natural religion itself had never more natural religion in it. If we consider the end proposed to us, and the means used to entitle us to the benefit of it, it grows mysterious, and soars above the reach of human reason; for God has done more for us than reason could teach us to expect, or can now teach us to comprehend. Let us then do our part, which we plainly understand, and let us trust in God that he will do his; though it exceeds the strength of human wisdom to comprehend the length and depth and breadth of that wisdom and mercy, which God has manifested to the world through his Son Christ Jesus, our Lord.



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# DISCOURSE I.

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## PART IV.

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AS, with respect to the health of the body, there is one regimen proper to preserve and maintain a sound constitution, and another to assist and restore a broken and distempered one; the one case requiring little more than wholesome food and temperance, the other calling for all that the help and skill of the physician can furnish: so it is in religion. An innocent man has nothing more to do than to preserve his innocence, which is his title to the favour of God; and therefore his religion is only a rule of life, directing him in all things how to preserve his integrity, and walk uprightly with his God. This is the first and the natural notion of religion; because the first and natural state of mankind was a state of innocence, and required no other religion than this. Here indeed there is no room for any thing mysterious, this religion being founded merely in the natural notions of justice and equity, and the necessary difference between good and evil: nor is it at all to be wondered at, that, whilst men consider religion under this single view, and imagine that whatever is to be done for their salvation is to be done by themselves, and that religion is only the

rule directing them how to do it, they should see no use of mysteries, nor, consequently, any reason to admit them.

But, upon supposition of men's becoming finners, and liable to the displeasure and wrath of God, religion itself becomes a new thing. Innocence, which once was all the care religion had, is now vanished, and with it all our hopes of glory and immortality. The natural attributes of God, which to the eyes of innocence afforded a pleasant prospect, to the eyes of finners are exceeding dreadful. What then shall the finner do? Shall he seek to natural religion in this distress? But, if this religion be nothing but a rule of living well, what is that to him, who has already lived so ill as to be obnoxious to condemnation? As well may you send the condemned malefactor to study the law by which he dies, in order to save his life, as the finner to the perfect rule of life, which he has transgressed, in order to save his soul. The more he studies the rule by which he should have lived, and compares it with his own transgressions, he will but the more fully comprehend how much he deserves punishment, and how desperate the state is to which his sin has reduced him. In a religion, which is barely a rule of life, there is no sure comfort or support to be had against the terrors of guilt and sin.

Unbelievers may think we ask too much of them to be granted, when we argue upon this supposition, *that all are finners, and are fallen short of the glory of God.* But, as this is the supposition upon which the Gospel uniformly proceeds, pretending to no more than to provide means of salvation for finners, who-

ever takes upon himself to question the reasonableness of the Gospel, must consider it as being what it pretends to be; otherwise he will not argue against the Gospel, but against something else formed in his own imagination. If, upon examination of the Gospel, it appears to be indeed, what it pretends to be, a means for saving sinners, you must necessarily come to one or other of the following resolutions: if you are conscious to yourself that you are a sinner, you must gladly receive the remedy provided for you, and which upon examination you find to be proper for your case; or, if you are satisfied with yourself, and want no help, you must reject it as unnecessary and improper in your case, and trust entirely to your own merit; and must appear before God, and demand life and immortality as due from his justice and equity, which you will not accept as a gift from his grace and mercy.

Let us then consider what is necessary to be done for a sinner, in order to restore him to eternal life; and that will teach us the true notion of that religion mentioned in the text, and which are *the words of eternal life*; and will enable us to judge what weight there is in the objection raised against such a religion from the additions which it makes to natural religion.

First then, it is necessary, in order to restore a sinner to eternal life, that God be reconciled to him:

Secondly, that the sinner be purged from the impurity contracted by sin:

Thirdly, that for the future he be enabled to obey the holy laws of God, without which his reconcile-

ment to God would be fruitless and of no effect.

I think there needs but little to be said to prove the necessity of these conditions : if the sinner's case be desperate, because God is provoked by his iniquity, and justly angry at his offences ; there can be no foundation for him to hope, till God be reconciled to him : if sinners are impure and odious in the sight of God, because of their sins ; their impurity must be cleansed, before he can again take pleasure in them, and delight to do them good : if the transgression of the laws of reason and nature, which are the laws of God, was that which lost him the favour of God ; that he may not lose it again, after being reconciled to him, it is necessary that he sin no more, or, if he does, that a remedy be provided to restore him.

Allowing then these conditions to be necessary to the salvation of a sinner, and likewise that religion must contain *the words, or means, of eternal life* ; it necessarily follows, that the sinner's religion must contain the means by which he may be reconciled to God ; the means by which he may be purified and cleansed from sin ; and the means by which he may be enabled for the future to obey the will of God : for these are the necessary means by which a sinner must be saved ; and therefore they must necessarily be contained in the sinner's religion. How imperfect a notion then have we of such a religion, when we consider it only as a rule of action ! and how weakly must we argue against it, when our arguments are pointed only against this notion or idea of it !

A rule of action must be plain and intelligible, or else it is no rule; for we can neither obey nor disobey a law that we cannot understand: and therefore from this idea of religion, that it is a rule of action, there lies a very plain objection against admitting mysteries in religion: and let the objection have its full force, the Gospel is secure from the blow; for the rule of life contained in the Gospel is the plainest, as well as the purest, that ever the world was acquainted with. In the precepts of Christianity there is no mystery, no shadow of a mystery, to be seen; they are all simple, and to men of the lowest understandings intelligible; the duties which it requires us to perform to God, to ourselves, and to our neighbours, are such as, when offered to us, we cannot but in our minds and consciences approve: and therefore the Gospel, as far as it is a rule of life, is far from being mysterious, since both the sense and the reason of the law are open and plain, and such as we cannot but see, and, when we see, consent to.

But, since this is not the only notion or idea of religion, that it is a rule of life; let us consider whether, according to the other ideas which belong to it, it be equally absurd to suppose it in some points mysterious. Let us examine it then under this notion, as containing the means by which God is reconciled to sinners.

And first, it is obvious to observe, that here is not the same reason against mysteries as in the other case: for, though we cannot practise a law without understanding it, yet God may be reconciled to us, and we have the assurance of it, without our being



able to comprehend and account for every thing that was done in order to it. A malefactor may receive a pardon, and enjoy the benefit of it, without knowing what it was that induced his prince to grant it; and would, without doubt, be thought mad to stand out against the mercy, merely because he could not dive into the secret reasons of it. Could not a sinner receive the benefit of God's mercy without understanding all the methods of it, it would then be necessary indeed, that even this part of religion should be free from mysteries, and made plain to every man's understanding: but, since a sinner may be saved by a mercy which he cannot comprehend, where is the absurdity of offering sinners mercy, and requiring them to rely on it, or, in other words, to believe in it, though it be never so incomprehensible or mysterious? Were it unreasonable or impossible to believe things to be, without knowing how they came to be, faith could never be reasonable in religion, or in any thing else: but, since the knowledge of the essence of things, and of the existence of things, are two distinct kinds of knowledge, and independent of one another; our ignorance of the essence of things, and of the relation they have to each other, can never be a good argument against the belief of their existence: and yet this objection contains all the arguments that unbelievers bring against the mysteries of Christianity. Why do they, for instance, refuse to believe Christ to be the Son of God? only because they cannot comprehend how he can be the eternal Son of God: and, if they will be true to their principle, and carry the objection



as far as it will go, they must in time come to deny the existence of every thing in the world, themselves not excepted. Since then to comprehend the reason and nature of things, is neither necessary to our believing the reality of them, nor yet to our receiving benefit and advantage from them; how comes it to be necessary, that in religion there should be nothing that we do not understand? Necessary it cannot be to our salvation, for we may be saved by means we comprehend not; nor yet to our faith is it necessary, for we may, and do daily believe the reality of things without knowing any thing of the nature and reasons of them. And, if mysteries may set forward our salvation, and are not destructive of our faith, upon what other views they can be excluded from religion, I cannot conceive.

Thus much then may serve to shew, that according to this notion of religion, that it contains the means by which God is reconciled to sinners, no argument can be drawn to weaken the authority of any religion, because some parts of it are mysterious: but, if you consider it farther, it will appear, that this part of religion must necessarily be mysterious, and the means of reconciliation such as reason and nature cannot comprehend. This I partly observed to you in a former part of this discourse, and shall therefore the more briefly touch it now.

The principles, from which this consequence I think will follow, are these: that men are sinners: that God must be reconciled to sinners in order to their salvation: that religion must contain *the words of eternal life*, or the certain method by which we may obtain eternal life. The consequence of these

principles is evident, that religion must contain the means by which God is reconciled to finners; for, since this reconcilment is necessary to eternal life, religion cannot have *the words of eternal life* without it. Now then, if there be no such means of reconcilment, which reason and nature can either discover or comprehend, this part of religion must necessarily be mysterious; since what reason cannot comprehend, is mysterious. Now, from the natural notion we have of God and his attributes, there arises such a difficulty in this case, as reason cannot get over: for it is certain, according to all the natural notions of our mind, that it is just for God to punish finners: it is likewise certain, that God can do nothing but what is just: if therefore he forgives finners, and receives them to mercy, and remits their punishment; it is then certain, that it is just for God in this circumstance not to punish finners. Now, reason cannot comprehend how it should, with respect to the same individual finners, be just to punish, and just not to punish them. If it be not just to punish finners, there wants no reconcilment for finners; and, if it be not just not to punish them, no reconcilment can be had, for it is contrary to the nature of God to do what is not just. The same argument lies from all the attributes of the Deity, which are at all concerned in the redemption of mankind: his wisdom and holiness, and even his mercy, are as indiscernible as his justice. Now try how far reason can go towards discovering the means of reconcilment: lay down first these certain and allowed principles; that it is just for God to punish finners—that God can do nothing but

what is just : and try how you can come at the other conclusion, which must be the foundation of a sinner's reconciliation to God ; namely, that it is just for God not to punish sinners, and righteous in him to receive them to favour. If reason cannot discover nor comprehend how both these propositions should be true at the same time with respect to the same persons, it is impossible that it should discover or comprehend the means which God makes use of to reconcile himself to sinners ; that is, it is impossible for God to make use of any means that are not mysterious, that is, above the reach and comprehension of human wisdom.

This difficulty must for ever remain, as long as we attempt to scan the divine justice by our narrow conceptions of it : and this is the very difficulty that makes many things in the Gospel to be mysterious. The Scripture tells us, *that God has been reconciled to sinners by the death of Christ—that he made atonement for the sins of the whole world.* These are great mysteries : we cannot see that there is any proportion between the sufferings of one and the sins of all ; or, if there were, we cannot see the justice of laying the sins of the wicked upon the innocent head. If we could see the reasons upon which the justice of God proceeds in this case, here would be no mystery : and therefore the mysteriousness of the whole proceeding arises only from hence, that our finite minds cannot comprehend the reasons and limits of the divine justice. Most certain it is, that, if God be reconciled to sinners, satisfaction must be made to his justice ; for he may as well cease to be God, as to be just. Whatever satisfaction is

made, it must be founded in the reasons of his own justice, that is, of justice directed by infinite wisdom. The reasons of such justice we cannot comprehend; and therefore we must either be saved by means that are mysterious to us, or God must give us infinite wisdom to comprehend the reason of his justice. You see then, that from this notion of religion, considered as containing the means by which God reconciled himself to the world, it is so far from being absurd to suppose it in some parts mysterious, that it is not possible it should be otherwise.

To redeem the world is the work of God: he only could find the means of reconciliation, and he only could apply them: it is our part merely to accept them, and to obey the terms and conditions upon which he offers them. Religion therefore, which is founded upon redemption, must needs consist of these two parts; an account of the redemption wrought by God, and instructions to men upon what terms they may reap the benefit of the redemption. As far as our part goes in the Gospel, there is nothing mysterious; we have nothing to do for ourselves, but what we very well know how to do. As to the other parts of the Gospel, we are not required to comprehend and account for God's methods of salvation, but only to accept them; which, as I before observed, are two distinct acts of the mind, and not dependent upon each other. As for the work of God in our redemption, it is indeed wonderful and mysterious: and why should it seem strange to you, that it is so? Are there any other works of God which are not

myfterious? Confider the creation and formation of this world; confider the fun, the moon, and the ftars, the works of his hand; tell me by what fecret power they move, by what rule their different motions were at firft impreffed, and by what fecret in nature or providence ever fince preferved. Or, if you think it hard to be fent to confider the heavens at a diftance, do but confider the earth, and the meaneft creatures of it: can you tell how they are formed? how they *live, and move, and have their being*? Nay, can you name that work of God, which is not myfterious? Is there any thing in nature, the firft principles of which you can difcover and fee into? If in all the works of God there is no fuch thing, why fhould we think it ftrange, that in his work of redemption he has appeared fo like himfelf, and that in this, as in every thing elfe, *his ways are paff finding out*? We live by the prefervation of providence, and enjoy the comforts and pleasures of this life; and yet how myfterious is our prefervation! how little do we know of the methods by which we are preferved! and yet the benefits of it we enjoy, notwithstanding our ignorance of the means: and why is it a greater abfurdity to fuppose that men may be redeemed, without comprehending all the means made ufe of in their redemption? In all other instances whatever, the miraculoufnefs of an efcape adds to the pleasure and joy of it, and is always remembered with a kind of ecftafy in the relation. Salvation is the only instance in which men demur upon the means, and are unwilling to receive the mercy, becaufe they cannot underftand the methods of obtaining it. In any other



case a man would be thought beside himself, who should act in the same manner.

As to the two other points, the cleansing sinners from their iniquity, and enabling them to live virtuously for the future; or, in other words, the sanctification and grace promised in the Gospel; I shall not enter into the consideration of them particularly, because the same way of reasoning is applicable in these cases, *mutatis mutandis*; and therefore I shall leave them to your own reflection.

Upon the whole; the only true and fair way of judging of the Gospel is, to consider what is the true state of mankind in the world. If men are in a state of purity and innocence, no redemption is wanting, and the methods prescribed in the Gospel bear no relation to their circumstances: but, if men have every where sinned, and come short of the glory of God, the law of nature cannot help them to those blessings, which by the law of nature are forfeited; and there is manifestly a necessity to have recourse to other means to obtain salvation.

It may be said, for it often is said, that, whatever degree of light men have, it will make little difference in the case; since an equitable judge will consider men and their merits in proportion to their abilities. Allowing this maxim to be true, yet it plainly goes no farther than this; that God will not punish men for not doing the things which their natural powers enabled them not to do. The argument cannot go farther: you cannot argue from the weakness or stupidity of men, that they shall be rewarded. It may be a good reason not to beat a man when he does amiss, because he is a

fool, and knows not what he does ; but it is no reason to honour or to advance him. And therefore a religion founded in this favourite principle cannot be said *to have the words of eternal life*; for no plea, no claim for eternal life can possibly be raised out of it.

Considering therefore religion under the character given in the text, *that it has the words of eternal life*; we shall have reason to conclude with St. Peter, that our only hope is in God, and in him whom he hath sent, our blessed Lord and Redeemer; and with him to say, *Lord, whither shall we go? thou, thou only, hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

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## DISCOURSE II.

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HEBREWS vii. 25.

*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

WHEN we consider the great and wonderful work of our redemption, though we cannot account for every step of it to our own reason and understanding, yet neither can we imagine it to be the effect of mere will and arbitrary appointment, and void of all foundation in the reason and propriety of things. All the works of God are works of wisdom; and, as far as our capacities give us leave to judge, we discern evident marks of wisdom in them all, and discover a fitness and propriety in every thing with respect to the end which it is intended to serve or promote. If this be so in every instance in which we are able to make any judgment, it is a great presumption that it is, and must be, so in all other instances, which are too high and great to be viewed and measured by human understanding: and we have one positive argument that it is so, arising from the natural notion we have of God, and of his attributes of wisdom and justice. It is impossible to suppose such a being to do any thing by chance, or in com-

pliance to mere will and humour. No: every act of God is the act of infinite wisdom, and is founded in the necessary reason and propriety of things: and it is as true of the works of grace, as it is of the works of nature, that *in wisdom he has ordained them all.*

It is one thing not to be able to discern the reasons of providence, and another to suppose there is no reason in them. The reasons, that made it either necessary or proper for Christ to die for the sins of mankind, may be removed out of our sight: but to suppose that Christ really did die for the sins of the world, and yet that there was no reason or propriety in his so doing, is to found revealed religion upon a principle destructive of natural religion; for no religion can subsist, with an opinion that God is a being capable of acting without reason.

The publication of the Gospel has made an alteration in the scheme of religion, by revealing to us the Son of God, *whom God hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power,* Heb. i. 2, 3.

The knowledge of the Son of God, of his power and dominion in the creating and upholding all things, became necessary, as the foundation of the faith required to be placed in him as our Redeemer. The character of Redeemer would be but ill supported by any person who had not power equal to the great undertaking. The New Testament doctrines therefore, relating to the dignity and authority of

Jesus Christ, are relative to his office of Redeemer; and therefore there was no explicit declaration of them either before or under the law of Moses.

Natural religion leads us by certain conclusions to the acknowledgment of one supreme intelligent Being, the author and creator of all things, and can by no reasoning whatever discover any other being concerned in the making, framing, or governing the world: and therefore all the hopes and fears, in a word, all the religious acts of man, in the state of natural religion, are necessarily and immediately relative to this one supreme Being. But put the case, that natural religion could possibly discover that this one supreme Being had an eternal Son, to whom he had communicated all power and authority, who was the immediate creator, governor, and judge of mankind; I beseech you to consider, whether, upon this supposition, there would not necessarily arise an alteration in natural religion; whether the hopes and fears, and all other religious acts of mankind, would not relate immediately to this their immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge. Can it be reasonably supposed, that we were created by the Son of God, that we are now under his government, and shall be finally under his judgment; and at the same time maintained, that no service, obedience, or regard is due to him from us his creatures and subjects? If this cannot be maintained consistently with this supposition, the conclusion will be, that the religion of a Christian is a natural and reasonable service, arising from the relation between Christ and mankind, which the Gospel has revealed and made known to the world.



When we consider what expectations we have from our Redeemer, and what great promises he has made to us in his Gospel, we cannot possibly avoid inquiring who this person is : when we hear his promise to be always present with us to the end of the world, to support us under all our difficulties, it is but a reasonable demand to ask by what authority he does these things : and when we are told that he liveth for ever, and is the Lord of life and of glory, there is no room to doubt of his being *able to save us*. St. Paul tells us, that the Lord Jesus Christ *shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*. A great expectation this ! but consider what the reasonable foundation of this expectation is : St. Paul tells us, it is the energy of power with which Christ is endued, *whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself*. Our Saviour puts this article upon the same foot : hear his declaration ; *Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God ; and they that hear shall live*. In the next verse the reason follows ; *For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself*, John v. 25, 26. If the Son has life in himself, even as the Father has life in himself ; if he is really endued with power to which all nature submits and obeys, a power sufficient for the creation of the world at first, and for the preservation ever since ; we have reason to conclude, that he is now as able to restore life, as he was at first to give it ; to call men from the grave into being, as well as to call them out of nothing at the first creation.

The relation of Christ to mankind as creator and governor considered, the work of redemption could not properly have been undertaken by any other hand: for, if Christ was the immediate creator and governor of the world, what reason can you imagine why God should resume this authority out of the hands of his Son, or set up another to have dominion and authority over any part of the creation, which by natural right belonged to him, who made all things? Were we to consider one person as our Creator, and another as our Redeemer, it would be extremely to the diminution of the honour and regard due to the Creator, inasmuch as the blessing of redemption would greatly outweigh the benefit of creation; and it would be natural to us to prefer the love that delivered us from the evils and miseries of the world, to that which placed us in them. In the daily service of our church we praise God for creating and preserving us, but above all for his inestimable love in the redemption; which is very consistent with respect to one great benefactor, who both made us and redeemed us: but, had any other hand redeemed us, such expression of gratitude to him would have reflected dishonour upon the Creator.

St. Paul tells us expressly, that Christ is head of the church; a title founded in the right of redemption, *that in all things he might have the preeminence*; that, as he was the head of all creatures in virtue of having created them, so he might be the head of the church, the elect people of God, in virtue of having redeemed them: *for it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell*; that is,

that Christ should be all in all, the head of the second as well as of the first creation; Coloff. i. 19. according to St. Paul's reasoning here, if any other person had redeemed the world, or if the world had been redeemed without Christ, he would not *have had the preeminence in all things*; which yet he had before sin came into the world; and, consequently, the sin of the world would have been the diminution of the headship and power of Christ. Upon these principles of the Gospel revelation we may discern some propriety in Christ's coming to redeem the world: the work was such, that no person of less power could undertake it; and his relation to the world was such, as made it fit and proper to commit the work to him.

The redemption of mankind is a work which in the event seems to concern men only: but, considered as a vindication of the justice and goodness of God towards his creatures, it is a work exposed to the consideration of every intelligent being in the universe. Whether they may be supposed to inquire into God's dealings with the children of men, we may judge by ourselves. It is little we know of the fall of angels; yet how has that employed human curiosity! for every man considers himself as having an interest in the justice and equity of that supreme Being, under whose government he lives, and by whose judgment he must finally stand or fall. If we doubt whether the superior orders of beings have the like inclination, St. Peter will tell us, *that the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow — are things the angels desire to look into*, 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. And indeed the method of God's dealing

with any rational creature is a common concern to all; and it is for the honour of God's government to be vindicated in the sight of every intelligent being, *that he may be justified in his saying, and overcome when he is judged.*

If this be so, it must necessarily follow, that the redemption by Christ, though it relates immediately to men, must be agreeable to all the reason and relation of things, known or discoverable by the highest intellectual beings; and need I add, that there are many such not discoverable by us?

It is certain that we are but a small part of the intellectual world: what relation we bear to the other parts, or to the whole, we know not; and yet undoubtedly the common Governor of the whole must in his dealings with every part have regard to this common relation, whether we understand it, or no. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us, *that Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.* Angels sinned, and men sinned: men only are redeemed. If God is just, there must be a reason for this, though not within our reach at present; and, when we come to know it, perhaps we may be no longer at a loss to know that the sacrifice of Christ was necessary to the salvation of men.

That there are many orders of beings superior to man, is a proposition so agreeable to reason, that there is little room to doubt of it. All these orders are in Scripture comprehended under the general name of *angel*. What relation these beings stand in to us in many respects, I will not now inquire: but that they are not unconcerned spectators in the

work of our redemption, is evident. Our Saviour tells us, *There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth*, Luke xv. 10. Again; *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels*, Rev. iii. 5. Here the angels are mentioned as witnesses of the justice of the judgment, and not merely as attendants to make up the pomp and ceremony of judicature.

Since then the justice and equity of God in redeeming men are things which the angels desire and are concerned to look into; it is evident, that his justice and equity, and the reasons of providence in this great affair, may be discernible to the highest order of intellectual beings, though not discoverable by us, the lowest.

That this is probably the case, may be learnt from hence; that, where the Gospel has revealed to us any of these relations, not discoverable by human reason, so far we can see the reason and propriety of this great work of our redemption.

But let us consider how well these principles and doctrines of the Gospel agree together, and how naturally the one flows from the other. When we view the sad condition of mankind, the sin, folly, and misery, which are in the world; and then turn to contemplate the perfections, the wisdom, and the goodness of him who made us; nature raises some hopes in us, that this confusion will some day find a remedy, and ourselves a release, from the goodness and wisdom of him who formed us. I blame not these hopes; they are just, they are natural.



But, if nature had the knowledge of the Son of God, and could discover that the world was made and is upheld by his power, that we are his immediate creatures and subjects; would it not be altogether as natural to found some hopes upon this relation? Should we not be willing to believe, that this great person, who made us, would have some compassion upon the work of his own hands? Should we not hope to find in him at least an intercessor on our behalf, an *advocate with the Father*? Should we not be inclined to recommend to him all our pleas, to put all our interest into his hands, trusting that he could not want bowels of affection towards the creatures whom he formed after his own image and likeness? I think, this would be but natural; and what more does the Gospel require of us? It has discovered to us this relation between Christ and the world, between Christ and the church, and requires from us such hope and faith, and such obedience, as naturally flow from this relation; and could it possibly require less? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that Christ is Lord of the world that is, and of that which is to come, and not to require us to have hope and confidence in him? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that he is the Lord of life and glory, and to bid us expect life and glory through any other hands than his? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that all judgment is committed to the Son, and yet no obedience due to him? or, that God has appointed him to be head over all, and yet no honour to be paid him?

From these and the like considerations we may

discern, how reasonable, how natural the religion of the Gospel is. It has indeed opened to us a new scene of things, discovering to us the ever-blessed Son of God, the creator and governor of the world : what else it proposes to us results naturally from this relation between Christ and the world. The mysterious work of our redemption itself seems to have arisen from the original relation between the only Son of God, and man the creature of God ; and our christian faith, in every article and branch of it, has a just foundation and support in the power, authority, and preeminence of the Son of God. We may well believe he has redeemed us, since we know he made us. And, though all nature seems to frown on us, and to threaten death and destruction, from which no human power or cunning can deliver us ; yet our hope is steadfast and unmoveable, being placed in him who is *able to subdue all things to himself*.

This belief, that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and arise to life, is the fundamental article of a Christian's faith : if this be not well established, our hope and confidence are vain, and the preaching the cross of Christ is foolishness.

Let us reflect a little how our case stands with respect to the prospect beyond the grave ; let us consider what hopes nature furnishes, and how they are supported, confirmed, and enlarged, by the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

When we view the world in its present circumstances, and see the misery and oppression that are in it ; when we consider that the distressed and for-

rows arising from the weakness and the wickedness of men are in number and in weight ten times more than all the sufferings to which we are exposed by the mere frailty of our condition; we can hardly imagine that a wise and just God made the world to be what we find it is. When we look farther, and find that the best men oftentimes fare worst; that even the desire and endeavour to please God frequently exposes them to infinite sorrows in this world; we stand amazed, and are ready to doubt whether these appearances can be reconciled with the belief that God governs the world. But, since all nature proclaims the being and the power of God, and the visible things of the creation declare in every language of the world the wisdom and goodness of him who made them; under the force and conviction of this evidence that there is a God, we can find no possible way to account for his justice and goodness towards the children of men, but by supposing that *he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*: and since this world evidently is not the scene of this judgment, we conclude there must be another, in which we shall stand before his tribunal. Thus far nature goes: all beyond this is vain philosophy and imagination, founded in conceits which are in vogue today, and forgot to-morrow. Scholars may reason of the nature of the soul, and the condition of it when separated from the body; but the common hopes of nature receive no support from such inquiries. But yet something farther seems necessary to give ease to nature in this painful search after life and happiness. The numberless instances of

mortality which we hear and see, the remains of those who left the world ages before we came into it, and are still mouldering in their tombs, is undeniable evidence that death destroys this compound being which we call man. How to revive this union nature knows not ; and as for those who make the spirits of men in the divided state to be perfect men, they seem to have got a conclusion without consulting the premises.

Look now into the Gospel : there you will find every reasonable hope of nature, nay every reasonable suspicion of nature, cleared up and confirmed, every difficulty answered and removed. Do the present circumstances of the world lead you to suspect that God could never be author of such corrupt and wretched creatures as men now are? Your suspicions are just and well founded : God made man upright, but through the temptation of the devil sin entered, and death and destruction followed after.

Do you suspect, from the success of virtue and vice in this world, that the providence of God does not interpose to protect the righteous from violence, or to punish the wicked? The suspicion is not without ground. God leaves his best servants here to be tried oftentimes with affliction and sorrow, and permits the wicked to flourish and abound. The call of the Gospel is not to honour and riches here, but to take up our cross and follow Christ.

Do you judge, from comparing the present state of the world with the natural notion you have of God, and of his justice and goodness, that there must needs be another state in which justice shall

take place? You reason right; and the Gospel confirms the judgment. God has appointed a day to judge the world in righteousness: then those who mourn shall rejoice, those who weep shall laugh, and the persecuted and afflicted servants of God shall be heirs of his kingdom.

Have you sometimes misgivings of mind? Are you tempted to mistrust this judgment, when you see the difficulties which surround it on every side; some which affect the soul in its separate state, some which affect the body in its state of corruption and dissolution? Look to the Gospel: there these difficulties are accounted for; and you need no longer puzzle yourself with dark questions concerning the state, condition, and nature of separate spirits, or concerning the body, however to appearance lost and destroyed; for the body and soul shall once more meet to part no more, but to be happy for ever. In this case the learned cannot doubt, and the ignorant may be sure, that it is the man, the very man himself, who shall rise again: for an union of the same soul and body is as certainly the restoration of the man, as the dividing them was the destruction.

Would you know who it is that gives this assurance? It is one who is able to make good his word; one who loved you so well as to die for you; yet one too great to be held a prisoner in the grave. No; he rose with triumph and glory, the first-born from the dead, and will in like manner call from the dust of the earth all those who put their trust and confidence in him.

But who is this, you will say, who was subject to



death, and yet had power over death? How could so much weakness and so much strength meet together? That God has the power of life, we know; but then he cannot die: that man is mortal, we know; but then he cannot give life.

Consider; does this difficulty deserve an answer, or does it not? Our blessed Saviour lived among us in a low and poor condition, exposed to much ill treatment from his jealous countrymen: when he fell into their power, their rage knew no bounds: they reviled him, insulted him, mocked him, scourged him, and at last nailed him to a cross, where by a shameful and wretched death he finished a life of sorrow and affliction. Did we know no more of him than this, upon what ground could we pretend to hope that he will be able to save us from the power of death? We might say with the disciples, *We trusted this had been he who should have saved Israel*; but he is dead, he is gone, and all our hopes are buried in his grave.

If you think this ought to be answered, and that the faith of a Christian cannot be a reasonable faith, unless it be enabled to account for this seeming contradiction; I beseech you then never more complain of the Gospel for furnishing an answer to this great objection, for removing this stumbling-block out of the way of our faith. He was a man, and therefore he died: he was the Son of God, and therefore he rose from the dead, and will give life to all his true disciples. He it was who formed this world and all things in it, and for the sake of man was content to become man, and to taste death for all, that all through him may live. This is a won-

derful piece of knowledge which God has revealed to us in his Gospel ; but he has not revealed it to raise our wonder, but to confirm and establish our faith in him to whom he hath committed all power, *whom he hath appointed heir of all things.*

Had the Gospel required of us to expect from Christ the redemption of our souls and bodies, and given us no reason to think that Christ was endued with power equal to the work, we might justly have complained ; and it would have been a standing reproach, that Christians believe they know not what. But to expect redemption from the Son of God, the resurrection of our bodies from the same hand which at first created and formed them, are rational and well-founded acts of faith ; and it is the Christian's glory, that he *knows in whom he has believed.*

That the world was made by the Son of God, is a proposition with which reason has no fault to find : that he who made the world should have power to renew it to life again, is highly consonant to reason. All the mystery lies in this, that so high and great a person should condescend to become man, and subject to death, for the sake of mankind. But are we the fit persons to complain of this transcendent mysterious love ? Or, does it become us to quarrel with the kindness of our blessed Lord towards us, only because it is greater than we can conceive ? No ; it becomes us to bless and to adore this exceeding love, by which we are saved from condemnation, by which we expect to be rescued from death ; knowing that the power of our blessed Lord is equal to his love, and that he is *able to subdue all things to himself.*



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## DISCOURSE III.

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### PART I.

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MATTHEW xi. 6.

*Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

IN the beginning of this chapter we read, that the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Christ, to inquire of him whether he was indeed the great Prophet so long expected by the people, and foretold by the prophets, or whether they were still to expect and wait the coming of another. Our Saviour detained the disciples of John, till he had made them eye-witnesses of the mighty power that was in him. They saw, at the command of his word, the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf restored to hearing, and the dead raised up to life again : they saw likewise, that these mighty powers were exercised without giving the least suspicion of any worldly design ; that no court was made to the great or wealthy by singling them out either for patients or for disciples. The benefit of the miracles was chiefly the lot of the poor ; and as they were better disposed to receive the Gospel, so were they preferred before

the rich and mighty to be the disciples of Christ. When the Baptist's disciples had seen and heard these things, our Saviour thought them sufficiently enabled to satisfy John in the inquiry upon which he had sent them: *Go, says he, and shew John those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.* Then follow immediately the words of the text: *And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

The close connection of the text with the last words of the fifth verse shews us what sort of persons our Saviour had in his eye, when he spoke of the offence taken at him in the world: *The poor, says he, have the Gospel preached to them: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* As if he had said, the poor are ready to embrace the Gospel, and happy are in this, yea happier far, notwithstanding their present uncomfortable condition, than the honourable and the learned, who are too great, and in their own opinion too wise, to hearken to the instructions of the Gospel.

The words thus explained lead us to inquire,

First, What are the offences which are generally taken at the Gospel of Christ:

Secondly, From what source these offences come.

The poverty and meanness in which our Saviour appeared, was the earliest, and may probably be the latest, objection to the Gospel. He came from God to convert and to save the world, to declare the purposes and the commands of the Almighty,



and to exact obedience from every creature ; but he came with less attendance and shew than if he had been an ordinary messenger from the governor of a province. Hence it is, that we so often find him upbraided either with the meanness of his parentage, the obscurity of his country, or the present necessity of his circumstances : *Is not this the Carpenter's son ?* says one ; *Can any good come out of Nazareth ?* says another ; *or any prophet out of Galilee ?* says a third. And when they saw him oppressed with sufferings, and weighed down with afflictions, they openly insulted his sorrow, and triumphed over his fond pretences to save the world : *Thou, say they, that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself : If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.* And so blinded are men with the notions of worldly greatness, and so apt to conceive of the majesty of God according to their own ideas of power and dignity, that this prejudice has prevailed in every age. The Apostle to the Corinthians *preached Christ crucified* ; but he was to the Jews *a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness* : for the Jews *required a sign*, a visible temporal deliverance, and had no notion, much less any want, as they could apprehend, of such a Saviour as Jesus. The *Greeks sought after wisdom*, and thought that, if God were indeed to redeem the world, he would act more suitably to his power and wisdom : whenever they made their Jupiter speak, his voice was thunder, and lightning was his appearance, and he delivered oracles not to be communicated to vulgar ears. So in the Old Testament, when God speaks, *clouds and darkness are*

*round about him*, and his presence and his voice are terrible. But here every thing had a different turn : the appearance was in the likeness of a man, and in the form of a servant ; and, as he came in like a servant, he went out like a slave, *he was esteemed stricken, and his departure was taken for misery*. His doctrine was framed rather to purify the heart, and to give wisdom to the simple, than to exercise the head, and furnish matter for the curious and learned ; to be a general instruction and a common rule of life to all men, and not to satisfy the vanity of worldly wisdom in inquiries above its reach. With him the precepts of virtue are the principles of wisdom and holiness, the greatest ornament of the mind of man.

But these things the wise and the great men of the world find hard to reconcile with the wisdom and majesty of God, according to their notions of wisdom and power. Why did not Christ, say they, appear in the power and majesty of his Father ? Would not the embassy have been more worthy both of God and of him ? Would any prince, who had a mind to reclaim his rebellious subjects to obedience, not rather choose to send a person of honour with a suitable retinue, whose appearance might command respect and credit, than an ambassador clothed in rags and poverty, fit only to create in the rebels a greater contempt both of himself and his prince ? If it was the purpose of God, that the world through faith should be saved, would not the world more securely and readily have confided in one whose very appearance would have spoke his dignity, than in one who seemed to be even more

miserable than themselves, and not able to rescue himself from the vilest and most contemptible death?

But let us now, in the second place, consider what foundation there is in reason for this great prejudice.

It is no wonder to hear men reason upon the notions and ideas which are familiar to them. Great power and great authority are connected with the ideas of great pomp and splendour; and, when we talk of the works of God, our minds naturally turn themselves to view the great and miraculous works of providence: and this is the reason why men are slow to discern the hand of God in the ordinary course of nature, where things, being familiar to us, do not strike with wonder and admiration.

When Naaman the Syrian came to the prophet of Israel to be cured of his leprosy, Elifha sent a messenger unto him, saying, *Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean.* The haughty Syrian disdain'd the easy cure, and scorn'd the prophet: Is this your man of God, and this his mighty power, to send me to a pitiful river of Israel? *Behold,* says he, *I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.* But his servants, not a little wiser than their master, thus reason the case with him: *My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou*

*not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith unto thee, Wash, and be clean?* Upon this gentle rebuke his stomach came down, and he condescended to follow the Prophet's direction; *and his flesh came again like the flesh of a young child, and he was clean.* Not unlike to Naaman's folly is theirs, who take offence at the poverty and meanness of the author of our redemption. His sentiments and theirs agree: he expected to have seen some surprising wonder wrought for his cure; and, when he was bid only to wash, he thought there could be nothing of God in so trifling a remedy. And is not this their sense, who think that so obscure, so mean a person as Jesus, could never be the messenger of God upon so great an errand as the salvation of the world? who thus expostulate, Why came he not in a majesty suitable to his employment, and then we would have believed him; but how can we expect to be raised to the glory of God by him who was himself the scorn and contempt of men?

If we search this prejudice to the bottom, we shall find that it arises from a false conception of the power and majesty of God, as if the success of his purposes depended upon the visible fitness of the instruments he made choice of. With men we know the case is so; they must use means which they can judge to be adapted to the end they aim at, if they intend to prosper in what they undertake: but with God it is otherwise. To stop the current even of the smallest river, banks must be raised, and sluices cut, when the work is done by man: but in the hand of God the rod of Moses was more than sufficient to curb the rage of the sea,



and force it to yield a passage to his people. *The foolishness of God, says the Apostle, is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men*; teaching us that we should not presume to sit in judgment upon the methods of providence; since, how foolish or how weak soever they may seem to us, they will be found in his hand to be the wisest and the strongest. And this reasoning the Apostle applies to the case now before us; *The cross of Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto all them that are called, the power of God, and the wisdom of God; because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men.* However the Jews, or however the Greeks, conceived of the crucified Jesus, yet to every believer he is the mighty *power of God to salvation*, because God ordained him so to be; and this ordination gives full efficacy to the cross of Christ, however in itself contemptible, and to all human appearance unfit for the purpose. The waters of Jordan had no natural efficacy to cleanse a leper; in the rod of Moses there was no power to divide the sea: but, when ordained by God to these purposes, the sea fled back at the touch of Moses's rod, and the leprosy of Naaman was purged by the so much despised waters of Israel. If we would judge truly, the more simple and plain the methods of providence are, the more do they speak the power of the Almighty. When God said, *Let there be light, and there was light*, his uncontrollable power more evidently appeared, than if all the angels of heaven had been employed to produce it. When our Lord said, *I will, be thou clean*, and the



person was cleansed, his divinity shone forth more brightly, than if he had commanded all the powers above visibly to assist him. So likewise, when God committed the redemption of the world to Jesus, a man of sorrow and affliction, and of no form or comeliness, and gave him the power of doing such works as never man did, in confirmation of his commission, he appeared as plainly in him, as if he had clothed him with visible majesty and power. If we consider him afflicted and tormented, and given up to a cruel death, it proves indeed that he was weak and mortal; but still God is strong, and not the less able to establish the word which he spoke by this weak, this mortal man.

As to this part of the offence then, so far as the majesty and power of God are concerned, it proceeds from very wrong notions in both cases, and supposes that the majesty of God wants the same little supports of outward pomp and grandeur as that of men does, and that his power depends upon the fitness of instrumental or material causes, as human power plainly does; whereas the majesty and power of God are never more clearly seen, than when he makes choice of the *weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty*.

Let us then in the next place consider, with respect to men, whether the advantages on their side would have been greater, had Christ appeared in greater splendour, and with more visible power and authority.

How far the imaginations of some men may rove upon such inquiries as these, or what degrees of splendour and glory they would judge sufficient for

their purpose, I cannot tell. This we are sure of, that the majesty of the Almighty is not to be approached by human eyes; that therefore, whenever it descends to treat with men, it must be veiled and obscured under such representations as men can bear. This is true, you will say; but is there no medium between the immediate presence of God, and his appearing in the form of a servant, and dying, not as the children of men commonly die, but as the vilest and most profligate criminal? Many degrees there are, no doubt, of visible glory, in any of which Christ might have appeared, but in none with greater advantage to religion than that in which he came. Suppose he had come, as the Jews expected, in the form of a mighty prince, and in that situation had propagated his faith and doctrine; what would the unbelievers then have said? How often should we have been told before now, that our religion was the work of human policy, and that our prince's doctrine and dominions were extended by the same sword? Was ever any religion the better thought of for having been preached at the head of an army? This is certain, that, to make religion a rational act of the mind, it cannot be conveyed to us in too easy and familiar a manner: the less awe we have of our teacher, the more freedom we shall exercise in weighing and examining his doctrines. And upon this account our Saviour's appearance was in the most proper form, as it gave to men the greatest scope and liberty of trying and searching into his doctrines and pretences: and therefore his meanness and poverty should least of all be objected by those who seem to contend

for nothing more than to clear religion from fears and prejudices.

But perhaps they will say, we wanted him not to appear in worldly state and glory, or to exercise temporal dominion on earth; we would have been contented with a visible, though an inferior kind of manifestation of his divine authority. *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written!* What think ye of giving sight to the blind; of opening the ears of the deaf; of loosening the tongue that was dumb; of restoring health to the sick; of raising the dead to life again; of raising even himself from the grave, and abolishing the scandal of the cross by a visible victory and triumph over death? What do ye call these things? What do they manifest to you? Are these the works of that mean man, that wretched, that crucified mortal, of whom we have been speaking? Do slaves and servants, nay, do princes and the greatest of the children of men, use to perform such works? If not, these are the very manifestations of divine power and authority which you require. Nor can it, I believe, enter into the heart of man to contrive any greater signs to ask of any person pretending to a divine commission, than these which our Saviour daily and publicly gave the world of his authority. Had he appeared with all the visible power and glory which you can conceive, yet still you cannot imagine what greater works than these he could possibly perform: and therefore the evidence now, under all the meanness of his appearance, is the same for his divine authority and commission, as it would have been,

had he come in the greatest pomp of glory and power.

As to us, I think, who are removed at a distance from the scene of this action, the evidence is much greater. Had he come in surprising glory, we might have suspected the relations of men, who, we might well think, saw and heard every thing under the greatest astonishment, and, like St. Paul when he was caught up to the third heaven, could hardly tell whether they were in the body, or out of the body. But now we have the evidence of men who lived and conversed with him familiarly, who saw all his mighty works, and saw them without surprise or astonishment, being reconciled to them by daily use, and the long-experienced gentleness and love of their Master; and therefore they very justly introduce their accounts with this assurance, *that they relate that only which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and which their hands had handled, of the word of life.* So far are we then from having any just cause of offence in the poverty and meanness of our blessed Lord, that from those circumstances arises the great stability of our faith, and this comfortable assurance, that our faith standeth not in the words or in the works of man's wisdom and power, but in the power and in the wisdom of the Almighty, who knows how to produce strength out of weakness.

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## DISCOURSE III.

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### PART II.

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I HAVE already examined the first and great prejudice against the Gospel, arising from the poverty and meanness of our blessed Lord, and the low condition of life in which he appeared in the world, and the wretched circumstances which put an end to it; and shewed it to be so far from being a just offence against the Gospel, that, when fairly considered, it serves to recommend religion to us with all possible advantage, and the more eminently to set forth the love of Christ, and the wisdom and goodness of God, in the Gospel.

It was from the offence taken at the mean condition of our Lord, that the cross became a *stumbling-block to the Jews*. It became also, as the Apostle says, *foolishness to the Greeks*: for they sought after wisdom; and, not finding the wisdom they sought after in the Gospel, it was esteemed by them as foolishness.

The great articles upon which all religion depends, are the nature of God, the immortality of the soul, and the certainty of future rewards and punishments in another life after this. These things have ever exercised the wit and learning of the considering part of mankind, and philosophy has



furnished difficulties on every side ; and, were they well cleared up, it is thought religion would want no other support. But in vain do you search the Gospel of Christ for a solution of these difficulties : he has not so much as entered into them, or once attempted to give an account of the nature or essence of God, or of an human soul, or to consider the difficulties that are urged by the schools against its separate existence from the body. Future rewards and punishments he has indeed fully asserted ; but, as to the nature and manner of them, and the soul's existence in each state, he has left them involved in the same intricacies in which he found them. And yet, say the disputers of this world, who would not expect from a person sent from God to have all his difficulties solved which affect the belief and practice of religion ? We are bid to be good and holy, and are promised immortality : so far it is well. But did he not know what doubts exercise the most learned men concerning the nature of God, and of the soul, and its passage to another world, and concerning the place and condition of that other world ? Why were not these doubts cleared ? Had he opened to us this dark scene of nature, and made us to understand the contexture of the soul, and its manner of subsisting out of the body ; had he taught us to comprehend the state and nature of the other world ; such doctrines, such discoveries would have been sufficient evidence of the divine wisdom : but now we are only taught the plain doctrines of morality, and are bid to take his word for our immortality.

To clear up this great and unreasonable offence

against the Gospel, I desire you would consider with me the following particulars :

First, That the objection does not lie properly against the Gospel of Christ ; but, if there be any sense in it, it must rise higher, and strike at the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation : for, if any fault is to be found in this matter, it is not with Christ for not teaching us more wisdom than we are capable of, but with God for not making us wiser than we are. And hence it will appear, that the objection is both impious and senseless.

Secondly, That this objection, allowing it its full force, does no way affect the belief or practice of religion ; because religion depends entirely upon the certainty of the soul's immortality, and of a future state of rewards and punishments ; which certainty no way depends upon the knowledge of the nature of the things themselves, since we are and may be certain of many things, the nature of which we neither do nor can know. And hence it will appear, that the difficulties arising from the consideration of the nature of these things cannot affect our belief of the certainty of them, if it be supported by proper evidence ; and, consequently, that religion is no way concerned to remove these difficulties. And,

Thirdly, That the Gospel has given us the greatest evidence for the certainty and reality of these things, that can be thought on or desired. And hence it will appear, that the doctrines of the Gospel are such as are adapted to the service of religion, and as might be expected from a teacher divinely inspired.

And first, let it be considered, that this objection does not lie against the Gospel of Christ; but, if there be any force in it, it strikes immediately at the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation.

As long as men keep to the plain simple points in which religion is concerned, there is no danger of their splitting upon these insuperable difficulties. If they seek after God, the whole creation will lead them to him; *for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead.* If they search after the immortality of the soul, and the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, these truths will be suggested to them from their own natural sense of good and evil, and the notions of God's wisdom and justice and goodness, compared with the present unequal distributions of rewards and punishments; which can be accounted for upon no other foot, nor reconciled to the natural sense God has implanted in us of the difference of good and evil, and the notions we have of his excellency and perfection. But, if they launch out into philosophical inquiries, and, not content to know that God is, without knowing what he is, endeavour to pry into the nature and manner of the existence of the Almighty; or if, not satisfied with the moral certainty of a future state, they want to look into the contexture of the soul, and to see there the natural seeds of immortality; it is no wonder if they make shipwreck both of their reason and their faith at once: for this knowledge is too high for men. God has not given us faculties to enable us to com-

prehend these mysteries of nature ; and therefore we must always of necessity wander out of the way, and be bewildered, when we search after them. For let any man consider whence it is that the difficulty of these inquiries ariseth : it is not for want of teaching, for all the teaching in the world will not enable men to comprehend the things of which they can form no notions or ideas. And this is the case: the seeds of this knowledge are not implanted in our nature, and therefore no cultivation can ever produce it. There is nothing which ever fell under the notice of our senses, to which the existence and being of God can be likened, nothing that bears any proportion of similitude to the natural frame and make of our souls : and therefore it is impossible to represent these things to the mind of man ; for it is not in the power of any sound of words to create new notions or ideas in our mind, or to convey new knowledge without them. God has set bounds to our knowledge by limiting our faculties, beyond which our utmost care and diligence, however assisted, cannot advance. Whatever wisdom or excellency of knowledge may be in our teacher, it is impossible he should infuse more into us than we are capable of receiving ; as a vessel can never receive more than its measure, though it be filled out of the sea.

This being the state and condition of men, it had been to little purpose, if our blessed Lord had attempted to let them into the knowledge of those great secrets of nature, which the curious and learned are so desirous of prying into. His business was to instruct them in the ways of virtue and ho-



liness, to awaken their sleepy souls and rouse their stupid consciences to a sense of goodness, to shew them the way to peace and happiness, by setting before them the precepts of God and nature in their true uncorrupted purity : and this he has done, even by the confession of his greatest enemies, who in this part have nothing to object, but that his laws are too good and too holy for their observance. It is the great excellency of a teacher to speak to the sense and understanding of the people ; and, whenever he rises above them, he is lost in the clouds, and his words are mere air and sound : and therefore, whatever wisdom and knowledge were in our blessed Saviour, it is folly to expect from him any greater degrees of either, than we are capable of comprehending. As he was our prophet and teacher, it was his business to be understood ; and he forbore teaching us the deep mysteries of nature, for the same reason that we do not teach children algebra, not that we envy them the knowledge, but that we know they are incapable of it. Instead of improving the nature of man, he must have destroyed it, and new created him, to have made him capable of a clear insight into all the mysteries which the curious seem desirous of knowing. And, could he have given us all the knowledge we thirst after, yet still the way to happiness would be the same, and we could do nothing to set forward our salvation, which he has not already both instructed and enabled us to do : and therefore, as the case stands, he has fully performed the office of a divine teacher, having fully instructed us *in the things which make for our peace.*



If you will press this argument any farther, you must plead the cause with God, and not with Christ: he has taught you all that you were capable of knowing; and you must inquire of God, why he made you no better and no wiser. And had it not, you will say, been better, if God had given us such enlarged faculties, as might have enabled us to surmount all difficulties of this kind? If you ask me, I can readily answer, that I had rather I were an angel than a man; but I know of no right I had to be either; and that I am either, is owing purely to the goodness and beneficence of my Creator. Had he left me still in the lump of clay out of which I was formed, he had done me no injury, nor could any complaint have been formed against him on my behalf. For what I have, I have reason to be thankful; for what I have not, I have no reason to complain.

Had God indeed given us only the faculties of men, and required of us the service of angels, we might then with some justice have lamented the unequal weight: but now that he requires nothing of us but what we are able to perform, and what, according to our present degree of understanding, it is highly reasonable we should perform, it is great perverseness to hang back for want of more light, and a greater capacity to understand what it is no way necessary for us to understand. Our present faculties, if rightly applied, will lead us to a certainty of the being of a God, to the knowledge of his excellency and perfection, and will instruct us wherein our reasonable service to him does consist: and shall we, when we know there is an all-suffi-

cient Being, and that it is our duty to serve him, shall we, I say, suspend our duty, because we meet with great difficulties in trying to comprehend his nature and manner of existence? As weak as we are, we may assuredly know, *that God will one day judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his doings*: and shall we not listen to this great motive to obedience, because we are not able to know how the soul can act distinctly from the body, or how it can be united to it again? It would be altogether as reasonable for a merchant not to trade to the Indies, though he is sure there is great wealth and riches there, till he can account to himself for the nature of all the surprising objects in that other world; or for a man not to eat, though he is sure it would nourish and support his life, till he can see the reason of nutrition, and give an account of all the secret ways by which nature performs the work.

God has given us knowledge sufficient to be the foundation of our duty; and, if we will use the light we have, we shall be happy. The great mistake which men commit in reflecting upon these matters, is, that they suppose they should have better evidence for the things of another world, could they overcome these difficulties, which cross them perpetually in the search after nature: and this would indeed be a real advantage to religion, if it were so; but that it is not, will appear in the following considerations: for,

Secondly, the difficulties which arise in considering the natural properties of things, do no way affect the certainty and reality of their existence:

if they did, we could be certain of the real existence of no one thing; since there is nothing but what affords us very great difficulties, when we come to account for the nature and properties of it. Let what will be the subject, I think, there cannot be two more different inquiries, than when we examine whether the thing really is, and when we examine what it is: they are inquiries which do not at all depend one upon the other. We can examine the properties of some things, without so much as reflecting whether there ever were such things, or no. When the mathematician considers the properties of an exact circle or square, it matters him not whether there be such perfect figures in the world, or no; nor does he trouble himself to inquire. So, on the other hand, we can examine and come to the certainty of the existence of things, without knowing, or attempting to know, their natures and properties. The peasant knows there is a sun and a moon, as well as the astronomers; and his certainty, as to their existence, is as great and as well-grounded as theirs. Nor is this only true in things which are objects of sense, but will hold likewise with respect to such things, the existence of which we collect from reason. From visible effects to invisible causes the argument is conclusive; though in many cases it extends only to the reality of the cause, and does not in the least lead us to the knowledge of the nature of it. When we see distempers cured by the use of plants or of drugs, some virtue we are sure there is in them, upon which the effect depends, though what we seldom or never can tell. This being the case then, that

we can arrive at the knowledge of the existence of things, when we are perfectly ignorant of their natures and properties ; and can, on the other side, examine and know the properties of things, without considering whether they exist, or no ; it is plain that these are distinct acts of knowledge, which do not depend on each other, and that we may be certain as to the reality of things, however we may be puzzled and confounded when we enter into the consideration of their nature.

And now pray consider, as to the case before us, what sort of knowledge it is that is necessary to support religion in the world. If we are sure there is a God who will judge the world, is not that a sufficient foundation for holiness ? Does it signify any thing, as to the necessity of our obedience, to inquire into the manner or nature of his being ? Does not the whole of religion evidently depend on this question, whether there certainly be a God who will judge the world ? And, if it appears there is, is it of any consequence to say there are great difficulties in conceiving how these things can be ? For, if they certainly will be, they will be some way or other, no doubt ; and it concerns not us to know which way. Since therefore our Saviour has given the greatest evidence that can be of the certainty of a future state, and the soul's existence after death, it is impertinent and unphilosophical to confront this evidence with difficulties arising from our conceptions as to the nature and manner of these things : it is in truth to set up ignorance against knowledge ; for our difficulties spring from our ignorance of nature, which is an argument we



ought rather to be ashamed of, than to bring into competition with the clear evidence we have for the certainty and reality of the things themselves. Were this duly considered, it would set the great controversy of religion upon the right foot, which ought to turn on this single point, whether there be sufficient evidence of a future state, or no? For, if such a state there be, let our conceptions concerning it be clear, or not clear, most certainly we shall be brought to account for all we do; which is enough, I think, to make us careful what we do. And this is the main concern of religion, and that which will secure whatever is necessary to it.

Since then religion evidently depends upon the certainty and reality of a future state of rewards and punishments, and other the like articles, and not in the least upon the knowledge of the nature, or the philosophical account of these things; it had been absurd in our Saviour, who was a preacher of religion only, a teacher sent from God, to have entered into those difficulties, which did not at all belong to his province. And, since neither the practice of religion would have received any advantage by the discussion of these doubts, for, if we had the knowledge of angels, and saw the heavens as plainly as they do, yet the same virtue and holiness, without any change, would be necessary to carry us thither; nor the motives of religion would have gained any new strength, since the evidence for the reality of a future state is not affected by these doubts; it is ridiculous to expect the solution of them in the Gospel, when, if solved, they would not serve any one point in which the



Gospel is concerned, but would end in mere philosophy and speculation.

But perhaps it may be said, that all this is true indeed, where the existence of things is out of doubt: in that case no difficulties can destroy the evidence of their existence. But, where the existence of things is doubtful, there the seeming contradictions which arise in considering the nature of the things, do mightily shake the presumption of their existence. This is a fair state of the case, and we ought to join issue on it.

Let us then proceed, in the third place, to shew, that the Gospel has given us the greatest evidence of our own immortality, and of a future state, that can be thought on or desired. There are two things upon which our resurrection to life depends, as we learn from our Saviour's answer to the Sadducees: *Ye do err, says he, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God:* which answer is a very clear one; for we can desire no more than to know that God certainly can raise us, and that he certainly will. The first is to be learnt from our natural notions of God; the second from the Scripture, which is the declaration of his will to mankind. As to the power of God, it cannot be brought into question, without throwing off all pretence even to natural religion: for, if you allow God, that he made the world, and formed man into a living soul in the beginning; you cannot deny but that he, who made man out of nothing at first, can as easily make him again, after death has dissolved the vital union. It remains then to inquire after the will of God, whether he, who certainly can, certainly will

raise us at the last day ? The time will not permit me to enter largely into the argument ; and therefore I shall rest it upon one, but that a very clear point. It will not be denied but that we have our Saviour's promise and word for our resurrection often repeated in the Gospel : and consider, pray, did not he raise many dead to life again ? Did he not at last raise himself from the grave, after he had been three days buried ? Is it not plain then, upon the Gospel account, that he had the power of raising the dead ? and is it not as plain, that he has promised to raise us ? Take both propositions together then, and they will amount to this ; that he, who has the power of raising the dead, has promised and declared that he will raise us from the dead. God, we know, cannot lie, and therefore must ratify every word which *he spoke by his holy child Jesus* : and hence arises a security which no doubts can shake. Besides, as to difficulties in nature and philosophy, he has not indeed taught us to answer them ; but he fully answered them himself, when he came from the grave ; as he who got up and walked, baffled all the philosopher's arguments against motion.

It is true, you will say, this is very good evidence, but you find it hard to believe : and perhaps you might have been as hard of belief, if our Saviour had reasoned never so philosophically. The question is, whether any objection lies against the Gospel for overlooking the difficulties which learned men raise ? I have shewed that none can lie, and that the Gospel has given a much better evidence than that which is desired : and this is

sufficient to remove the offence taken upon the account of this supposed defect in the Gospel. If you believe not the Gospel, that alters not the case: the evidence is not the worse for that; for neither would you believe perhaps, *though one rose from the dead.*

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## DISCOURSE III.

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### PART III.

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**T**HE prejudices which men are apt to conceive against the Gospel, are of different kinds, according to the different views under which they consider it. When they set themselves to examine the pretensions it has to be a divine revelation, they stumble at the meanness and poverty of its author; imagining that, if God were to send a person into the world upon so considerable an errand, he would clothe him with a majesty becoming one immediately commissioned by himself, and which might better support the great undertaking: or, if they consider the Gospel as the word of God, given to men for their instruction in all things pertaining to the service of God, they expect to find all their doubts and difficulties removed, which are any way related to the cause of religion; such, for instance, as relate to the nature of the soul, its manner of subsisting out of the body, and to the nature and condition of the future state which we are bid to expect: and, not finding these difficulties considered and removed, they are apt to conclude that this revelation has not all the marks of wisdom

which are to be expected in one coming immediately from God.

These offences have been already considered: but, as some are offended at the Gospel for not clearing the doubts and difficulties which encumbered the notions of religion before, so others take offence at the new doctrines introduced into religion by the Gospel, and complain of the hardship put upon them in requiring them to believe things which are not suggested to them by natural reason, nor are to be maintained by it. Even of our Saviour's disciples we find many offended at his doctrine, and complaining to each other, *This is an hard saying; who can hear it?* And so far did their prejudice prevail, *that they went back, and walked no more with him.*

The Gospel, it is said, contains many mysterious truths: and what purpose of religion can be served by our receiving articles of faith which we do not understand? Shall we be the better men for it? Will it make us more just, or holy, or beneficent to our brethren? Will it promote the honour of God to represent him as requiring such conditions from us, the end or use of which we cannot discern? Or, will it recommend religion to the world? Will men be the more forward to submit, when they must first renounce their sense and understanding, and cease to be rational, in order to be religious?

This is a very heavy charge, and, were it as true as it is heavy, might possibly shake the foundations of the Gospel. But, to set this matter in a clear light, I must desire you to observe the different notions which belong to the word mystery in the use



of the Gospel, and in vulgar use among men at this time : and, by thus distinguishing the use or sense of the word, it will appear,

First, that the objection does not reach the Gospel sense or use of the word, nor can affect the mysteries contained in the Gospel : and,

Secondly, that the use and sense of the word, which is liable to this objection, does not any way belong to the Gospel ; nor are there any such mysteries in the Gospel as may justify the complaint made against them.

First then, If you look into the sacred writers, you will find, that the whole design of the Gospel, the dispensation of providence in the salvation of mankind, is styled a mystery ; *the hidden wisdom of God, which was kept secret since the world began* : a mystery it is called, because it was kept secret since the world began, God not having opened or declared his gracious purposes before the coming of Christ. With respect to this time of secrecy and silence the Gospel is called a mystery ; but, upon the revelation of it by Christ Jesus, it is no longer looked upon as a mystery, but as the manifestation of God's will and goodness to men. Thus you will find St. Paul speaking in the last of the Romans : *The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith* : that is, this great work was a mystery in all ages, being kept secret in the counsels of God ; but, since the coming of Christ, it is no longer a mystery, but is manifest and made

known to all nations and people. Here then, you see plainly, the opposition is between mystery and revelation: what God has reserved to himself, without communicating the knowledge of it to the world, that is a mystery; what he has revealed, is no longer a mystery, but a manifestation of his will and purpose. In this sense, I presume, there lies no objection against the Gospel: that it was once hidden in the secret counsels of providence, but is now, by the revelation of Christ Jesus, made known to all men, can afford us no matter of complaint, but may administer to us great joy, and be a subject of praise and glory to God; inasmuch as our eyes have seen, and our ears heard, those things, which many righteous men and prophets have *desired to see, and have not seen them, and to hear, and have not heard them.*

As the Gospel itself is in this sense styled a mystery, so are the several parts of it likewise: *I shew you a mystery*, says St. Paul; *we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.* He did not mean that he would shew them what they could not comprehend, but that he would declare to them the purpose of God, which they were ignorant of. The same use of the word you may meet with in our blessed Saviour himself: when he had described the future state of the church in parables to the Jews, and came afterwards to explain them to the disciples, he tells them the reason of his proceeding: *Because*, says he, *unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given.* All futurities, because known only to God, are mysteries; but, when revealed, they are no longer so, being made

known and manifest. Thus, it is plain, St. Paul uses the word in 1 Cor. xiii. where he joins the gift of prophecy and the knowledge of mysteries together : *Though I have, says he, the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge* : where it is plain what he means by mysteries, since they are to be understood by the gift of prophecy. In the fourth chapter of the same epistle he shews what account we are to make of our pastors and teachers : *Let a man, says he, so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* His meaning is not, that they were preachers of mysteries in the vulgar notion of it, that is, of things which nobody can understand ; but that God had entrusted them with his purposes and intentions in the salvation of mankind, which they, like good stewards, were to dispense to the whole family, by declaring and revealing the whole will of God.

The same Apostle says, chap. ii. 7. *We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery* ; and in the next words explains what he means by mystery, *even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our glory* : and in the tenth verse he tells us, this is no longer hidden, but the mystery is laid open ; *God having revealed it unto us by his Spirit.* In the same sense we read of the *mystery of faith* : where we are not to understand the Apostle to mean incomprehensible articles of faith, but the revelations of God's purposes and designs, which through faith we receive, and are therefore styled the mysteries of faith.

In this sense the Gospel is full of mysteries, as containing the secret purposes of God's hidden wif-

dom in the redemption of the world, which were made manifest by Christ Jesus, *who brought life and immortality to light*. Against this Gospel sense of mystery the common objections have no force; since mysteries here are not understood to be such things as reason cannot receive, but such things as proceed from the hidden wisdom of God, and are made manifest in the Gospel of Christ.

Let us then, in the second place, proceed to shew, that the notion of mysteries, against which the objection lies, does not belong to the Gospel. The objection represents a mystery as a thing inconceivable, and altogether irreconcilable to human reason. But such mysteries there are none in the Gospel of Christ. If men, learned or unlearned, have run themselves into contradictions by endeavouring to explain the mysteries of God farther than he has explained them, be that to themselves: let not the Gospel be charged with their errors and mistakes. Nothing indeed has proved more fatal to religion, than the vain attempts of men to dive into the unrevealed mysteries of God, and to account for, upon principles of human reason, the things which proceed from the hidden wisdom of God. All the secret purposes of Providence are, in the sense of the Scripture, mysteries; as likewise all knowledge which God has not revealed. Of such mysteries are there many: but then they concern not us to inquire after; if they did, God would reveal them to us. God has declared to us, that he has an only-begotten Son, and that he was the person who came down from heaven for our deliverance: that he has an holy Spirit, who



shall sanctify our hearts, and be assisting to us in working out our salvation. This, and agreeable to this, is the Scripture doctrine: and a man would be put to it to fix any absurdity, or so much as seeming contradiction, upon this doctrine, or any thing said concerning it in Scripture. Concerning these persons there are indeed exceeding great mysteries, which are not revealed: God has not told us, or enabled us to conceive, how his Son and his Spirit dwell in him, or how they came from him. These therefore are properly mysteries, which are hidden in the secret wisdom of God, and which we are no where called upon to inquire after. It is easy, I think, to take God's word, that he has a Son and a Spirit, who dwell with him and in him from all eternity; a Son who came to our assistance, a Spirit who is ever with us to guide us into truth: these things, I say, are easy to be believed, without entering into the difficulties arising from natural and philosophical inquiries, which the Scripture no where encourages us to seek after: and, as long as men keep close to the rule and doctrine of Scripture, they will find no cause to enter into the great complaints raised against mysteries. The Scripture has revealed indeed wonderful things to us, and for the truth of them has given us as wonderful evidence; so that they are well qualified to be the objects of our faith: for such God designed them, and not for the exercise of our vanity and curiosity, or, as you call it, of our reason. If it is not reasonable to believe God upon the Gospel evidence, there is an end of all mysteries; but, if it is reasonable, there must be an end of all



### DISCOURSE III.

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farther inquiries : and I think common sense will teach us not to call God to account, or pretend to enter into the reason of his doings.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that this is crucial for ensuring the integrity of the financial statements and for providing a clear audit trail.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed description of the sampling process and the statistical techniques employed to interpret the results.

3. The third part of the document provides a comprehensive overview of the findings. It highlights the key trends and patterns observed in the data, as well as the implications of these findings for the organization's overall performance.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the limitations of the study and the potential areas for future research. It acknowledges the constraints of the data and the methodology used, and suggests ways in which the study could be expanded or refined.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes with a summary of the main points and a final statement on the significance of the research. It reiterates the importance of the findings and the need for continued attention to the issues discussed.

6. The sixth part of the document includes a list of references and a list of figures. The references provide a list of the sources used in the study, and the figures provide a visual representation of the data and the results of the analysis.

7. The seventh part of the document is a list of appendices. These appendices provide additional information and data that are not included in the main body of the report, but which are essential for a complete understanding of the study.

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# DISCOURSE IV.

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## PART I.

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I COR. i. 21.

*For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

*IN the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God.* There is some difficulty in ascertaining the precise meaning of the first words; *in the wisdom of God.* Some understand the meaning to be, that, since the world, *in the wisdom of God*, i. e. by contemplating the wisdom of God in the great works of the creation, had not *by wisdom*, i. e. by the exercise of their reason, arrived to the true knowledge of God, it pleased God to take another method, and *by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* But since this difficulty does not affect the main assertions of the Apostle in the text, I will not spend time in inquiring what has been, or may be, said upon this point.

The main assertions of the Apostle in the text are two :

First, that the world by wisdom knew not God.

Secondly, that it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save believers.

The language made use of here by St. Paul may want explaining; for it may seem strange, that the preaching of the Gospel should by an Apostle of Christ be called *the foolishness of preaching*. But the meaning and language of St. Paul will be accounted for by considering what led him to this kind of expression.

The doctrine of the cross, and of the redemption of the world by the death and passion of Christ, was received by the great pretenders to wisdom and reason with scorn and contempt: *The Greeks*, says the Apostle, *seek after wisdom—and Christ crucified is to the Greeks foolishness*. The pride of learning and philosophy had so possessed the polite parts of the heathen world, that they could not submit to a method of salvation which was above the reach of their philosophy, and which refused to be tried by the disputes and subtilties of their schools. The Apostle, ver. 17, says, *Christ sent him to preach the Gospel, not with the wisdom of words*. The wisdom of the world, thus discarded, took its revenge of the Gospel, and called it *the foolishness of preaching*. Be it so, says the Apostle; yet by this *foolishness of preaching* God intends to save them who believe: for this method is of God, and not of man; *and the foolishness of God is wiser than men*. You see what led St. Paul to use this expression, and to call the preaching of the Gospel the foolishness of preaching. The great and the learned so esteemed it, and so called it: the Apostle speaks to them in their own language, and calls upon them in the text

to compare their much-boasted wisdom with this foolishness of preaching, and to judge of them by their effects: the world by *wisdom knew not God*; but the *foolishness* of preaching is *salvation* to every believer.

Whether this charge of ignorance imputed to the Gentile world be true, or no, is a matter depending on the evidence of history: if it be not true, there can be no difficulty in disproving it: the time and place may be named, when and where the true knowledge of God prevailed, and religion in its purity was professed by the people. But this has not been attempted, nor will it be, by any one who is acquainted with the history of the ancient world.

It may be hard perhaps to account for the general corruption of religion which prevailed in the world; especially when we consider how absolutely absurd, and contrary to common sense, many of the superstitious rites were, which had spread themselves over the heathen world. We can scarcely conceive what should move men to consecrate birds and beasts, stocks and stones, and to fall down and worship them. But, these follies being once introduced, and propagated from father to son, it is easy to account for the great difficulty of removing them. Custom and education, and the reverence which men naturally have for what they esteem to be religion, were foundations too strong to be removed by the reasoning and speculations of a few who were something wiser than the rest, and saw perhaps many and great absurdities in the common practice: and, though there did appear in the hea-



then world some such great and good men, who were as lights shining in a dark place ; yet was there not one found able to extricate himself from all the superstition of his country, much less to reduce the people to a practice consonant to the pure principles of natural religion. And it is an observation true in itself, and of great weight in this case, that not one country, nay not one city, ever embraced the principles of pure natural religion upon the strength of their own reason, or upon conviction from the reason and wisdom of others. And, since the world continued under idolatry for many ages together before the coming of Christ, notwithstanding that they had as much sense and reason in those days as we have in ours, what pretence is there to imagine that they would not have continued in the same state to this day, if the light of the Gospel had not appeared ?

Whoever considers this matter seriously and fairly, cannot but be convinced of the truth of the Apostle's assertion, that *by wisdom the world knew not God.*

As to the second proposition, *That it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe ;* as far as true notions of God and religion are necessary means of salvation, the truth of the assertion will be admitted.

The enemies of revelation will of themselves, and in spite of themselves, bear witness so far to this truth. They now see clearly the great truths of religion ; they can now demonstrate the being and attributes of God, and from the relation we bear to him deduce the duties owing to him, the worship,

and the purity of the worship, that is to be paid him. Are they wiser than all who lived before them? or do they owe this new degree of light and knowledge to some advantage which others before them had not? They will hardly say they are wiser than all who lived when learning and arts and sciences flourished in the East, in Greece, and at Rome; and, should they say it, it will be harder still to believe them: and yet what one advantage have they above the others, this only excepted, that in their days the light of the Gospel has been spread over the world?

But, however, this comparison between the wise and learned of different ages will not determine the case before us; for religion is not made for scholars only: the use of it is to govern and direct the world, and to influence the practice of mankind. And the great question lies between the religion of the world in general before the coming of Christ, and since; and the influence which religion in one state and the other naturally had, or may be supposed to have had, by just consequence, on the morality of mankind. To give you an account of the religion and divinity of the vulgar in the days of heathenism, would be to entertain you with an history of folly and superstition; some parts of which for the barbarity of them, and some for the lewdness of them, are very unfit to be related in a Christian congregation. The people thought of their gods much after the rate that the poets write of them; and their sacred history was an account of the battles and quarrels, and of the loves and amours of their deities. Their practice in religion

was agreeable to their articles of belief: their impure deities were worshipped in acts of impurity or barbarity: and how could it be otherwise? for, when vice itself was consecrated, and had temples dedicated to it, how could the worshippers be untainted?

But consider now how the case stands in countries where the Gospel is preached in any tolerable degree of purity. The common people now are no greater reasoners than they were formerly: yet go into our villages, you will find there a firm persuasion of the unity of God, who made heaven and earth, and all things in them: the meanest of the people will tell you, that an honest heart is the only acceptable sacrifice to God, and that there is no way to please him but by doing justly and righteously.

Let me ask now, whence comes this change? Is it for the better, or no? If it is, surely the world is greatly indebted to the hand that wrought this change, that rooted out all the false notions destructive of virtue and the happiness of mankind, and planted in the room thereof principles which do so much honour and glory to God, and are full of present peace and future hopes for the children of men.

I am aware that it will be said, that the common people now are no more able to give a reason of the faith that is in them, than their heathenish ancestors were before them; and that custom and the prejudices of education have influenced both equally; and that these Christians, had they been born heathens, would have been heathens, or, if Mahometans, they would have been still Mahometans.

Suppose the case to be so, and consider whether we are not extremely obliged to revelation even upon this foot.

If men are naturally influenced by custom and the force of education to follow the opinions and practices of their country, and are, after all that has been said to exalt human reason, incapable to deliver themselves from popular and national errors by the strength of their own reason ; two things must, I think, be admitted :

First, that it was a great undertaking, and the work of a very extraordinary power, to root out ancient errors, which had for many ages had possession of the whole world : And,

Secondly, that it was an act of great wisdom and goodness, as well as power, to introduce just principles and notions of religion, and, by giving them at first a firm establishment, to throw the weight of custom and education on the side of virtue and true religion, in opposition to superstition and vice.

The first proposition cannot be disputed ; for, if the power of custom and education be as great as it is represented, the power must be very great that gets the better of it : and I believe it will be hard to shew from history, that ever a nation was reasoned out of their religious errors : it has been done by the power of miracles, and by the power of the sword ; but in this last method the nation and its errors have been commonly destroyed together. However, the Gospel was not introduced by external force ; and therefore the work must necessarily be ascribed to a power of another kind.

As to the second proposition, it may be thought dishonourable to true religion to suppose it to be at all beholden to custom and education for its support; dishonourable to God, to suppose that he can make use of any thing to propagate religion, but the reason and understanding of his creatures; and, consequently, that true religion is no longer religion, when it stands by the force of custom and education.

I know how much has been said of the use of reason in religion, to the exclusion of all other helps: but I know too that the holy writers frequently call on us *to train up a child in the way he should go*, and give this reason for it, *that when he is old he will not depart from it*. I know too that God called Abraham, and made of him a great nation, *because he knew him, that he would teach his children after him to keep the commandments of the Lord*: which precept to instruct children betimes, and which declaration on God's part in relation to Abraham, cannot stand with a supposition that true religion is the worse for the support it has from example and education.

But to consider this matter a little farther: if we know any thing with certainty of mankind, it is this; that their principles, opinions, and practices are strongly influenced by custom and education. I will ask any man, whether he thinks it possible to alter this state of things, and to make all men as much philosophers, and as much above prejudices, as some pretend to be? I believe no man in his senses ever thought this possible. If then men are, and ever will be as long as they continue men,



greatly governed by custom and education, the single question is, whether it was an act beneficent to mankind, and becoming the wisdom of God, to direct this influence to the side of virtue and true religion in order to make men happy, rather than to leave them to be miserable under the strong influence to vice, superstition, and idolatry, which had possession of the world?

The true end of religion is to make men better, to lead them to a due discharge of their duty to God and to man. True principles and right and just notions of God will lead men to a just performance of their duty, independently of this consideration, whether their principles are the result of their own reasoning, or instilled into them by education. If this be so, the common people, whose religion is always treated as their prejudices, are as capable of performing the duties of religion, and as acceptably in the sight of God, as the greatest reasoners and philosophers.

Let us suppose, that some wise man had fully convinced himself by reason of the being of God, of the holiness of his nature, and that he is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek him: suppose too, that a plain countryman, not able to make deductions in a course of reasoning, was yet fully persuaded of the same truths from his Bible, or the instruction of his parish-priest: I say, in this case, that the countryman's principles are as good a foundation for all the duties and purposes of religion as the philosopher's; that they will be as beneficial to the world in making a good father, husband, or master, and as beneficial to the man in

making him happy here and hereafter: and, though his instruction, compared with the philosopher's deep knowledge, may, in the language of St. Paul, be called the *foolishness of preaching*, yet will it, if duly attended to, *make him wise unto salvation*.

I am not placing religion upon prejudice as its proper foundation: no; the Gospel was at first introduced by the strongest appeal to reason, when it was introduced by the hand of God in signs and wonders and mighty works, which the Apostle calls the *demonstration of the Spirit*, and opposes it to the *wisdom of the world*: and the Gospel stands upon the same reason still. But this is a reason which, the wise ones of the world think, can produce nothing but prejudice, or such faith as differs but little from it. This then I say, that it was worthy of God, by a strong hand and outstretched arm, in signs and wonders to beat down superstition and idolatry, and the corrupt notions of the world; and to plant in the room of them, not by the arts of man's wisdom, but by these demonstrations of the Spirit, true principles of reason and religion; to give them possession in the world, that they might be delivered down from generation to generation, and maintained under the natural influence which custom and education have, and always will have, upon mankind.

And, if we consider revelation in this light only, as removing false principles of error and superstition, and introducing just ones of truth and religion, independently of the reason and evidence on which the Gospel stands, it must appear to be an act of divine love and goodness, which we ought to receive

with thankfulness. If men were supposed to be quite incapable of entering at all into the reason of things, and to be wholly guided by prejudice and custom, yet surely even then it would be an act of love to draw out of their minds principles full of mischief to themselves and others, and place in their room principles of love and benevolence to make themselves and others happy. And surely this at least must be allowed to the Gospel, that it did in fact expel the false and pernicious notions of heathenism, and introduce principles upon which men may be at peace and in friendship with God and with each other. And from hence perhaps we may see the reason why miracles were so frequent in the beginning of the Gospel, and why they ceased afterwards. They were necessary till truth had possession of the world; but truth, thoroughly established, was left to be propagated by the natural means of instruction and education.

Every body sees what mischief and wickedness are often produced by false and corrupt opinions and principles; which owe not their strength to reason, for with reason they have no alliance, but to the possession they have of the mind. Good principles, with the same advantage of possession, will be as powerful to good purposes, though the mind discerns not the reason from whence they flow. There are but few workmen, perhaps, who know the reason, and can demonstrate the mechanic powers of the instruments they use; but, being perfect in the use and application of these powers, they are able workmen and master-builders; which is all that is required of them. In like manner, if

true religion is so introduced into the mind, as to work in the heart of man, and make him upright and honest, the end and purpose of religion is answered.

To answer this end of religion were the preachers of the Gospel sent into the world: the errand was worthy of him who sent them; whose goodness and mercy inclined him to teach men the way to happiness, but not to flatter their vanity and pride of knowledge. The doctrines of the Gospel are not the worse for being *foolishness to the Greeks, and a stumbling-block to the Jews*; since they are, and on experience appear to be, *the power of God to salvation to all who believe.*

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## DISCOURSE IV.

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### PART II.

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IN treating on this subject, I have already observed to you, that there are two propositions or assertions contained in the words of the text :

First, That the world by wisdom knew not God.

Secondly, That it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save believers.

It being allowed in general, that the world was grossly ignorant and superstitious, and unacquainted with the true notion of God, and the religion that was to be paid him ; yet it will still be said, that there were some, some few at least, who had extricated themselves from these popular errors ; who saw and acknowledged one supreme Being, the cause of all things ; who had clear and distinct notions of morality, and of the duties owing from man to man. The writings of some of these great men are still extant ; and, if we consult only Plato, Aristotle, and the Roman philosopher Tully, we may see how far reason and philosophy could and did carry these men in matters of religion and morality.

From these and such-like instances we are apt to form a general notion of the powers of human rea-



son ; and the argument appears undeniable : thus far human reason did go without the help of the Gospel ; thus far therefore it certainly can go.

It may be worth our while to consider this case, not with an intent to depreciate the worth of these, the best and greatest men of antiquity, but to state it clearly and fairly, as far as it does, or may be supposed to affect the argument for the necessity of revelation.

Supposing then, in the first place, all that is said of these wise men to be true, and that they did arrive at a clear and distinct knowledge of God, and of the religion that was due to him ; yet it will weigh but little in the present consideration, for this plain reason ; because religion, if it is of any use at all, is equally of use to all men : for, since all men live under the impresson of natural conscience, and the sense of being accountable for their actions, they all equally want direction ; and, as the experience of the world shews, all men will have some religion, either good or bad. To say therefore that reason was sufficient for the purposes of religion before the publication of the Gospel, and to prove it by shewing that it served this purpose in four or five instances in an age, whilst millions and millions had no help from it, is quite mistaking the point : we want something to be of use to all men, and which all men stand in need of to their well-being : you have found something that will serve perhaps one in a million, and think that you have discovered an adequate supply for the general want. But what must become of the many thousands who are incapable of being the better for your method ? If the

whole nation were infected with the plague, it would be worth while to send even to the Indies for a man who could cure them; but, if his remedy could cure only two or three in the kingdom, it would be of no great consequence whether he came, or staid away.

But it may be said, that what reason did for a few, it was capable of doing for all, if it had been duly attended to; and, consequently, that reason was a sufficient foundation for true religion, notwithstanding that true religion was lost in the world; which was not through a defect in reason, but through the abuse and misapplication of it by the generality of mankind.

I agree the case to be so; but we are still where we were before: for this general abuse of reason, or inattention to the voice of it, which had spread over the whole world, had certainly a root in some general evil and corruption that had infected mankind: and, whatever reason was in itself, yet it stood in great want of a remedy for this evil, that had so universally darkened and obscured it. Suppose I should say such a man was blind; will it be a proper reply to say, No, his eyes are sound and good, excepting only that there is a very thick film over them, which intercepts all sight? or would it be proper to insist that the man wanted no cure, because he had sound eyes? What shall we do with this film then? for, till it is removed, the man might as well be without eyes. This was the very case of the heathen world. You say they had reason sufficient for all the purposes of religion: be it so; yet, in fact, it is certain they were never able

to make this use of it for ages together. Since the coming of Christ the world has been able to make this use of their reason : and now, at last, it is become a great question, whether a cure has been wrought, or no.

But consider farther, when we talk of reason abstractedly as a principle of human actions, it is right to say that reason can do whatever we see any man perform by the help of his reason ; and therefore it is true that reason can measure the magnitude and distances of the heavenly bodies : but is it also true that every man's reason can do this ? by no means ; and therefore to consider all men as capable of doing what we see some great geniuses able to do, is absolutely absurd. Now, the few whom you suppose to have attained to a just notion of God and of religion in the heathen world, what were they ? Men brought up in retirement and study, of great industry and application, who spent their lives in searching into the causes of things : and, even of those many who followed this method of life and study, there are but few who can with any pretence be said to have discovered the truth : the crowd of philosophers talked much more, but knew as little as the people. But the people themselves, what must become of them ? they have no time for study, and they must have true notions of religion at a cheaper rate, or not at all. As religion is a thing in which all men are concerned, it must be conveyed in a manner that suits men of all conditions. Supposing therefore that you have found a way by which some few thoughtful men obtained true notions of religion, you are far from having found a way of pro-

pagating true religion in the world. Reasoning will not do the business : and therefore the Gospel set out in another manner, by proposing the great truths of religion in the plainest and simplest manner in an authoritative way, but by an authority supported by the plainest and the strongest proof, the proof of miracles ; an argument that was adapted to men of all conditions, and made its way to every understanding.

It is become a fashion to dress up the great doctrines and proofs of religion in axioms and theorems and demonstrations ; and those who have taken pains in this way may have done great service to men of thought and contemplation : but, had the Gospel set out at first with this air of mathematics, it had lost one strong proof of its divine original, arising from the plainness of its doctrine, and the simplicity of the evidence which was offered in its behalf ; which made the Gospel to be a proper tender to all mankind. All mankind are concerned in the great truths of religion ; and nothing can be more absurd, and contradictory to the notion of God's wisdom and goodness, than to suppose God to intend to establish true religion in the world, and yet to offer it in a method which could possibly have an influence but on very few. Whoever will reflect seriously on the nature and condition of mankind in general, will be able to give himself a clear reason why God did not call in the assistance of the *wisdom of the world* to propagate the Gospel, but chose rather to establish it by the *foolishness of preaching*, as it is called, and by the *demonstration of*

*the Spirit*, manifested in signs and wonders and mighty works.

I have hitherto considered this plea, drawn from the case of some great men in the heathen world, upon supposition that what is said of them is true, and that they had indeed extricated themselves from the superstitions of their country, and attained just notions of true religion: but this thing, which has been often said, has never been proved, and I am afraid never will.

I do not wonder that those who have been conversant in the writings of the ancients, and have been entertained with the just and fine reflections to be met with on the attributes of God, considered as maker and governor of the world, and of mankind in particular, should conclude that those who thought and talked so clearly of the great attributes of the Deity, and of his providence over the world, had also as clear notions of the religious service due to him, and to him only. What has led to this conclusion I conceive to be this: there is so plain a connection between the relation we bear to God, and the religious duty owing to him, and the argument is so familiar to us, that we almost naturally suppose that every man, who maintains the principle, cannot fail of seeing the conclusion.

The conclusion indeed is so natural, that, if it were overlooked, nothing can more sensibly prove the weakness of human reason in opposition to inveterate errors and superstition; and nothing can more effectually shew us how unable these wise men were to reform the world, since with all their wis-



dom they were not able to reform themselves. Yet this was the truth of the case; and it was not at random, and without knowledge of the fact, that St. Paul lays this to the charge of the wise men of the world, *that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.*

To prove the truth of the Apostle's assertion, that even the wise men, who *knew God, did not glorify him as God*, by an induction of particulars, would be undertaking a work which could hardly be well discharged in this place. But yet the point is too material to be passed over in silence. Let us then consider the case of one only, but of one, who among the good men was the best, and among the wise ones the wisest. I shall easily be understood to mean Socrates, the great philosopher of Athens: and, were the wise men of antiquity to plead their cause in common, they could not put their defence into better hands.

We have an account of the speculative opinions of many of the wise men of Greece preserved to us in authors of great credit; but of their practice, and personal behaviour in life, little is said: which makes it hard to judge how far their own practice and conduct was influenced by their opinions, or how consistent they were in pursuing the consequences of their own doctrines. The case might have been the same with Socrates, had not a very

particular circumstance put him under a necessity of explaining his conduct and practice with respect to the religion of his country. He had talked so freely of the heathen deities, and the ridiculous stories told of them, that he fell under a suspicion of despising the gods of his country, and of teaching the youth of Athens to despise their altars and their worship. Upon this accusation he is summoned before the great court of the Areopagites ; and happily the apology he made for himself is preserved to us by two the ablest of his scholars, and the best writers of antiquity, Plato and Xenophon : and from both their accounts it appears, that Socrates maintained and asserted before his judges, that he worshipped the gods of his country, and that he sacrificed in private and in public upon the allowed altars, and according to the rites and customs of the city. After this public confession, so authentically reported by two so able hands, there can be no doubt of his case. He was an idolater, and had not, by his great knowledge and ability in reasoning, delivered himself from the practice of the superstition of his country. You see how far the wisdom of the world could go : give me leave to shew you what the foolishness of preaching could do in the very same case.

St. Paul was in the same case : he was accused in the same city of Athens of the same crime, that he was a setter-forth of strange gods ; and before the same great court of Areopagites he made his apology, which is likewise preserved to us by St. Luke in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts. We have then the greatest and the ablest among the wise men of

Greece, and an Apostle of Christ, in the same circumstances. You have heard the philosopher's defence, that he worshipped the gods of his country, and as his country worshipped them. Hear now the Apostle: *Ye men of Athens, says he, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious: for as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you: God that made the world, and all things therein. This God, he tells them, is not worshipped with men's hands, as though he needeth any thing:— Nor was the godhead like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.* He then calls upon them, in the name of this great God, to repent of their superstition and idolatry, which God would no longer bear: *because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

Which of these two now was a preacher of true religion? Let those who value human reason at the highest rate determine the point.

The manner in which Socrates died was the calmest and the bravest in the world, and excludes all pretence to say that he dissembled his opinion and practice before his judges out of any fear, or meanness of spirit; vices with which he was never taxed, and of which he seems to have been incapable.

Consider then, was it possible for any man, upon the authority of Socrates, to open his mouth against

the idolatry of the heathen world, or to make use of his name to that purpose, who had so solemnly, in the face of his country, and before the greatest judicature of Greece, borne testimony to the gods of his country, and the worship paid them?

But to proceed: the city of Athens soon grew sensible of the injury done to the best and wisest of their citizens, and of their own great mistake in putting Socrates to death. His accusers and his judges became infamous; and the people grew extravagant in doing honours to the memory of the innocent sufferer: they erected a statue, nay a temple, to his memory; and his name was had in honour and reverence. His doctrines upon the subjects of divinity and morality were introduced into the world with all the advantage that the ablest and politest pens could give; and they became the study and entertainment of all the considerable men who lived after him. It is worth observing too, that from the death of Socrates to the birth of Christ were, if I remember right, near four hundred years; which was time sufficient to make the experiment, how far the wisdom of Socrates, attended with all the advantages before mentioned, could go in reforming the world. And what was the effect of all this? Can you name the place where religion was reformed? Can you name the man who was so far reformed, as to renounce the superstition of his country? No; none such are to be found; and how should there? since, the greater the credit and reputation of Socrates were, the more strongly did they draw men to imitate his example, and to worship as their country worshipped.

Consider, on the other side, what was the consequence of preaching the Gospel. St. Paul entertained the Athenians with no fine speculations; but he laid before them, in the plainest dress, the great and momentous truths of religion; he openly rebuked their idolatry, and condemned their superstition. The Gospel was published in the same manner every where. The first preachers of it were enabled to support it by miracles; and most of them shed their blood in defence of its truth. By these means they came likewise to have credit and authority in the world. But in these two cases there was this great difference: the corrupt example of Socrates was a dead weight upon the purity of his doctrine, and tended to perpetuate superstition in the world: the authority and example of the Apostles went hand in hand, and united their force to root out idolatry. There was this farther difference too: the doctrines of Socrates could go only among the learned: the doctrines of the Gospel were artless and plain, and suited to every man's capacity.

For near four hundred years the disciples of Socrates had the world to themselves, to reform it if they could; in all which time there is no evidence remaining that the religion of the world was the better for their wisdom. But in much less time the Gospel prevailed in most parts of the known world: wherever it came, superstition and idolatry fled before it: and in little more than three centuries the empire became Christian; which completed the victory over the heathen deities. And, if we may judge by this comparison between the wisest of the



heathens and an apostle of Christ, the doctrine of the text will be fully verified; *that the world by wisdom knew not God, and that God by the foolishness of preaching has provided salvation for them who believe.*

I have gone through the principal points which the text led me to consider, and shall add but few words by way of reflection on the whole.

If then it appears from history, and the experience of the world before us, that men for ages together lived in ignorance of the true God, and of true religion, and that reason was not able to contend against inveterate errors and superstitions; let us not be so vain as to imagine that we could have done more in the same circumstances, than all or any who lived in the many ages of idolatry. If we consider to what height arts and sciences were carried in those days, and the politeness of Greece and Rome in all parts of learning, we shall have little reason to imagine that men have grown wiser as the world has grown older. If we have more reason in matters of religion, and undoubtedly we have more, it should lead us to consider to whom we are indebted for the happy change, and to give praise to him who set the reason of mankind free from the chains under which it had been fast bound for ages together by superstition and idolatry.

When we consider the means made use of by God for restoring true religion in the world, and pretend to judge of the fitness of them to attain the end proposed, we should be aware of being misled by the conceits of some who think themselves wise enough to give directions in a matter of so great

moment. Some may imagine it might be better, if the Gospel had reasoned more philosophically on the nature of the Deity, or more fully explained the nature of the human soul; and others may wish that other abstruse points of reason and divinity had been cleared to their satisfaction. But this was not the errand Christ came on: he came to teach true religion, and to teach it to all men; and therefore what was not fit for all was no part of his business. The Greeks sought after wisdom, and the Jews required a sign: but the preachers of the Gospel had no commission to satisfy the curiosity of one or of the other; but to teach the doctrines of God in such a manner, and to prove them by such means, as might influence and affect as well the lowest as the highest. If then the means made use of to introduce the Gospel into the world were such as were proper and necessary to subdue ancient errors and prejudices; if the truths taught by Christ are a proper foundation for all the duties of religion in which man can have any concern; if they are left to be supported in the world, and propagated from age to age, by methods which by experience have been found effectual, and which, human nature considered, must be effectual to preserve the profession of religion amongst men: if, I say, we discover these marks in the Gospel, we see enough to convince us that the Gospel is the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation; which is seeing all that we are concerned to look after, or have any pretence to expect from him who came to save and to redeem us.

Lastly, since we have the experience of many ages

before us to shew us how unable human reason is to struggle against the errors and follies of superstition, when once they have got possession; since from our own experience we know how much reason is indebted to the light of the Gospel; we should be careful to preserve this light, for fear of falling back again into the wretched state from which we have been delivered, or into a worse. Reason was once, what the light of the Gospel is now, a sufficient guide in religion: but, when men grew corrupt and vain in their imaginations, superstition and error prevailed over the world, and false religion led reason in triumph for ages together. As reason was subdued, the light of the Gospel may be; and will be, when the same causes meet to work together: a consideration that should make men, who have any sense of religion, think seriously of the treatment the Gospel every day meets with. If we use it no better, it may soon leave us; and, when once we get rid of this foolishness of preaching, we know, by sad experience, what is to be expected from the wisdom of the world.

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## DISCOURSE V.

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JOHN iii. 16.

*God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

IN this passage of Scripture, and in many others, the redemption of the world by Christ Jesus is ascribed to the love and goodness of God towards mankind. Whatever other difficulties men may find in the Gospel, one would suppose that it might be admitted to be, at least, a good representation of the divine mercy towards mankind, and fully to display that tenderness and compassion to our weaknesses and infirmities, which we all hope for, and with some reason expect to receive, from our great Creator, whose *mercy is over all his works.*

The case being so, who would expect to hear any objection against the Gospel derived from the topics of divine mercy and goodness? Yet some there are, who think the mercy of the Gospel to be imperfect, and that nature gives far better hopes to all her children. They conceive the infirmities of human nature to be unavoidable, and the mercy of God to be infinite; and from these considerations they raise hopes as unbounded as they conceive the

mercy to be. As they derive these strong assurances from natural reason, they conceive all promises of mercy to be unnecessary, and therefore to be suspected; and the argument is worked up not only to be an objection against the Gospel revelation, but against all revelations, either past or to come.

There is nothing of more consequence to the credit and authority of revelation, than to reconcile it to the natural notions and the natural hopes and expectations of mankind; and indeed the promises of the Gospel and the hopes of nature are founded on the same common principles. Ask a Christian, why did God redeem mankind by sending his Son into the world? he must answer, because men were sinners, weak, and miserable, and unable to rescue themselves from their wretched condition. Ask him, what moved God to express so much concern for such worthless objects? he must resolve it into the goodness, and tenderness, and paternal affection of God, with which he embraces all the sons of men.

Ask the Deist, upon what grounds he has hope and confidence towards God? he will reply, that he conceives it impossible for a beneficent being to be rigorous and severe towards the crimes and follies of such weak, foolish, and impotent creatures, as men: that their iniquities, though against the light of nature, yet flow from a defect in the powers of nature; since it is no man's fault that he is not stronger, or wiser, or better, than he was made to be: and therefore, though the light of reason renders him accountable for his actions, yet



his want of power to do what his reason approves, will make his defects excusable in the sight of his equitable Judge.

You see how nearly natural religion and the Gospel are allied in the foundation of their hopes and expectations. It is pity such near friends, who have one common interest, should have any disputes. But disputes there are.

Far be from us to weaken the hopes of nature. The Gospel is no enemy to these hopes; so far otherwise, that all the hopes and expectations of nature are so many preparations to the Gospel of Christ, and lead us to embrace that mercy offered by Christ, which nature so long and so earnestly has sought after.

But the question is, whether these natural hopes can give us such security of pardon, and of life and immortality, as will justify us in rejecting the light of revelation? Now, whoever depends on the forgiveness of God, admits himself to be in a case that wants pardon; that is, admits himself to be a sinner. This being the case of mankind in general, let it be considered,

First, that natural religion could not be originally founded in the consideration of man's being a sinner, and in the expectation of pardon.

Secondly, that the hopes which we are able to form in our present circumstances, are too weak and imperfect to give us entire satisfaction.

Thirdly, that the coming of Christ has supplied these defects, and has perfected and completed the hopes of nature.

It must be allowed, that the original religion of

nature was agreeable to the original state of nature : and consequently, if natural religion is founded in the consideration of man's sin and weakness, it follows, that man was originally formed a sinner and weak. But farther,

Supposing men made originally to be what we see they are, upon what grounds are we to hope for an alteration for the better? For, if it was consistent with God's goodness to put men into this state originally, how is it inconsistent with his goodness to continue that state, which was at first his own appointment? He could no more act inconsistently with his goodness at the beginning of the world, than he can at the end of it. If reason therefore admits the present state of the world to be of God's appointment, it must never afterwards pretend to entertain hopes of being delivered from it; and without such hopes all religion is vain and useless.

It may be thought perhaps, that, supposing the present state of things to be of God's appointment, we cannot be answerable for what we do; for why should he blame us for doing the work he has appointed? Allow this reasoning; yet no religion can be built on it; for it can go no farther than to say that we ought not to be punished for our doings: it can never shew that we have any title to be put into a better state: the utmost it can pretend to prove, is, that we are absolutely unaccountable; and, if so, there is nothing we can do to less purpose, than to trouble our heads about religion.

Farther, if the laws of nature are the precepts of natural religion, as without all doubt they are, it

follows, that natural religion can be nothing else but obedience to the laws of nature; and, consequently, the genuine hopes of natural religion must be founded in obedience. This must necessarily be the case; for all laws are made to be obeyed. No prince was ever so absurd as to make laws with this view, that his subjects might break them, and he shew his goodness in pardoning their transgressions: and yet this must have been the scheme of Providence, if natural religion was nothing else from the beginning but an expectation of pardon for sin.

Secondly, let us take a view of our present state, without inquiring whether any and what change has happened to put us into this condition; and let us consider what may be expected from our present circumstances. Two things may be affirmed with certainty of the present condition of mankind: one is, that they have a sense of their obligation to obey the laws of reason and nature; which is evident from the force of natural conscience: the other is, that very few do in any tolerable degree, and none perfectly, pay this obedience.

Let us examine then how religion will stand upon these circumstances. It is impossible to found the hopes of religion on innocence and obedience; for obedience is not paid. On the other hand, absolute impunity cannot be claimed for all sins; much less can any degree of happiness, either present or future, be claimed in behalf of offenders. The utmost probability to which human reason can arrive in this case, is, that, the goodness of God and the

weakness of man considered, God may favourably accept our endeavours, how imperfect soever our attainments may be. But is this reasoning built on infallible principles? Can any certainty or security arise out of this? any that can give rest or peace to the mind of man, ever inquisitive after futurity? Will you promise impunity to offenders upon repentance? Impunity, mere impunity, is not the thing that nature seeks after: she craves something more. But can the argument from the divine mercy be carried farther? Is it not great mercy to pardon sinners? Can you with decency desire a reward for them? Our Saviour has told us, that, when we have done our best, we must still own *that we are unprofitable servants*: and, if we reflect that all our natural powers are the gift of God, and, consequently, our best services are but a debt paid to the donor; if we consider that in all we do there is no profit to the Most High, that his power and majesty are not exalted by our service, nor lessened by our neglect; we shall find that our own reason teaches us the same lesson, and that, when we confess ourselves unprofitable servants, we give greater evidence of our understanding than of our humility. And, if this be truly the case, what are the claims of natural religion? are they not the claims of unprofitable servants? the claims of those to whom nothing is due?

Thirdly, let us now take a view of the conditions and promises of the Gospel, and see whether we have any reason to be offended at them. As to the laws which are made the conditions of our happi-

ness, they are not new impositions, but as old as reason itself, and the very same which natural religion stands bound to obey. Here then can be no complaint, at least no just one. So far then we are quite safe, that we can be no losers by the Gospel, since it lays no new burden on us. In all other respects our case is extremely altered for the better. We feel ourselves easily tempted to do wrong, and unable to pay the obedience we owe to righteousness. Hopes therefore from our innocence we have none, but are forced to have recourse to the mercy of God. Now this mercy, which we hope for, the Gospel offers us in the name of God. Have we any reason to suspect the offer? or to reject that very mercy, when promised by God, which our own reason teaches us to expect at his hands?

If we sin, nature has no refuge but in repentance; and how far that will go, we know not: nature has not, cannot teach us this knowledge. From the Gospel we learn, that true repentance shall never be in vain; shall not only protect us from punishment, but shall also set open to us the doors of life and immortality. There you may view religion once more restored to its native hope of glory and life for evermore. You will be no longer obliged to wander in the mazes and intricacies of human reason, and to speculate upon the attributes of divine mercy and justice; the limits and boundaries of which are not to be determined by the wit of man, and the contemplation of which abounds with terrors as well as hopes: but you may see the clear and immutable purpose of God to give salvation to all who, with penitent hearts, and



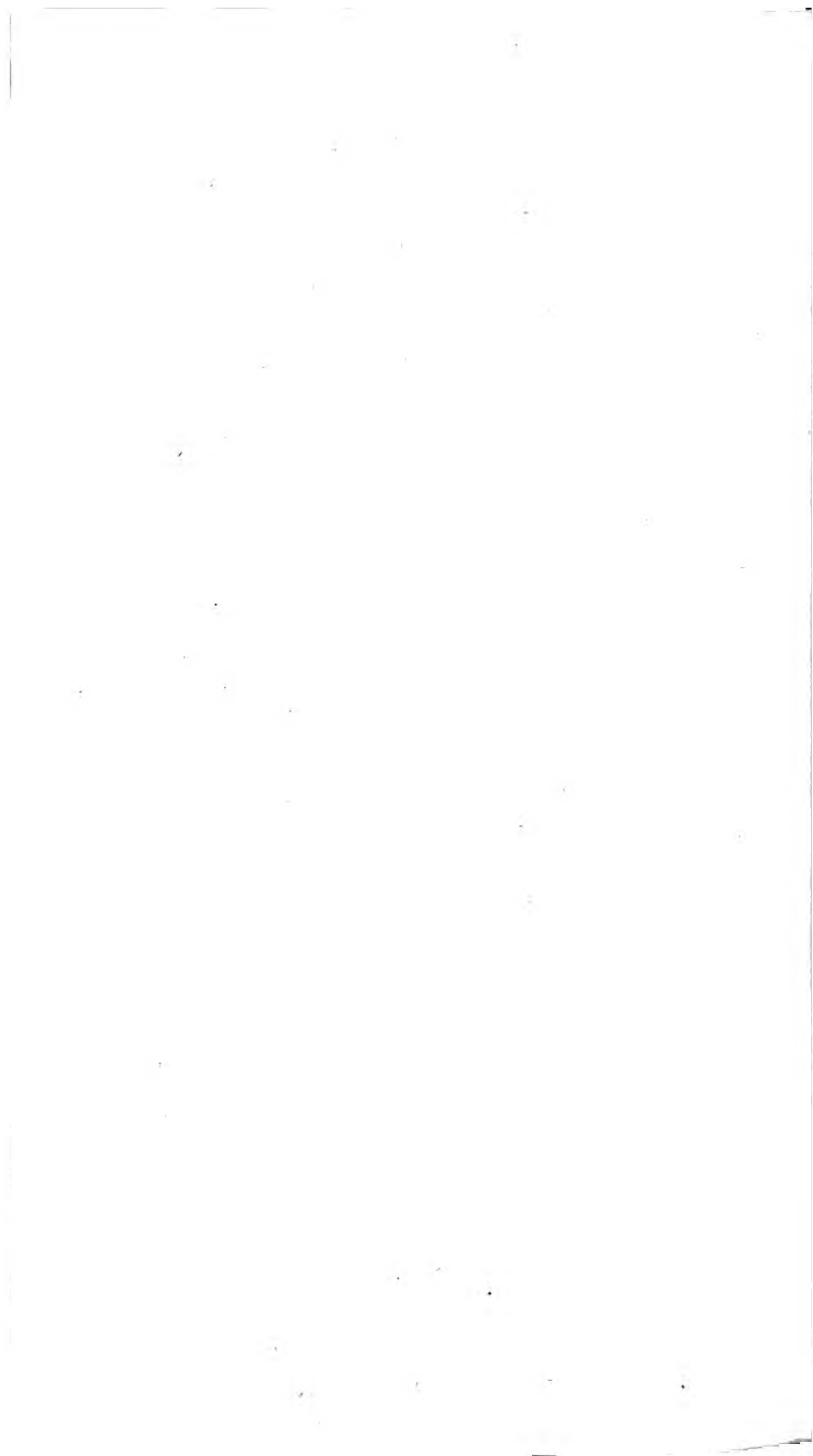
a firm reliance on his word, endeavour after righteousness.

One would imagine the Gospel should easily find credit with men, when all its promises do so exactly tally and correspond with the hopes of nature. Has nature any reason to complain of this? Is it an objection to the Gospel, that it has confirmed all your hopes and expectations, that it has given you the security of God's promise to establish the very wishes of your heart? You trust, you say, that he who made you still retains some love for you: to convince you that he does, *he has sent his well-beloved Son into the world to save sinners.* Though you offend, yet you hope on repentance to be forgiven: the Gospel confirms this hope; the terms of it are more beneficial, and convey to true penitents not only hope, but a claim to pardon. But pardon only will not satisfy: there is still something farther that nature craves, something which with unutterable groans she pants after, even life and happiness for evermore. She sees all her children go down to the grave: all beyond the grave is to her one wide waste, a land of doubt and uncertainty: when she looks into it, she has her hopes, and she has her fears; and, agitated by the vicissitude of these passions, she finds no ground whereon to rest her foot. How different is the scene which the Gospel opens! There we see the heavenly Canaan, the new Jerusalem; in which city of the great God there are mansions, many mansions, for receiving them, *who through faith, and patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and immortality.* Our blessed Master has abolished death, and re-

deemed us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, that we may dwell in his presence as long as time itself shall last.

If we were to form a system of religion for ourselves that should answer to all our wishes and desires, what more could we ask for ourselves than what the Gospel has offered? The obedience required of us is the same to which we are antecedently bound, in virtue of that reason and understanding which makes us to be men. The promises of the Gospel extend to more than nature could ever claim; they take in all her wishes, establish all her hopes; and they are offered by a hand that is able to make them good.

The conclusion of the whole is, that, since the religion of a sinner must necessarily be founded in the hopes of mercy; since these hopes have at best but uncertain foundation in natural religion, and are liable to be disturbed and shaken by frequent doubts and misgivings of mind; we have great reason to bless and adore the goodness of God, who has openly displayed before our eyes the love that he has for the children of men, by sending *his well-beloved Son into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*



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## DISCOURSE VI.

2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

*—And hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.*

THESE words being spoken of our blessed Saviour, and affirming that he through the Gospel brought life and immortality to light, are thought by some to be exclusive of all arguments for a future immortality, drawn either from the light of reason and nature, or from the writings of Moses: for, if the hopes of immortality were so supported before the coming of Christ Jesus, it could not be truly asserted of him, *that he brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.* And so far at least they must be allowed to argue justly, that, if the text is to be understood in this exclusive sense, it will affect the proofs and authorities of any former revelation equally with those of sense and reason. But then, on the other side, it is certain, that, if this argument does not impeach the authority of Moses with regard to this fundamental article of faith, neither will it shut out the proofs of natural religion; since it must destroy the evidence of both, or of neither. Now, that it does not set aside the authority of Moses, is evident from our Saviour's argument to the Sadducees: *Now that the*

*dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, Luke xx. 37.* From whence it appears, that our Saviour thought the law of Moses afforded good proof of a future life ; which is inconsistent with the supposition that there was no evidence for life and immortality till the publication of the Gospel.

But, supposing Moses or the law of nature to afford evidence for a future life and immortality, it remains to be considered, in what sense the words of the text are to be understood, which do affirm *that life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel.* To bring any thing to light may signify, according to the idiom of the English tongue, to discover or reveal a thing which was perfectly unknown before : but the word in the original is so far from countenancing, that it will hardly admit of this sense. The Greek runs thus ; φωτίσαντος δὲ ζῶν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν. Now φωτίζειν signifies (not to bring to light, but) to enlighten, illustrate, or clear up any thing. You may judge by the use of the word in other places : it is used in John i. 9. *That was the true light, which lighteth (or enlighteneth) every man that cometh into the world ; ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον.* Jesus Christ did not by coming into the world bring men to light ; but he did by the Gospel enlighten men, and make those, who were dark and ignorant before, wise even to salvation. In like manner our Lord did enlighten the doctrine of life and immortality, not by giving the first or only notice of it, but by clearing up the doubts and difficulties under which it laboured, and giving a better



evidence for the truth and certainty of it, than nature or any revelation before had done. There is one place more, where our translators render the original word as they have done in the text: 1 Cor. iv. 5. *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.* But in this place it had been more properly rendered, *who will cast light upon the hidden things of darkness; and, so rendered, it better suits what follows, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.* The hidden things of darkness, which shall be brought to light at the coming of the Lord, are the actions and practices of wicked men; which, though they are of a certain and determinate nature, are yet hard to judge of, because we cannot discern the springs and motives from whence they arise: perfectly unknown to us they are not; if they were, there was no occasion for the Apostle to forbid us judging of them; for men do not, cannot judge at all of things which do not at all fall under their notice: but they are so dark and obscure, that it is hard to judge rightly of them; and therefore it is but prudent to suspend our sentence till the day comes which will make all things clear, which will hold such a light to these hidden things of darkness, that we shall manifestly discern them, and be able to view them on every side. So that, in this case, the hidden things of darkness are not supposed to be perfectly unknown, but only to be so dark and involved, that we cannot safely pass our judgment on them; and *to bring them to light im-*

ports no more than to set them in a clear light, and to make them plain and manifest to the eyes of all the world. According to the use then of the original word, *to bring life and immortality to light* signifies to illustrate and make plain this great doctrine of religion, to dispel the doubts and uncertainties in which it was involved, and to give evident proof and demonstration to the world of the certainty of a future life and immortality.

The text, thus explained, leaves us at liberty to make the best both of the evidence of nature and of Moses for a future life and immortality, and asserts nothing to the Gospel but this prerogative, that it has given a surer and fuller proof of this fundamental article, than ever the world before was acquainted with. The true point then now before us, and which takes in the whole view of the text, is, to consider the evidence which mankind had for the doctrine of immortality before the coming of Christ, and the evidence which the Gospel now affords; and to shew where the former evidence failed, and how it is supplied by the latter.

It would take up too much time to examine minutely the several arguments for the immortality of the soul, which are to be found in the writings of heathen authors; nor would it perhaps answer the purpose of our present inquiry: for the natural evidence in this case is not so much to be estimated by the acuteness of this or that writer, as by the common sense and apprehension of mankind: and this, and all other opinions which have any pretension to derive themselves from nature, owe their authority, not to the abstracted reasonings of any school,

but to some general sense and notion which is found in all men, or to some common and uncontroverted maxim of reason. The unbelievers of this age have abused their time and pains in their endeavours to expose the natural evidence of immortality, by confronting the different sentiments of the ancient philosophers, and by shewing their uncertainty and inconsistency: for what if Plato, if Aristotle, if Tully, are inconsistent with one another, or with themselves, in their abstracted arguings upon this point? What is this to the evidence of nature, which is not the single opinion of Plato, or any other philosopher, but the united voice of all mankind? This was the common belief of the world, derived from some common sense, or principle of reason, before any philosopher had so much as thought of an abstracted reason for the proof of it: and, had not the common sense of nature dictated this truth to them, I am very confident the philosophical reasons had never been thought of. That the common belief and persuasion was the foundation of the philosophical inquiry, is evident from hence, that all the ancient writers upon this subject appeal to the common notion and consent of mankind, as one great argument for the truth of the doctrine: which certainly proves this at least, that the world was possessed of this belief long before they were writers, or ever the philosophical reasons were thought of. If the notion was common, that alone is a sufficient proof that it did not arise from abstracted reasoning; for no common opinion ever did, or ever can: and the reason is plain; for a common opinion is that which is received by the generality of men,

who never were, who never will be, capable of attending to abstracted reason. Now this natural evidence, distinguished from the intricacies of philosophy, is the thing which we inquire after, and which will stand its ground, whatever becomes of the private notions of learned men : for nature may be in the right in giving notice of a future life, however men may be mistaken, when they come to consider and ascertain the nature and cause of it ; which to do is the mark and aim of philosophy.

But the common consent is the voice and law of nature ; for what all agree in must needs derive itself from something that is common to all ; and what is so, but the sense and instinct of nature ? When men come to speculation, they differ as much in the cast and turn of their minds, as they do in the features and lineaments of their faces ; and therefore speculative reasoning will never produce a common persuasion.

This belief and persuasion of the certainty of a future life arose from the common sense that men have of the difference of good and evil, and of every man's being accountable for the things done in this world ; which account not being taken in this world, as the least degree of observation will enable men to see, they concluded, or rather they felt from the very force of reason and conscience, that there was an account to be given hereafter. Such an internal argument as this, which springs up in the heart and from the heart of every man, has a greater weight in it, than all the reasonings of philosophy put together, and will tie men down, if not to hope for, yet at least to fear a future immortality ; either

of which is the silent voice of nature testifying the reality of a life to come.

That this is the true foundation of the universal belief of a future life, may be learnt from hence, that the persuasion of another life was always connected with the supposition that there were different states for good and bad men ; so that you cannot any where trace the notion of immortality, but you find evidence also for the different conditions of men in another life, according as they have behaved themselves in this. Now these two opinions being thus inseparably united, it is easy to judge which is the natural sense, and which the consequence : let any man try, and he will find, that it is not the expectation of living, that makes men infer the reasonableness or necessity of a judgment ; but it is the reasonable and natural expectation of judgment, which makes them infer the necessity and reality of a future life.

Into what great absurdities this natural notion grew under the management of poets, is well known : they named the princes and the judges, and described the tortures of the wicked, as their fancies led them ; and their inventions became the vulgar theology. But this still shews the truth of what I have asserted ; for neither would the poets, whose business it is to raise fine scenes upon the plan and probability of nature, have so painted the torments and the enjoyments of men departed, neither would the world have received their inventions, had there been no foundation in nature to support the romance.

As to such as imagine that the notion of a future



life arose from the descriptions and inventions of poets, they may e'en as well suppose that eating and drinking had the same original, and that men had never thought of it but for the fine feasts and entertainments which are described in such writers. The poets were the Papists of antiquity, who corrupted the genuine sentiments of nature, and obscured the light of reason, by introducing the wild conceits of folly and superstition: and, when once they had grafted the slips of superstition upon the stock of nature, they throve so fast, and grew so rank, that the natural branches were even starved by the luxuriancy of this wild olive. But still the root was natural, though the fruit was wild. All that nature teaches is, that there is a future life, distinguished into different states of happiness and misery, in which men will be rewarded or punished, according as they have pursued or neglected the rules of virtue and honour. And this notion prevailed where the fables of Greece had never been heard of; and wicked men felt in themselves the fear of the wrath which is to come, though they had never so much as learnt the name of Tantalus or Sisyphus, or any other sufferer in the poets' scene of hell.

The natural evidence then of life and immortality stands equally clear of the inventions of poetry, and the subtilties and refinements of philosophy; and, though it be allied to both, yet it arose from neither. The truth of the case with regard to both is this: the poets found men in possession of the doctrine of a future state, with rewards and punishments for good and bad men: upon this foundation they went

to work; and the plain draught of nature was almost hid under the shades and colours with which they endeavoured to beautify and adorn it. The philosophers found the same persuasion in themselves and others, and, as their profession led them, fought out for physical reasons to support the cause. This inquiry has furnished us with the various opinions of antiquity concerning the nature and operation of the soul, its manner of acting in the body and out of it, its eternity and immortality, and many other curious pieces of learning. How far any or all of these inquirers into nature succeeded in their attempt to prove the immortality of the soul from physical causes, is another question. As to the present point, it is plain the natural evidence is not concerned in their success, whatever it is; for the natural evidence is prior to their inquiries, and stands upon another foot, upon the common sense and apprehension of mankind: and the schools may determine the soul to be fire, or air, or harmony, or what else they please; yet still nature will make every man feel that the grave will not secure him from appearing before the great tribunal, to which he is accountable.

So true is this, that, had it not been for philosophy, there had remained perhaps no footsteps of any unbelievers in this great article: for the sense of nature would have directed all right; but philosophy misguided many. For those who denied immortality, did not deny the common sense of nature, which they felt as well as others; but they rejected the notice, and thought it false, because they could not find physical causes to support the

belief, or thought that they found physical causes effectually to overthrow it. This account we owe to Cicero, one of the best judges of antiquity; who tells us plainly, that the reason why many rejected the belief of the immortality of the soul, was, because they could not form a conception of an unbodied soul. So that infidelity is of no older a date than philosophy; and a future state was not doubted of, till men had puzzled and confounded themselves in their search after the physical reason of the soul's immortality. And now consider how the case stands, and how far the evidence of nature is weakened by the authority of such unbelievers. All mankind receive the belief of a future life, urged to it every day by what they feel transacted in their own breasts: but some philosophers reject this opinion, because they have no conception of a soul distinct from the body; as if the immortality of the soul depended merely upon the strength of human imagination. Were the natural evidence of immortality built upon any particular notion of an human soul, the evidence of nature might be overthrown by shewing the impossibility or improbability of such notion: but the evidence of nature is not concerned in any notion; and all the common notions may be false, and yet the evidence of nature stand good, which only supposes man to be a rational creature, and, consequently, accountable: and, if any philosopher can prove the contrary, he may then, if his word will afterwards pass for any thing, reject this and all other evidence whatever.

The natural evidence, I say, supposes only that a

man is a rational, accountable creature: and, this being the true foundation in nature for the belief of the immortality, the true notion of nature must needs be this; that man, as such, shall live to account for his doings. The question then, upon the foot of nature, is this, What constitutes the man? and whoever observes with any care, will find that this is the point upon which the learned of antiquity divided. The vulgar spoke of men after death just in the same manner as they did of men on earth: and Cicero observes, that the common error (as he calls it) so far prevailed, that they supposed such things to be transacted *apud inferos, quæ sine corporibus nec fieri possent, nec intelligi*; which could neither be done, nor conceived to be done, without bodies. The generality of men could not arrive to abstracted notions of unbodied spirits: and, though they could not but think that the body, which was burnt before their eyes, was dissipated and destroyed; yet so great was the force of nature, which was ever suggesting to them that men should live again, that they continued to imagine men with bodies in another life, having no other notion or conception of men.

But with the learned nothing was held to be more absurd than to think of having bodies again in another state: and yet they knew that the true foundation of immortality was laid in this point, that the same individuals should continue. The natural consequence then was from these principles to exclude the body from being any part of the man: and all, I believe, who asserted an immortality, agreed in this notion. The Platonists un-

doubtedly did; and Cicero has every where declared it to be his opinion: *Tu habeto, says he, te non esse mortalem, sed corpus: nec enim is es quem forma ista declarat; sed mens cujusque is est quisque.* It is not you, but your body, which is mortal: for you are not what you appear to be; but it is the mind which is the man. This being the case, the controversy was necessarily brought to turn upon the nature of the soul; and the belief of immortality either prevailed or sunk, according as men conceived of the natural dignity and power of the soul. For this reason the corporealists rejected the opinion: for, since it was universally agreed among the learned that all that was corporeal of man died, they, who had no notion of any thing else, necessarily concluded that the whole man died.

From this view you may judge how the cause of immortality stood, and what difficulties attended it, upon the foot of natural religion. All men had a natural sense and expectation of a future life. The difficulty was to account how the same individuals, which lived and died in this world, and one part of which evidently went to decay, should live again in another world. The vulgar, who had no other notion of a man but what came in by their eyes, supposed that just such men as lived in this world should live in the next; overlooking the difficulties which lay in their way, whilst they ran hastily to embrace the sentiments of nature. This advantage they had however, that their opinion preserved the identity of individuals, and they conceived themselves to be the very same with respect to the life to come, as they found themselves to be in regard to the life



present. But then, had they been pressed, they could not have stood the difficulties arising from the dissolution of the body, the loss of which, in their way of thinking, was the loss of the individual.

The learned, who could not but see and feel this difficulty, to avoid it, shut out the body from being any part of the man, and made the soul alone to be the perfect individuum. This engaged them in endless disputes upon the nature of the soul; and this grand article of natural religion by this means was made to hang by the slender threads of philosophy; and the whole was entirely lost, if their first position proved false, that the soul is the whole man: and it is an assertion which will not perhaps stand the examination. The maintainers of this opinion, though they supposed a sensitive as well as a rational soul in man, which was the seat of the passions, and, consequently, the spring of all human actions; yet this sensitive soul they gave up to death as well as the body, and preserved nothing but the pure intellectual mind. And yet it is something surprising to think that a mere rational mind should be the same individual with a man, who consists of a rational mind, a sensitive soul, and a body. This carries no probability with it at first sight, and reason cannot undertake much in its behalf.

But, whatever becomes of these speculations, there is a farther difficulty, which can hardly be got over; which is, that this notion of immortality and future judgment can never serve the ends and purposes of religion, because it is a notion which the generality of mankind can never arrive at. Go to

the villages, and tell the ploughmen, that, if they sin, yet their bodies shall sleep in peace ; no material, no sensible fire shall ever reach them, but there is something within them purely intellectual, which shall suffer to eternity ; you will hardly find that they have enough of the intellectual to comprehend your meaning. Now natural religion is founded on the sense of nature, that is, upon the common apprehensions of mankind ; and therefore abstracted metaphysical notions, beat out upon the anvil of the schools, can never support natural religion, or make any part of it.

In this point then nature seems to be lame, and not able to support the hopes of immortality which she gives to all her children. The expectation of the vulgar, that they shall live again, and be just the same flesh and blood which now they are, is justifiable upon no principles of reason or nature. What is there in the whole compass of beings which yields a similitude of dust and ashes rising up again into regular bodies, and to perpetual immortality ? On the other side, that the intellectual soul should be the whole man, how justifiable soever it may be in other respects, yet it is not the common sense of nature, and therefore most certainly no part of natural religion.

But it may be worth inquiring how nature comes to be thus defective in this material point. Did not God intend men originally for religious creatures ? and, if he did, is it not reasonable to expect an original and consistent scheme of religion ? which yet in the point now before us seems to be wanting. The account of this we cannot learn from reason or

nature ; but in the sacred history the fact is cleared beyond dispute. The absurdity upon the common notion of immortality arises from the dissolution of the body at death ; and the great difficulty upon the foot of nature is how to preserve the individuals for judgment, which are evidently destroyed by death. Now, if this death was really a breach upon the state of nature, it is no wonder it should be a difficulty in the religion of nature ; for the religion of nature was most certainly adapted to the state of nature. And the wise man tells us, *that God made not death : for he created all things that they might have their being ; and the generations of the world were healthful ; and there is no poison of destruction in them ; nor the kingdom of death upon earth ; for righteousness is immortal. But ungodly men with their works and words called it to them.* If immortality was the condition of the creation, if death came in as a surprize upon nature, no wonder if she stands mute and astonished at the fatal change, and seems neither willing to part with her hopes of immortality, nor yet able to maintain them. Upon the plan of nature the common notion of immortality was the true one : for take death out of the question, which is the only separation of soul and body that we know any thing of, and there is no pretence for distinguishing between the man and the intellectual mind. The vulgar certainly retained the true original notion of nature ; but, when the original state of nature was lost, the notion grew absurd ; and it could not be otherwise. God made man immortal, and gave him consistent hopes and fears : man made himself mortal by sin : must not

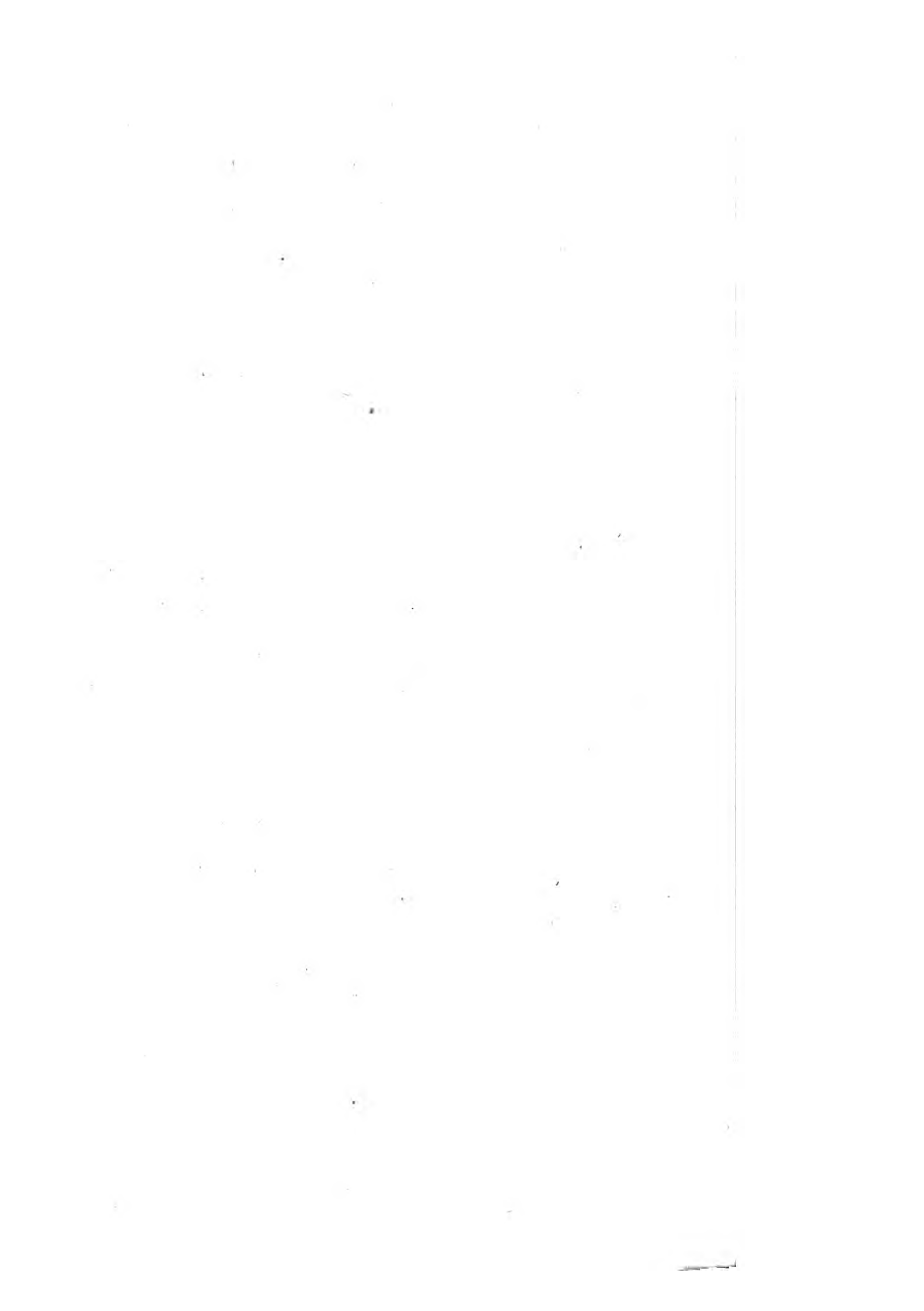
then those hopes, which were consistent hopes upon the foot of immortality, become very absurd, when joined to a state of mortality? And thus the coming in of death obscured the hopes of immortality.

Lastly, if we consider how our Saviour has enlightened this doctrine, it will appear that he has removed the difficulty at which nature stumbled. As death was no part of the state of nature, so the difficulties arising from it were not provided for in the religion of nature. To remove these was the proper work of revelation: these our Lord has effectually cleared by his Gospel, and shewn us that the body may and shall be united to the spirit in the day of the Lord, so that the complete man shall stand before the great tribunal to receive a just recompence of reward for the things done in the body. This account is given in the words preceding those of the text: *who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.* Now, if the abolishing of death was the bringing to light life and immortality, it is plain that the coming in of death was that which darkened nature in this great point of religion.

There are two things, as we learn from our Saviour's answer to the Sadducees, necessary to confirm us in the belief of a resurrection to come; namely, the knowledge of the power of God, and of the will of God: *Do ye not therefore err, says our Lord, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?* The Scriptures contain the revelation of the will of God; and therefore the words, I reckon, are to be understood as if he had said,

Ye err, not knowing the will of God and the power of God. If we are satisfied in these two points, that God both can and will raise the dead, we shall want nothing to assure us of the certainty of a resurrection. The power of God we may learn from reason and nature: for what should make us doubt but that he, who at the first formed man out of dust and ashes into a living soul, should be able to call him into life again out of the same state? But the Gospel has declared both his will and his power, which he confirmed in the raising his own Son from the grave; and better evidence we could not have for the possibility and certainty of a resurrection. This evidence of the Gospel has reinstated nature in all her hopes, confirmed her right to immortality, and taught her to triumph over death and the grave, which seemed before to be unmoveable bars to all her expectations. This has restored religion, which had hardly one sound foot to stand on, and made our faith and our reason consistent, which were before at too great distance. Nature indeed taught us to hope for immortality; but it was in spite of sense and experience, till the great Prince of our peace appeared, *who brought life and immortality to light through his Gospel.*





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## DISCOURSE VII.

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ROMANS iv. 25.

*Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*

THE manner of expression here used is different from what is generally to be met with in other parts of the New Testament upon the like occasion. Here we are told that Christ was *delivered* for our offences, and *raised* for our justification; as if the remission of our sins was to be ascribed peculiarly to the passion, and our justification in the sight of God to the resurrection of Christ: whereas in the chapter before this, ver. 25, the Apostle tells us in general, that God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation *through faith in his blood*; and in ch. v. ver. 9, particularly and expressly, *that, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him*; and ver. 10, *that we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son*. In the twentieth of the Acts, the Apostle, in his exhortation to the elders of the church, warns them *to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*, ver. 28. To the same purpose both St. Peter and St. John speak; the one telling us, *that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin*, 1 John i. 7; the other, that we have been redeemed *with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*, 1 Pet. i. 19.

It is the constant tenor of Scripture, that atonement for the sins of the world was made by our great High Priest upon the cross; that his death was our redemption, and his blood the price paid for us. So that, when we consider the redemption (which includes our justification) with respect to Christ, the author and finisher of it, it must be ascribed to his death and passion: but, as to ourselves, our title and interest in this common salvation being grounded on faith, our justification, though purchased by the blood of Christ, must be appropriated to ourselves through faith in that blood: for the same Apostle, who has told us that we are *justified freely through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*, hath likewise told us *that God hath set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood*. For this reason we are said to be justified by faith; not that our faith is the purchase of justification, which we owe to the blood of Christ alone; but because through faith we obtain the benefit of the redemption wrought by Christ Jesus. Now, though the death of Christ was the reconciling of the world to God, yet the resurrection of Christ is the great and solid foundation of our hope and faith in him, even of our faith in his blood, by which he made the propitiation for our sins: and therefore, although Christ died for our offences, and by his precious blood made atonement for our sins; yet, since our faith in his death, our hope in his blood, by which hope and faith we are justified, are built upon the truth and credit of his resurrection, it is very properly said, that *he rose again for our justification*: for the death of Christ

would have been no justification to us, nor could we have had hope or faith in it, but for the power and glory of the resurrection; which has wiped away the scandal and ignominy of the cross, and made it a rational act of faith to hope for life and immortality from him, who himself once died upon the tree.

For the truth of this exposition I appeal to St. Paul, who, 1 Cor. xv. 17, has told us, *that, if Christ be not risen, our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins.* So that faith in the death of Christ, not grounded on the assurance of his resurrection, is a vain faith, and such an one as cannot deliver us from our sins. Nay, that the death of Christ could not have been a propitiation for sin without his resurrection, he expressly teaches in the next verse, saying, that, *if Christ be not raised, then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished.*

The power of the resurrection, together with the atonement for sin made by the death of Christ, is very beautifully expressed by St. Paul, Rom. viii. 34: *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* The death of Christ freed us from condemnation; but then was our freedom made manifest, when he came from the grave in triumph, and led captivity captive; when he ascended to the right hand of his Father to be our perpetual High Priest and Mediator: for, as the Apostle argues, *if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; i. e. by his resurrection to life and to glory.*

This account, as it gives the true interpretation of the text, so likewise does it shew of what great moment the resurrection of our Lord was, which was to be the basis and support of the whole Christian institution, and the ground of our hope and faith in him. That Christ died the death of a common malefactor, after a life spent in innocency, and a constant and laborious teaching of the great duties of religion and morality, was but common to him, and others before him, whom God had raised up to be shining lights of the world. Thus the prophets of old were persecuted and destroyed by fundry kinds of death : but in their blood there was no expiation for sin : the blood of Abel and of the prophets spoke no such language, but cried to God for vengeance against a cruel and a guilty world. Had Christ died like one of them, and been no more heard of, how should we have believed that his death had atoned for all the rest of the blood that had been spilt from the foundation of the world ? or that the whole earth had obtained remission of sin from God by destroying one more, and him the greatest of all the prophets, in the most cruel manner ? But, when our Lord rose from the grave, and brought back with him the pardon which he had sealed with his own blood ; when, instead of executing wrath upon his enemies, he sent again the offer of peace and reconciliation, and took upon himself to be their Mediator and Intercessor, as he had already been their Sacrifice ; what room was there to doubt of the efficacy of his death, the efficacy of which was so undeniably confirmed by his resurrection ? or what reason to mistrust the salva-



tion he offered others, when, by saving himself from the power of death, he had given the fullest evidence how able he was to save others also? The most incredulous of his enemies desired him only *to come down from the cross, and they would believe him*: but how much better reason had they to believe him, when he came, not from the cross, but from the grave, which was by much the surer hold, and from which before no mortal had ever escaped! How undeniable was this testimony of God's love to mankind, that, after the ill reception his Son had found among them, after all the cruel usage he had experienced, and the ignominious death he had suffered, he yet sent him once more from the grave to convince unbelievers, and to proclaim and confirm the pardon he had purchased for them!

His first coming was attended with a mean birth and narrow fortune, his education was suitable to his condition, and the greatest part of his life spent in obscurity: *he had no form or comeliness that we should desire him; he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*: and when he fell a victim to the malice and rage of the people, his best friends, the constant companions of his sorrow, gave him over for lost; *they esteemed him stricken and smitten of God*: all their hopes died with him, and the remembrance of his miracles and mighty works was buried in the same tomb with himself; and nothing less was thought of, than that *this was he who should redeem Israel from all his sins*. But, when he came again from the bosom of the earth, having subdued the powers of darkness and of death, then was he declared to be the Son of God with power;

and the glory as of the only-begotten Son of God shone clearly through the veil of flesh which had so long obscured it. And from thenceforth our faith has stood, not in the words which the wisdom or cunning of man teacheth, but in the power and demonstration of the Spirit of life: and we can with assurance say, *We know in whom we have trusted*, expecting life and salvation from him alone, who is the Lord of life and glory. But, after all, if the resurrection of Christ is the support of all other articles of the Christian faith, how is itself supported? To our common apprehension nothing more incredible than that a man dead and buried should be restored to life again.

To go into the particulars of the evidence of this great event, recorded in Scripture and the oldest writers of the church, would open too large a field of discourse at present: and indeed there are some objections which naturally arise in the minds of men, which ought previously to that inquiry to be removed; for the great difficulty at which men stick, does not arise so much from the nature of the evidence we propose, as from the nature of the thing itself. The presumptions against the possibility of a resurrection operate so strongly in the minds of some, that they think it needless to inquire what evidence there is for it, being persuaded that the thing itself is not capable of being supported by any evidence. This prejudice was a very early one; for the Apostle exhortulates this case with King Agrippa, *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?*

Let us consider the force of this exhortulation,

and see whether it is strong enough to encounter the prejudice.

Now, nothing can be said to be incredible, if there is a power in any person able to effect it; for, if there is such a power, that power may bring into existence that very thing which you doubt of; and it cannot be incredible that a thing should exist, which may possibly really exist. If we consider only the strength of children, it is incredible that they should build castles; but, if we consider the strength and ability of men, it would be ridiculous to doubt whether they could, or no. So that the credibility or incredibility of any thing depends on knowing whether there is, or is not, a power adequate to the undertaking. The resurrection of the dead is in truth a very stupendous work: but neither you nor I am to undertake it: if it depended on us, it would be incredible indeed. It is the work of God, and of him only: and surely I have named one of credit and power sufficient to be trusted in this great affair. And this is St. Paul's argument, Why should it be thought incredible *that God should raise the dead?* Whoever therefore affirms that a resurrection is in itself a thing incredible, must affirm that it is incredible that God has power to raise the dead. And now consider who it is that can consistently with the common and allowed principles of reason and nature deny this power to God. No one certainly, who admits that God made the world, can entertain this doubt: for, if God has given us the life we now enjoy, what should hinder him from restoring life again, after this is lost? Can there be more difficulty in

giving life the second time, than there was at first? If there be any contradiction therefore in the notion of a resurrection, there must be the very same in the notion of creation. And therefore natural religion is just as much concerned in this point as revelation: for, though the belief of the fact, that the dead shall be raised, depends on revelation; yet our belief that God has power to raise the dead depends not on revelation, but on the clear dictates of reason, of that reason by which we discover him to be our creator. And, if you doubt even of this his power of creation, you must bid adieu to all religion at once: for, if God created not the world, how are you at all related to him? If he did not make us, what right he has to govern us, or what pretence to our obedience, neither you from nature, nor we from revelation, can ever be satisfied.

The power of God being admitted to be equal to this work, the question of the resurrection of Christ comes to be a question of fact: and, though I propose not to enter into the evidence of the fact, yet it may be proper to observe, that a resurrection, considered as a fact, is a fact as capable of evidence as any whatever; it is an object of sense, of every sense by which we judge of the reality of things without us.

We are told, *that Christ died, and rose again.* Of his death, I suppose, there is no great doubt: die he certainly did: and surely there could be no more difficulty to see and know that he was dead, than in knowing when others were dead, from Adam to this day. One would think, therefore, that those about him, who saw him crucified and



buried, might be trusted when they report that he died.

But he came to life again : very true ; and it was very easy for those who conversed with him to know whether he was alive, or no. There was no more difficulty in judging of his being alive, than of judging, in any other case, whether those we converse with are alive, or no. His having been dead and buried could not possibly alter the case, or create any difficulty in judging whether he was really alive, or no. So that the resurrection, considered as a fact, was in every part of it an object of sense, and as capable of being well attested as any other object of sense whatever. Lay these things together, the promise of God to give us life eternal, his power to make good his word, the confirmation he has given us of our hope by the resurrection of Christ ; and what is wanting to make the belief of this article a rational act of faith ?

The promises of God have never borrowed help from moral probabilities. The promises to Abraham were not of this kind ; so far otherwise, that it is said of him, that, *against hope, he believed in hope* ; that is, he hoped, where, humanly speaking, there was no ground for hope. There was no probability that his seed, who was a stranger and pilgrim on earth, should inherit the land of Canaan, possessed by great and powerful nations.

The promise of a son to him, when he and his wife were both too far advanced in years to expect one in the ordinary course of nature, was contrary to experience and to natural probability. But what says the Apostle ? *Abraham, not being weak in faith,*

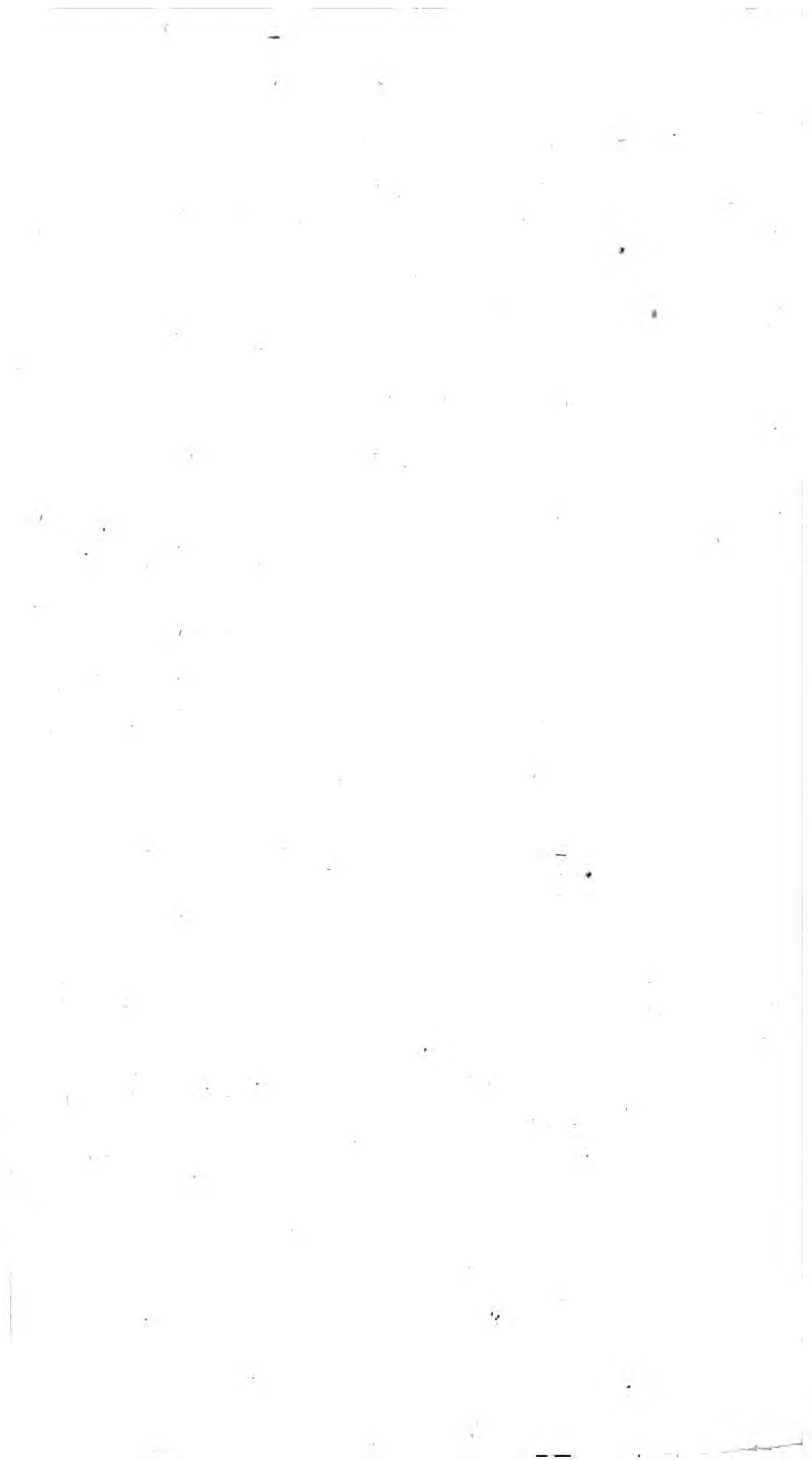


*considered not his own body, now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.—But he staggered not at the promise of God,—being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform.* This reliance on the promises of God, against all the presumptions of human experience and probability, was the very thing, as St. Paul tells us, that *was imputed to him for righteousness.*

Compare now this case with the case of Christians. We have great promises made to us by God in Christ Jesus, the promises of a resurrection to life. Inquire of the world; they know of no such thing, the ages past have afforded no instance of this kind, and, as far as they can see and judge, daily experience is a witness against this hope. Under these difficulties, whither shall we go for refuge and support? whither! but to the promises of God, and to this full persuasion, *that what he has promised he is able to perform.* If we hold fast this persuasion, and stagger not through unbelief, then shall we indeed be the children of the faith of Abraham, whose *faith was imputed to him for righteousness*: for, as St. Paul tells us, this testimony of Abraham's faith *was not written for his sake alone, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.* Here then is the great article of Christian faith, even of that faith which will be imputed to us for righteousness: it is a firm confidence and reliance upon God, under this peculiar character, that he is the raiser-up of the dead, and will, according to his promise, raise us to life eternal.

For the confirmation of this hope and faith God raised his own Son from the grave ; who for that reason is said to be raised for *our justification*, since upon the authority and credit of his resurrection depends that great article of faith, by which alone we are to be justified.

As the blessed fruit of this faith is to all true believers life and immortality, so it highly concerns us to consider what the event of unbelief must be. Many would perhaps content themselves without the hopes of glory and future happiness, if that was all. But that is not all : *for the dead shall be raised*, whether you like it, or like it not ; *all who are in the grave shall come forth*, some to life, some to condemnation, according to the things done in the body. Nothing can secure to us more effectually an happy state in futurity, than a constant and steady belief and expectation of the resurrection of the dead. This will convince us that what we are now doing are not such trifling things as to be soon forgotten, or attended with consequences only for to-day or to-morrow ; but they are things long to be remembered, things noted down in God's book, and will be exposed to view at the great day in the presence of men and of angels, and be attended with consequences through all the ages of eternity, to our great honour and happiness, or to our great confusion and misery.



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## DISCOURSE VIII.

ROMANS viii. 16.

*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*

TO be the children of God is the greatest privilege under the Gospel, and, consequently, implies in it all the advantages that belong to, and all the qualities necessary to make, a good Christian. Thus our Apostle argues: *if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.* As this is a new state, which belongs not to us by nature, so our entrance into it is stiled a new birth; and we are said *to be born again, and to be begotten again*, to these hopes: he, from whom we receive these hopes, is the Father that begets us, and his children we are: and therefore, as we receive our spiritual life from the gift and mercy of God, he is our father, and we are his children. Thus St. Peter tells us, *that we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*, 1 Pet. i. 23. This new life we receive by the ministration of the Spirit: the powers which belong to this life, and in which it consists, depend upon the influences of the Spirit: and

therefore we are said *to be born of the Spirit*. He is the earnest of our inheritance, the pledge and security which we receive from God of our future immortality: our right of inheritance depends upon the relation we bear to God of sons and children: and therefore the Spirit of adoption, by which we are born to God, is the pledge and security of our inheritance, as he is styled by our Apostle.

But the difficulty is, how to make the first step, and to know assuredly that we are the children of God. When once we are sure of this, it will not be hard to believe that God will provide for his own children, and secure to them an inheritance that fadeth not away. And here the Apostle tells us, *that the Spirit itself*, that is, the same Spirit by which we are made children, *beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*. It is matter of great dispute, what sort of evidence the Apostle here means, and what kind of certainty arises from it. Some have placed this evidence among the gifts of the Spirit, and supposed it to be given on purpose to assure the elect of the certainty of their salvation. Others maintain, that no man, unless it be specially revealed to him by God, can ever know that he is in a state of security in this life: and this opinion was received and confirmed by the Council of Trent, as may be seen at large in the sixth session. It will not be worth my pains or your patience to enter into the niceties of this controversy: and therefore I shall confine myself to St. Paul, and endeavour to shew you his meaning in the text, which will go a great way towards giving us right notions and apprehensions in



this matter. In order to this, I propose three things to be considered:

First, How many witnesses St. Paul points out to us in the text, and who they are.

Secondly, What kind of evidence each of them gives in this case.

Thirdly, What the result of their evidence is, and with what kind of certainty we know *that we are the children of God.*

First, We are to consider how many witnesses St. Paul points out to us in the text, and who they are. As our translators have represented St. Paul's meaning, there is no room for dispute concerning the number of the witnesses, which are evidently two: *the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit*: the Spirit itself, that is, the Spirit of adoption, which Christians receive, is one witness; and our own spirit is the other witness. But the vulgar Latin, and several other translators, render the words to this effect: *the Spirit itself beareth witness to our spirit.* According to this sense, which is maintained by Grotius and Crellius, and some others, there is but one witness, the Spirit of adoption, who bears evidence to our spirit. But the words in the original evidently imply the sense which our translators follow: *Αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν.* Συμμαρτυρεῖν signifies to be a fellow-witness, or to witness the same thing that another does: and so the word constantly signifies in Scripture, and is never used but where there is a concurrent evidence of two witnesses. We meet with the same word in Rom. ii. 15: *which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness,*

*and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* And to this place Grotius sends us, to shew that the word is used of one single witness only; as here the conscience only is said to bear witness. But a little attention will shew us in this place another witness: the Apostle proves from the evidence of conscience, that the Gentiles had the work or matter of the law written in their hearts: the law testifies to men what is good, and what is evil: if conscience testifies the same thing to be good and just which the law does, then conscience proves the matter of the law to be written in the heart; if it testifies any thing else, so be it: but no other evidence will prove the Apostle's assertion, that the Gentiles have the work of the law written in their heart. And therefore the Apostle's argument stands thus: the Gentiles shew the work of the law to be written in their heart by the testimony of their conscience, which agrees with the testimony of the law; their conscience and the law both allowing and forbidding the same thing. So that the Apostle's argument plainly supposes the concurrent evidence of the law and of conscience. And therefore even here the word *συμμαρτυρεῖν* points out two witnesses to us. The same word is used by St. Paul in the first verse of the ninth chapter of the Romans: *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness, συμμαρτυρήσῃς μοι.* But here evidently are two witnesses to the same thing. When a man does not speak the truth, it is certain that he witnesses one thing, and his conscience witnesses another, and are therefore two distinct witnesses:

so are they likewise when a man speaks truth; for the same evidence will not make two witnesses to be one witness. And therefore here also there are two witnesses; St. Paul, who witnessed his affection to his countrymen; and his conscience, which witnessed for his sincerity. The word is used but once more in the New Testament, and that is in the last chapter of the Revelations; and there it is used with respect to a testimony, in which Christ, and his Angel whom he sent to the churches, and even St. John, were concerned. So that the word is every where used of the concurrent evidence of two or more witnesses. And, this being the constant use of the word, there can be no reason given why it should not be taken in the same sense here, and rendered, *The Spirit itself beareth witness, not to, but with, or together with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* Here then are two witnesses; and who they are, is next to be considered.

Who the first Spirit is, must be learnt from what goes before. In the second verse of this chapter we read of *the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which hath made us free from the law of sin and of death*: in the ninth verse he is called *the Spirit of God and of Christ*; in the eleventh verse, *the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead*; in the fifteenth verse, *the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father.* In the verse of the text reference is had to this Spirit: *the Spirit itself*, that is, the Spirit which has made us free in Christ Jesus, the Spirit by which we have received adoption, does itself bear witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. But the question then is, whether Spirit in all these

places be the name of a person, or whether it denotes only a quality and temper belonging to Christians; so that the Spirit of Christ shall signify no more than the mind of Christ does in another place, *Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus*; that is, the same temper and disposition. This sense Crellius maintains, and others after him; and thus he explains the text: our evangelical spirit, that is, as he explains himself in another place, our evangelical temper, is a sufficient argument to our own minds that we are the children of God. I mean not to dispute this point with Crellius, and his brethren, the Socinians; which would be to run into a great controversy: but, since the Spirit of Christ may and does sometimes signify both ways, I shall endeavour to point out to such as have no private prejudices to be maintained, which sense is here to be followed. First then, this Spirit is the Spirit of life, by which we are made free; that is, by which we are regenerated in Christ Jesus, and set at liberty from the heavy yoke of sin, which the Apostle had been describing in the foregoing chapter. Now, an evangelical temper is not the cause, but the consequent of this freedom. The Spirit of God is the efficient cause; of whom we are said, for that reason, to be born. Secondly, it is the Spirit of him who raised up Christ; that is, the Spirit by which he wrought that great wonder and miracle, as is evident by taking the whole eleventh verse together: *If the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* So that the Spirit of him who raised

Christ from the dead, is the Spirit *by which* he raised Christ from the dead ; that is, the Holy Spirit, who is mighty in works and wonders. Lastly, it is the Spirit of adoption, by which we are made sons : the Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of which we are born in Christ ; of which birth an evangelical temper is not the cause, but the effect. So that, by the whole tenor of the Apostle's arguing, it appears, that the Spirit which beareth witness with our spirit, is the Holy Spirit of God, which works together with our spirit to enable us to perform the just and holy will of God. As to the second witness, our own spirit, I need not spend much time to tell you who it is, since most are agreed that it is our own mind. *Who knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him?* that is, save his mind and conscience. So then the faithful Christian has two witnesses of his being the Son of God ; the Holy Spirit of God, and his own mind and conscience.

Let us therefore, in the second place, inquire, what evidence each of them gives in this case. In order to this, we must look back to the latter part of the foregoing chapter, to which this verse of the text relates : for in all this eighth chapter there is not one word said before of our own mind or spirit, nor the least hint of any evidence that it gives of our being the children of God. Our crying Abba, Father, in the fifteenth verse, is very improperly pitched upon by some as the evidence proceeding from our own mind ; since it is said expressly, that we cry Abba, Father, by the Spirit of adoption : so that our crying Abba, Father, is an evidence



coming not from our own minds, but from the Holy Spirit. The power to do good comes from the influence of the Holy Spirit; and therefore the good we do is such an evidence of our being the sons of God, as we stand obliged to the Spirit of God for: *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God, ver. 14.* To be led by the Spirit, is *through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh, ver. 13.* So that our victory over the flesh is the effect of our having the Holy Spirit to assist and strengthen us, and is consequently, as it is a great evidence and assurance to us of our being the children of God, the evidence of that Spirit from whom it proceeds; that is, not our own spirit, but the Spirit of God. So that the great privileges mentioned in this chapter, such as being made free from the law of sin and death, of walking not after the flesh, but the Spirit, being such as we receive from the Spirit of God, are therefore evidences of the Spirit for our regeneration.

But where then must we look for the evidence of our own spirit? since all the marks and signs of regeneration mentioned in this eighth chapter manifestly belong to the evidence of the Holy Spirit. This difficulty put the Greek commentators upon a very forced interpretation of this place; for, observing that all the signs of adoption mentioned by the Apostle proceeded from the power and working of the Holy Spirit, in effect they made the two witnesses of the text but one. Thus Chrysostom by the Spirit itself understands the Holy Spirit; and by our spirit he understands the gift of the Holy Spirit within us: "What is this?" says he: "*the Spirit*

“*beareth witness with our spirit.*” To which he answers, “The Comforter beareth witness to the gift bestowed on us; for the voice, that is, of crying “Abba, Father, belongs not only to the gift or “grace, but likewise to the Spirit who bestows the “grace.” The gifts of the Spirit are sometimes called by the name of Spirit. The gift of prophecy is styled the spirit of prophecy. But I do not remember that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are ever styled *our spirit* in sacred writ. Besides, as I observed before, this reduces the two witnesses to one; for how does the Spirit bear witness but by the gifts and graces bestowed on us? and, if so, then the evidence of the gift, and the evidence of the Spirit, are one and the same evidence.

Keeping therefore to the sense already laid down, let us consider what St. Paul had in his view when he penned the place now before us. Those who are conversant in St. Paul’s writings need not be told that they must not always search for the connection within a verse or two of what they read. The Apostle often looks back to what went before at some distance, and, after a long chain of consequences, returns to his point without giving his reader notice. This might be made plain by instances, were it our business at present to examine the manner or way of St. Paul’s writing. But as to the place before us: in the latter part of the seventh chapter St. Paul describes the state of an unregenerate Jew, or heathen; for what he says equally belongs to both. This he does in order to shew them the necessity of redemption through Christ, inasmuch as neither the law of Moses, nor

of nature, could free them from the power and dominion of sin, nor, consequently, from death, which ever follows close at the heels of sin. That this was the Apostle's intent, appears from the lamentation he makes over the state of nature, and the remedy he immediately proposes of faith through Christ: *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* And then, in this eighth chapter, he sets forth the power of redemption, shewing, in every part, how it supplies the weakneses and infirmities both of the law and of nature. The unregenerate man *was brought into captivity to the law of sin*, chap. vii. 23. *But the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and of death*, ver. 2. In the unregenerate man *there dwelleth no good thing*, ver. 18: but in the Christian *dwelleth the Spirit of Christ*, ver. 9. So that the Apostle's main design here is, I think, pretty evident. But, to clear the matter before us, we must more particularly examine what he says of the unregenerate man's condition. He describes him as under the most wretched slavery, obeying sin, with the greatest reluctance to his own mind and reason: *that which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I*, ver. 15. His mind he allows to be uncorrupted, and to stand firm to the law of God, approving the things which are good; but then the lusts and appetites of the flesh are too strong for it, and force it into the obedience of the law of sin, which it hates and condemns: *I find a law*, says he, *that, when I would do good, evil is present with me: for I*

*delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members, ver. 21, 22, 23.* See then the divided empire of sin and reason: reason approves what is just and holy, consents to and delights in the law of God; but sin captivates and enthral's it, and makes the man the slave of sin, though the admirer and approver of virtue. The upshot of the whole matter is, as St. Paul in the last verse expresses it, *With the mind, or spirit, I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.* And now consider what assistance this condition requires: the man's spirit is right and pure; it loves, it delights in, it approves the law of God; and, could he follow the dictates of his reason, and obey the law of God as well as love it, and practise holiness as well as approve it, he would want no other evidence of his being the son and servant of God: *his servants ye are, says the Apostle, to whom ye obey.* The man who is taken captive, and carried into slavery, obeys by force his tyrant's law; but he loves his own country and king, and longs to come under the obedience of his natural prince again. As to his own mind, he knows whose subject he is, and would be; but outward necessity shews him that he is a slave by the constrained obedience he yields to the foreign law. Take off force, and the man's own inclinations will return him soon to his natural obedience. And this is not unlike the case St. Paul puts the unregenerate man in: he loves God and his law; but he obeys the tyrant, sin. Destroy the power of sin, and reason



will return him to the obedience of God, and soon shew whose true son and servant he is. So that the evidence of reason, even in the state of nature, shews us that we are the servants and sons of God: but power constrains us, lust and appetite rule over us, and woful experience shews us that we are the slaves of sin. Now, to complete this evidence of our minds, and to render it convincing to ourselves and others, that we are indeed the children of God, what more is wanting, than to destroy the power of sin, and to give us up to follow the dictates of reason in obeying the just laws and commands of God? For this is a complete evidence that any man is the son and servant of God, that he loves him, that he obeys him, and keeps his commandments. You see then what the evidence of our own spirit is: it loves and delights in the law of God, and is restless to obey the law it loves: *with the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin*: which words I desire you to bear in your memory, whilst I set forth to you the evidence of the Spirit of God.

In the eighth chapter St. Paul tells us, that the redemption by Christ Jesus has put an end to the wretched captivity we lived under: *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death*. Law here signifies power; for power is a law to those who live under it. Now then the power of the Spirit has destroyed the power of sin. The power of sin was opposite to the mind and reason of man; so that man, whilst he lived under that power, was a slave. But the power of the Spirit is on reason's side, and works together with it; so that to be under this power is a state of freedom



and liberty : and therefore it is justly said, that the law of the Spirit of life hath made us free. The consequence of our being under the power of the Spirit is, *that we walk not after the flesh, but the Spirit*, ver. 4 ; *that we mind the things of the Spirit*, ver. 5 ; *that we mortify the deeds of the body*, ver. 13 ; *that we are the sons of God*, ver. 14 ; *that we cry Abba, Father*, ver. 15. These are the fruits of the Spirit. Now, to walk after the Spirit, and to do the deeds of the Spirit, is to walk according to our own mind and reason ; for reason approved the things of God, and the things of the Spirit are the things of God. To cry Abba, Father, proceeds from a settled and undisturbed mind, from filial duty and reverence. Children, who live in disobedience to their parents, are not apt to meet them with these endearing expressions : but, when the child loves, and is under no rebukes of conscience for misbehaviour towards his parent, he meets him with these words of love and of confidence. This therefore we owe to the Spirit : for before, however our minds consented to his laws, yet still we were sinners, and conscience stood between us and our Father ; so that we could not approach without fear and trembling, our minds still representing him to us rather as an injured Lord, than as a tender Father. But, since the power of the Spirit hath stilled the horrid contest that was in us between reason and sin, and that we both love and obey him, we now no longer fear his presence ; but, like children longing for the return of a kind father, we run out to embrace him, with words of friendship and affection in our mouths, crying Abba, Father : and by this means, says St. Paul, *the Spirit*

*itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* With the mind, says the Apostle before, *I serve the law of God*: and now, says he, by the Spirit you obey the same law; and the Spirit of God and your spirit agree to give you the utmost assurance of being the children of God. You are no longer in the sad condition before described, the mind leaning one way, and the flesh another; so that you desired to do one thing, but yet did the contrary, and were always restless and uneasy, rebuked within, and constrained without: for the Spirit, by which you are now ruled, consents to your mind, and is bent to perform the same things which the mind approves; from whence you may have the greatest confidence towards God: for what more perfect obedience can there be, than that to which both outward and inward man consent? or what plainer signs can you have of a good son and servant, than to know that he loves the law of his father, and obeys it? Love the law indeed you did before; but obey it you could not: but now by the Spirit you obey it, and have the greatest satisfaction, both from within and without, that you are the children of God. This may suffice to shew the Apostle's meaning, and to explain the nature of the evidence which each spirit gives.

We must now, in the last place, consider, what the result of this evidence is, and with what kind of certainty we may know that we are the children of God.

And first, you must take notice, that these two evidences strengthen and support each other, and must both meet to give us the assurance we expect.

We must have the evidence of our own spirit that we do indeed love and approve the law of God ; and we must have the evidence of the Spirit of God working in us by obedience : and, when we both love and obey the commands of God, we want nothing farther to assure us that we are the children of God ; but, where either of these is wanting, the evidence of the other avails nothing. If you love and approve the command, but do not obey, you are self-condemned, you are in your sins ; lust has dominion over you, and not the Spirit of God. If you obey the law, and conform outwardly to it, but do not love and like it, you are an hypocrite, no servant of God, but of the world ; and your outward compliance is fleshly wisdom, and not the work of the Spirit.

So then you have two ways of judging yourselves, which must both concur ; you have inward and outward signs of grace : the inward signs are a pure conscience, a sincere love for God and religion, and whatever tends to the glory and honour of your Maker : the outward signs are acts of obedience conformable to the inward purity and love of your mind. These are fruits by which you may judge yourselves. Our Saviour tells us, *that we may know men by their fruits* : much rather may we know ourselves by our own fruits ; especially when we may know the stock too from whence they grow, the motions and workings of our own heart.

Hence it appears, that the evidence of the Spirit is not any secret inspiration, or any assurance conveyed to the mind of the faithful ; but it is the evidence of works, such as by the Spirit we perform :

and therefore the only sign of sanctification is holiness; and the only mark of grace is to obey from the heart the word of God: and therefore they err, not knowing the Scriptures, who from this or the like passages imagine, that the Spirit ever gives, or was ever designed to give, inward assurance or certainty to men of their final state.

Hence likewise it is certain, that some go too far on the other side, by denying that any man may know himself to be in a state of grace: for all the children of God are in a state of grace; and the evidence of the Spirit of God and our own spirit may make us certain, where they concur, as they ought to do, that we are the children of God. *If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God*: which is St. John's rule, and comprehends both the evidences in the text; for our heart judges both of our inward and outward obedience: and therefore, where our hearts condemn us not, we have the evidence of both spirits, the end of which is confidence.

But, lastly, this certainty does not extend to our future and final salvation: for to be in a state of grace is to be heir of salvation: but an heir may be defeated, if by any after-act he incapacitates himself to inherit. In a word, a state of grace may be lost; he that is the child of God may cease to be the child of God: and therefore being certain and confident that you are now in a state of grace cannot make you certain of your salvation; but you must still *work out your salvation with fear and trembling*. This we may learn from our Apostle's own arguing here; *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our*

*spirit, that we are the children of God.* The consequence of this is, *if children, then heirs*, ver. 17. *But now are we heirs through hope*, he tells us in another place; and at the twenty-fourth verse of this chapter, *we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope.* Certainty shuts out hope: and, since being children makes us only heirs through hope, it is plain, being certain that we are now the children of God can give us no absolute certainty of our salvation: and therefore it is great presumption to talk of security. Our certainty reaches to our present condition, which is enough to keep our minds easy and contented. Other certainty than this might make us remiss: this may encourage us *to run with patience the race that is before us, and to labour in the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not be in vain.*





Handwritten text, possibly a signature or a date, located in the lower right quadrant of the page. The text is very faint and difficult to read, but appears to consist of several lines of cursive or semi-cursive handwriting.

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## DISCOURSE IX.

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JOHN XX. 30, 31.

*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

THESE words stand towards the close of St. John's Gospel, and are by some thought to be the last of his own writing. They give us an account of the nature of his Gospel, and of his end and design in publishing it to the world. The Apostle does not pretend his Gospel to be a perfect and complete narrative of all that our Lord did whilst he conversed among men, not even of all the miracles and wonders which he wrought in confirmation of his doctrine: *Many other signs truly did Jesus,—which are not written in this book.* He adds farther, that the signs omitted in his account were done *in the presence of his disciples*, and were, consequently, of as good authority as those related by himself. This was but a necessary piece of caution; for St. John wrote his Gospel late, towards the end of his life, after the Apostles and disciples of Christ had spread the Gospel far and near, and had both by

preaching and writing published the great works and signs done by their Master. To prevent therefore the suspicions which some might be apt to entertain of their teachers, when they found the great evidences insisted on by them not mentioned by St. John, who, being the last writer of the Apostles, would naturally, for that reason, be supposed to be the most accurate; he declares that he had not recounted all the signs done by Jesus, but that there were many others, which, having been wrought in the presence of the disciples, might very well be taught and published by them, though omitted by himself.

But why does St. John, speaking of the miracles of Jesus, take notice only that *they were done in the presence of the disciples?* whereas in truth they were done in the face of the sun, in the most open and public manner, in the sight of friends and foes; which is so advantageous a circumstance, and which adds so much to the credibility of the signs, that it ought ever to be remembered. St. John knew this very well, having in the course of his Gospel often taken notice of this very thing: particularly in the story of Lazarus he tells us, *that many Jews were with Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother, who followed Jesus to the grave, and saw Lazarus come forth to life upon his call: many of which, says St. John, ch. xi. 45, 46. having seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him: but some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.* But the reason why this is not insisted on in the text is, that it was not to St. John's purpose: he is there speaking of the au-

thoritative promulgation of the Gospel, as is evident from the last verse, *These things are written that ye might believe* : and this led him no farther than to observe that the preachers and publishers of the Gospel were eye-witnesses of the things they attested, and therefore unexceptionable witnesses. This is the true foundation of the Apostles' authority considered as promulgators of Christianity ; which depended upon what they themselves had seen or heard, and not upon what others had seen or heard, whether friends or foes. Other circumstances may be good collateral evidence ; but the testimony of the Apostles rests upon this, that they themselves saw and heard what they have reported. And therefore the same Apostle in his first Epistle sets forth this evidence in the very same manner : *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life—that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.*

You have also the reason assigned which moved St. John to publish his Gospel, which extends likewise to all the other writings of the New Testament : *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.* This reason is not so strictly to be urged, as if writing were the only way of publishing the Gospel, which we know was effectually published to great multitudes, before any book of the New Testament was written, by the preaching and working of the Apostles. But thus far perhaps we may justly argue, that writing is the

best, if not the only method of perpetuating the testimony, and delivering down the doctrines of Christ uncorrupted to distant ages: and this way has had the consent and approbation of all civilized nations; from whence it is that *scripta lex* is used in the best writers to signify an instituted law, as distinguished from the law of nature arising either from instinct or reason.

The Gospels then were published that they might be a standing evidence to all ages of God's purpose to redeem the world by sending his Son to take our nature on him, *that he might die for our sins, and rise again for our justification*: and it was absolutely necessary to convey this knowledge to the world by a proper authority; for revelation cannot obtain the force and authority of law, or any way oblige the consciences of men, till it be sufficiently published and declared. This is universally true of all laws whatever, both human and divine: and the reason of it is plain; because otherwise men would be bound to an impossibility, to obey a law before they knew what the law was. For the same reason also it must be allowed, that the promulgation of the law is the proper care and concern of the lawgiver: for the law must come from the governor to the governed; and the subject, till he knows the law, that is, till it is promulged and sufficiently declared to him, can have no concern in it. Apply this to revelation, and you will perceive, that it is absurd to suppose that God has given any law to the world which he has not sufficiently promulged and declared; for that would be to suppose that God intended to give, and not to give, a law to mankind at the same time. An



insufficient promulgation is no promulgation; and therefore all powers and qualities necessary to give credit and authority to the publishers of a revelation are always supposed, when we speak of the truth and authority of revelation. God may reveal what he sees fit to one or two or more men; but, unless such men are commissioned and duly qualified to satisfy others that such things have been made known to them, others are no more concerned in the revelation, than if it had never been made. It would take up too much of your time to inquire particularly what are the necessary qualifications to constitute a proper witness to revelation. It may suffice to observe, that no man is naturally qualified for it, for this plain reason, because all natural qualifications are easily counterfeited to serve a purpose. Honesty, sincerity, and religion may be put on in appearance; and a man may bear himself so well in the disguise, as not to be discovered. Things in common life are easily believed upon the report of honest men: but then it must be considered, that the moral probability of such things goes a great way in rendering them credible. It is no shock to our minds to believe that such a thing happened at such a time, which we know often does happen in the course of things, and probably might happen then. In such cases a small weight inclines the mind to assent: but it requires other kind of evidence to make the mind submit to the belief of things which are supported by no moral probability, but are quite out of the ordinary course and nature of things. This shews that no revelation can be sufficiently promulgated and declared to the world by men, unless they

are extraordinarily qualified and commissioned to that purpose. We do not therefore rely merely upon the honesty or moral character of the first preachers of the Gospel, but on their authority proved and supported by many wonderful works which God enabled them to do, and on their integrity sufficiently established by what they did and suffered for the sake of the Gospel.

But here the question is asked, How shall we distinguish between the pretences to revelation, which are so many and various, all of which have an equal right to be heard, that it is endless to look for religion in such a crowd of pretenders to it, and difficult to determine the merit of the several claims? So that the only sure way is to take up with natural religion, which is every where uniformly the same, and in which there is no danger of being deluded and misled by imposture; for natural religion admits of no counterfeit: and, since every man's reason is judge in this case, no man can be cheated but by himself: and all men are so much their own friends, that in a matter of so great moment, which so nearly concerns their present and their future happiness, they may securely trust themselves.

Now, to form a true judgment upon this case, it will be necessary first to state the question right upon the foot of this objection, and then to examine what weight of reason there is in it.

First then, the question must relate to revelation, considered only as the rule and measure of religion: for the dispute between nature and revelation is confined to this one point, Which is the best and safest guide in religion? It is absurd therefore to

bring instances of any revelations in this case, which do not pretend to this property, that were never given, or pretended to be given, as a rule of religion : for, when men talk of the various revelations that have been in the world, and the difficulty of determining which they ought to obey, they cannot take into their consideration the answer of the oracle to Cræsus, or the several other answers on particular occasions recorded in the Greek and Roman histories, nor yet the particular messages which God sent by the hands of different prophets to the people of Israel ; for these revelations, whether true or false, being confined to particular occasions, are out of the present question, and have no relation to the inquiry concerning a rule or measure of religion. This observation will in a great measure overthrow the truth of the fact upon which the objection is built ; for upon this view there are not many revelations that can come into competition : in the heathen world I know of none ; for, though there were sundry pretences to revelation, yet none was set up as a common standard for the religion of mankind. The religion of Rome was chiefly introduced by Numa, who pretended a revelation for the foundation of his authority : but it is plain he aimed at nothing farther than modelling the religion of his city, and had no thought of the rest of the world in what he did. Nor had the Romans any sense that their religion concerned any but themselves ; and therefore, when they extended their conquests, religion was their least concern ; they left the world in that respect as they found it, and men were not so much as invited to take their reli-

gion. Now it is evident, that no law, either human or divine, extends farther than the lawgiver intends. Suppose then, if you please, Numa's religion to be a revelation ; yet, since it was given and declared only to the people of Rome, the rest of the world can have no concern in it. That no system of religion in the heathen world claimed as a general law, is evident from the answer returned by the oracle, when the inquiry was, Which religion was best ? The answer was, that every man should worship according to the custom of the country where he was. So that all religions were esteemed equally good, and the most any religion pretended to was a local authority, which reached no farther than the laws of the country did : and, unless men are for giving more to the pretended heathen revelations, than ever they claimed for themselves, or was claimed for them by those who introduced them and lived under them, they cannot be brought into this question, since they have no relation to us, any more than the many civil laws and constitutions of the same countries had : and men may as reasonably complain of the great variety of civil and municipal laws that distract their obedience, and then instance in the laws of the Medes and Persians, as they now complain of the variety of revelations, instancing in such as, if they were true, concern them as little as the laws of Persia do.

But perhaps it will be said, that though these religions do not oblige us, yet nevertheless, if any of them were true, they effectually overthrow all others ; for God cannot contradict himself, whether he speaks to one nation, or to all the world :



and upon this foot these several pretences come within our inquiry. This reasoning may be good; but then it does most effectually exclude all these pretences: for the voice of nature is the voice of God, and therefore cannot be contradicted by God. No revelation therefore can entitle itself to be considered, if it contradicts any one plain principle of natural religion: and there is not any one form of religion within the period mentioned that does not split upon this rock; and therefore there is no danger of your being oppressed with labour and study in examining their several claims.

But farther; Which of them all so much as pretends to the essentials necessary to constitute a law, either human or divine? Where was it published and declared? by whom, and how qualified? Can you name the persons, or produce the Gospel of such religion? Take the instance of Rome: What was Numa? a king, and therefore submitted to in the innovations of religion. But what one mark of a divine commission can you produce? and yet without such marks even a true revelation could be of no authority. Try all other instances, and you will still see how weakly the objection against revelation is supported by any pretences of the heathen world.

But still it will be urged, that the many pretences to inspiration, which have been received and admitted, are so many instances of the weakness of men, and their inability to distinguish between true and false in the present case. And how can we ever trust ourselves in examining revelation, and be secure in our judgment, when we see all the world



has erred before us, and men wise as ourselves, who thought too, it may be, that they acted as rationally as we do, mistaken in every instance of this kind? Is it not easily supposed, that the world is misled now, as formerly it has been? Why then should we expose ourselves to almost certain error by following the same steps, and pursue those principles which have never yet produced aught but deceit and falsehood? Whatever force there is in this argument, it must recoil upon the cause of natural religion; for certain it is from the history of all ages, both past and present, that men have erred grossly and universally in many principal points of natural religion. How then shall we ever trust ourselves in examining the dictates of nature, since the attempt has in all ages produced folly, ignorance, and superstition? What security have we that we shall not follow our forefathers in all their errors and mistakes, if we guide ourselves by the same clue of thread which directed them? Nay, in truth, the errors and superstitions of the heathen world, even those which pretended to derive themselves from oracles and revelations of the gods, are chargeable upon this blindness and ignorance of nature. Had nature but done her part, men could not have been imposed on by such gross and palpable superstition: had the natural notion of the Deity been preserved entire and uncorrupted, no one form of the heathen worship could have stood before it; but they must have all dispersed, as the clouds fleet away before the sun.

What is it now that discovers to you these impostures, which were not seen by those before you? Is

it not manifestly that true sense of reason and nature, which hath been new kindled and lighted up in the mind of man by the Gospel of Christ? Was it not then the want of this sense that darkened the old world? But, be the cause what it will, if you judge rightly in supposing yourself able now to discern the dictates of reason and nature, without which you ought not to pretend even to natural religion, it is absurd to pretend that you are in the same danger of being deceived by pretended revelations as the old world was, since you have, and claim to have, that light, the want of which was the very thing that exposed them to all their errors and superstitions. And, to shew that this objection is a mere feint, ask any one who makes it, whether he thinks any man could impose one of the heathen forms of worship, or any thing like it, on him? No man, I believe, but would be angry to be suspected of so much weakness. Yet these very forms were imposed on your forefathers; and you are confident, and with good reason, that they cannot be imposed on you. It is evident then, that you are not in the same case with them, that their danger is not your danger; and, consequently, their errors about revelation is no objection against hearkening to revelation now, when we know ourselves effectually secured against their errors.

From these pretences let us turn to view the true revelations belonging to the same period, and see how far they relate to the present case. Those given to particular men upon particular occasions are out of the question, for reasons already mentioned.

The law of Moses was published and declared with great solemnity, and by persons every way qualified : it contains a rule or system of religion, and is still maintained by its disciples in opposition to the Gospel. Here then perhaps may seem to be some difficulty, when two revelations, that have equal pleas to truth, are set in competition one against the other. This question must be argued upon different principles with Jews, and with other men : for the law was given and declared to the Jews, and they were under the obligations of it : they therefore are concerned to inquire, not only of the truth of a subsequent revelation, but also whether it does sufficiently abrogate their law, or whether it is to subsist with it ; as likewise whether their law has any where precluded them from admitting any farther revelations. But to us the question is, how we are concerned with the law, and whether there can be any competition with respect to us between the law and the gospel. From the principles already mentioned we may soon determine this question : for it is plain, that no revelation can oblige those to whom it is not given ; that promulgation is so far of the essence of the law, that no man in reason or equity owes any obligation to a law till it is made known to him ; that the obligations therefore of a law are limited by the terms of the promulgation. Apply this to the law of Moses ; you will find that law in the very promulgation of it confined to the people of Israel : *Hear, O Israel!* is the introduction to the promulgation ; which it could not have been, had the law been designed for the whole world. And this was known

to be the case under the law. Moses, who best understood the extent of his own commission, says thus to the people of Israel: *What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?* Deut. iv. 8. The holy Psalmist expresses the same sense in these words: *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them.* Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. From all which it is evident, that the law of Moses has no claim to our obedience. The moral part of the law, when understood, will oblige every rational creature; but this is not the obligation we are now speaking of. The law of Moses then cannot add to the number of revelations which create us any difficulty in determining ourselves: for, let the case happen as it will, we are free from the law. But the law affords even to us abundant evidence for the truth of the Gospel. The proofs from prophecy are as convincing to us as to the Jews: for it matters not whether we are under the law, or not under the law, since conviction in this case arises from another and different principle. But I hasten to a conclusion.

Let us then consider briefly, what alteration has happened since the coming of Christ to disturb and unfettle our judgments in this great affair. A man perhaps, who is a great reader, may be able to produce many instances of impostors since that time, and imagine that they are all so many dead weights upon the cause of revelation: but what is become of them, and their doctrine? they are vanished, and



their place is not to be found. What pretence is there then to set up these revelations? Is God grown so weak and impotent, that we may suppose these to be his revelations, and intended for the use of the world, had he not been baffled at first setting out? If God intends a law for the use of the world, he is obliged, if I may use the expression, to publish the law to the world: and therefore want of such publication evidently shews that God was not concerned in them, or at least did not intend that we should be concerned in them: and therefore it is absurd to instance in such pretences as difficulties in our way, which in truth are not in our way at all.

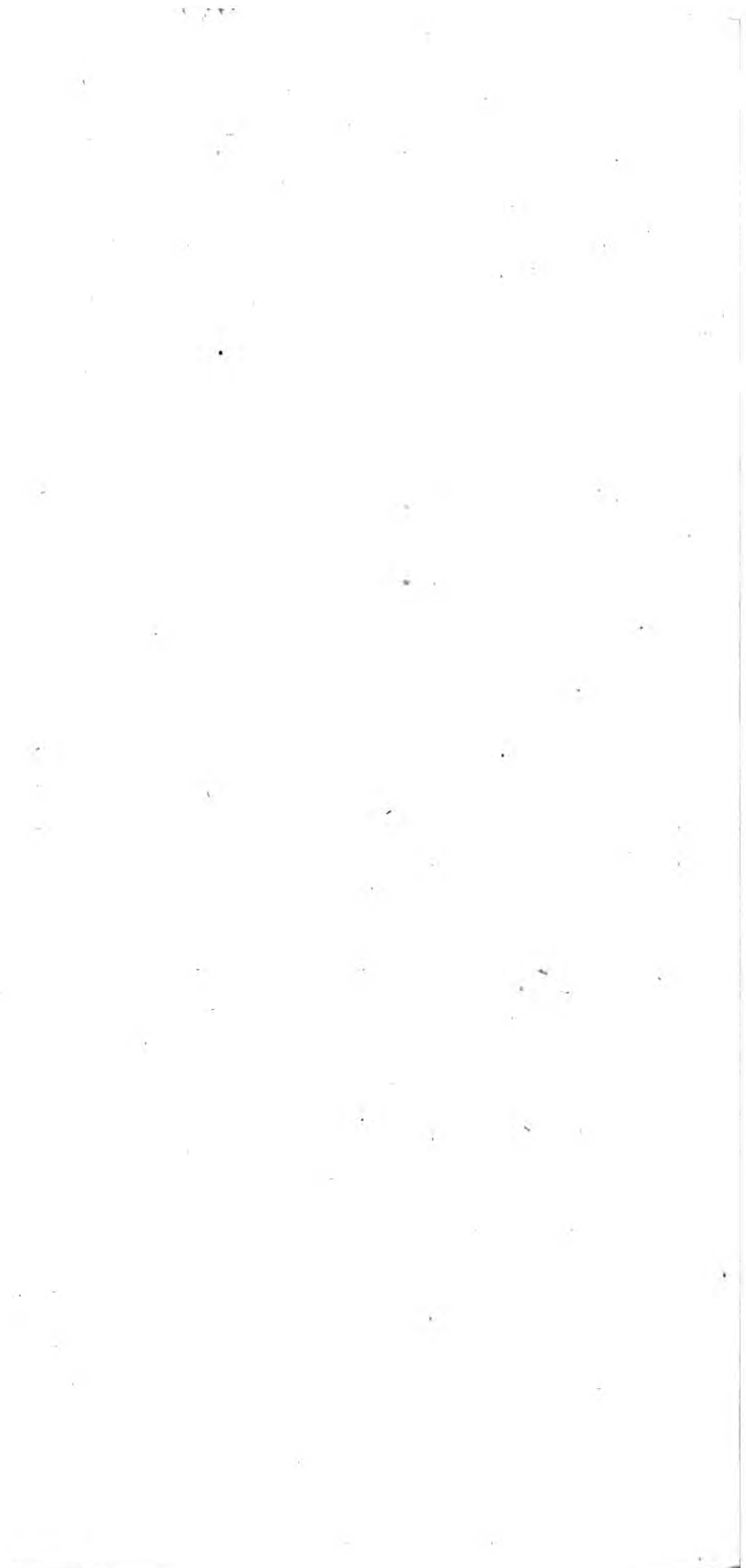
And thus the case of revelation stood, and the Gospel had no competitor, till the great and successful impostor Mahomet arose: he indeed pretends a commission to all the world, and found means sufficiently to publish his pretences: he asserts his authority upon the strength of revelation, and endeavours to transfer the advantages of the Gospel evidence to himself, having that pattern before him to copy after: and, should we say that the Alcoran was never promulged to us by persons duly commissioned, it may be answered perhaps, that the Alcoran is as well published to us as the Gospel is to them; which has some appearance of an answer, though the fact is indeed otherwise; for even the Alcoran owns Jesus for a true prophet.

But with respect to this instance, I persuade myself it can be no very distracting study to find reasons to determine our choice. Go to your natural religion: lay before her Mahomet and his disciples



arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and tens of thousands, who fell by his victorious sword: shew her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements: shew her the prophet's chamber, his concubines and wives; let her see his adultery, and hear him allege revelation and his divine commission to justify his lust and his oppression. When she is tired with this prospect, then shew her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and the perverse. Let her see him in his most retired privacies; let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table to view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, but not provoked: let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his cross; and let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*

When natural religion has viewed both, ask, Which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had; when she saw part of this scene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at the cross; by him she spoke and said, *Truly this man was the Son of God.*



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## DISCOURSE X.

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ACTS ii. 22.

*Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did, by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.*

**T**HE great evidence of Christianity, to which our Saviour and his Apostles constantly appeal, are the miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by the hand of Jesus to confirm the authority and commission he gave him to publish and declare his will to the world. This being the only reasonable evidence that he could give of his coming from God, our Saviour says expressly, *If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin*, John xv. 24. If he had not given these undeniable proofs of his being a teacher sent from God, they would have been acquitted, not only in reason, but even out of his own mouth. *If I do not the works of my Father, says he, believe me not*, John x. 37: *If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true*, John v. 31: and he adds, verse 36, *The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father sent me.*

Thus, when St. John sent to him to inquire expressly whether he was the Christ, or no, he shewed the messengers his works, and bade them relate to John what they had seen; referring it to him to judge by his works, which were the only proper evidence, whether he were the Christ, or no.

The truth then of Christianity resting upon the authority of miracles, I shall endeavour in the following discourse to shew,

First, Wherein the true force of this argument from miracles consists, and what it is that they prove.

Secondly, What sort of works are to be admitted for miracles in proving the truth of any religion.

First, I shall endeavour to shew wherein the true force of this argument from miracles consists, or what it is that they prove.

Miracles are not intended to prove the being of God, nor the doctrines of morality: for natural religion is supported by natural reason, and has for its evidence the works of nature. Thus St. Paul argues in his first chapter to the Romans, declaring that what was to be known of God was manifest to men, God having shewed it unto them: *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* And in the most corrupt and degenerate times God did not leave himself without witness, continuing to do good, to give rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling the hearts of men with joy and gladness. These are the standing proofs of the being and goodness of God: and men need but open their eyes, and look

found them, to see the wonderful and stupendous works of nature, which lead directly to the knowledge of God. And what greater evidence can man have than this? for, if the making one world will not prove the being of a God, the making of ten thousand will not. And therefore this is a principle of religion not learnt from revelation, but which is always supposed as the foundation of revelation: for no revelation can bring greater works to prove its authority, than the works by which the clear and unexceptionable dictates of natural religion are proved: for the distinction between miracles and works of nature is no more than this, that works of nature are works of great power, produced constantly and in a regular course, which course we call nature; that miracles are works of great power also, wrought in an unusual way: but they are both considered in the same light, and with equal advantage, as effects leading to the knowledge of a great, though invisible, power. Thus we must acknowledge great power to be shewn in the Sun's constant rising and setting; and as great in his standing still, should we see him stopped in his course for the space of a whole day. That we have all eyes to see, and ears to hear, is an effect of as great power, as giving sight to one born blind, or hearing to one born deaf. Upon this account it is impossible that any true revelation should contradict or evacuate any clear dictate of natural religion, which stands at least upon as good a bottom as any revelation can do. And therefore the principles of natural religion must be supposed for the foundation of revealed: which is intimated by



the writer to the Hebrews: *He that comes to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*; that is, he must bring this belief with him: for a revelation is not to prove the being of a God, or that he loves virtue, and hates vice. God never wrought miracles for this purpose, having sufficiently evidenced himself from the beginning of the world by the visible things of the creation: and had any one asked our Saviour to shew a proof that there was a God, I am apt to imagine he would have turned him over to the works of nature, as he did the rich man's brethren to Moses and the prophets for a proof of a future state.

But, to ascertain the use of miracles, it will be proper to consider when and for what purpose they were introduced. In early times we meet with none: nor was there any occasion for them, so long as men preserved a right notion of God as maker and absolute Lord of the universe, and were acquainted with him, (I had almost said, personally acquainted with him,) and knew his voice when he spoke to them; for so long they received his commands without doubt or hesitation: and, being perfectly satisfied that the command came from God, what weight or authority could the multiplying signs and wonders add to their persuasion? for signs and wonders could only shew that the command came from God, to whom all nature obeyed and was subject: and, as they wanted no such proof, there was no room or occasion for the introducing of miracles.

But, when idolatry prevailed in the world, and every nation had its peculiar deity, to whom they gave the name of God, it became necessary, in

order to preserve true religion in the world, to distinguish between the true God, and the pretended deities adored by the heathen. The great works of the creation were standing proofs of the being of a God, and common to all nations; and therefore the belief of a Deity was the common persuasion of the world: for, though men in general were become idolaters, yet they were not atheists: but then the true God was forgotten or almost lost in the multiplicity of false gods, to whom the blindness of the world ascribed the honour and power due to the one Supreme only.

In this state of things God thought proper to exert himself in such acts of power as should demonstrate his superiority above all gods of the heathen, and to assume a character of distinction, that the hand might be certainly known from which the mighty works proceeded: and it is very observable, that God did publicly assume such a character, and work miracles, at one and the same time. The first miracles, of which we have any account, were those wrought by Moses in Egypt; and at the same time God declared himself to be the God of the Hebrews. And this was the first declaration of himself to the world under such a character: for we do not read he ever styled himself the God of Noah, or the God of Shem, or of any other person, till after the call of Abraham; for to him he appeared at first, and said, *I am the almighty God*, Gen. xvii. 1. And, though in the family of Abraham he was known by the name of the God of Abraham, yet was not that relation understood in the world, till Moses had express command to make it known to Pharaoh and

his people. And the accuracy with which the message was delivered, is observable: for, though God commanded Moses in speaking to the children of Israel to say, *The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me*; yet in speaking to the king of Egypt, who probably might know little of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his orders are to say, *The God of the Hebrews hath met us*, &c. Exod. iii. 15, 18. and v. 3.

It may appear strange to us to hear the great God, the creator of heaven and earth, assuming to himself a character that seems to limit the right of his dominion: for why does he, who is God of all the world, style himself *the God of the Hebrews*? Is he not the God of all nations? Or, why does he appeal to miracles wrought under the character of God of the Hebrews, when the great works of the creation (of all miracles the greatest) are a constant and perpetual evidence of his almighty power and universal dominion?

To account for this, you must consider the state of religion in the world at the time when God assumed this character, and sent Moses to shew signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. All the nations of the earth had at that time their several local deities; and, as every nation is naturally inclined to think their own the best, a message delivered in the name of the deity of any one people could have no effect upon another. And therefore, when Moses delivered a message to Pharaoh in the name of the God of Israel, Pharaoh's answer was, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go*, Exod.

v. 2. Now the way which God made choice of to convince Pharaoh was by *multiplying signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, that the Egyptians might know that he was the Lord, when he stretched forth his hand upon Egypt*, Exod. vii. 3, 5.

Here the question plainly was between God under the character of the God of the Hebrews, and the god of the Egyptians, which of them was supreme : and this point could only be determined by a superiority of power shewn in miracles. And, if we attend to the nature of the miracles wrought by Moses, they will appear to be such as plainly pointed out the hand of the almighty Creator. The author of the book of Wisdom tells us, *that the Egyptians, being deceived by the foolish devices of their wickedness, worshipped serpents void of reason*, Wisd. xi. 15. And the most ancient account we have of that people from profane history confirms the observation. And therefore the first miracle performed by Moses was a direct conquest over the deities of Pharaoh : for, when his rod was changed into a serpent, and devoured all the serpents produced by the magicians, what could Pharaoh reasonably conclude, but that the God, in whose name Moses spoke, was *God of gods, and Lord of lords* ? And, when the magicians were compelled to acknowledge the divine power of Moses, and openly to declare to Pharaoh that the finger of God was in it, one would imagine that this triumph over the deities and magicians of Egypt should have furnished a complete answer to that demand of Pharaoh, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice ?* But he continued obstinate.



But the purpose of God in sending Moses to shew his wonders in the land of Egypt was intended not only for the deliverance of the Hebrews, but to make his name known over all the nations of the earth: for, as Egypt was at that time a great and flourishing kingdom, and was notoriously the seat of superstition and idolatry, from whence the infection spread to all the nations round about, it was of all others the properest scene for God to exert his power and authority for the conviction of all people. And for this reason God had connived at the wickedness and idolatry of Egypt, and suffered the kingdom to grow very great, that their punishment might be the more exemplary: *In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth,* Exod. ix. 16.

The miracles wrought in Egypt were such as all the world had a concern in: for they were so near akin to the works of the creation, that by a just comparison they might be known to come from the same hand: for who but the Author of nature could stir up things animate and inanimate to punish offenders? When God slew all the first-born in Egypt in one night, and preserved the people of Israel in safety; when he led the people of Israel through the Red sea by commanding the waters to open them a passage, and drowned Pharaoh and all his host by bringing the waters back upon them; did not God by these signs plainly speak to them, and say, *See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal:*



*neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand?*  
Deut. xxxii. 39.

This use of miracles appears throughout the history of the Jews. Thus, in the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal, the Prophet laid before the people this choice: *If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him,* 1 Kings xviii. 21. The people were silent: the dispute was referred to be determined by signs and wonders: and, when the people saw the hand of God made manifest, they fell on their faces, and said, *The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!* ver. 39.

The case of the destruction of the army of the Assyrians in the reign of Hezekiah, when an hundred and fourscore and five thousand men were destroyed in one night by the angel of God, seems to carry with it a severity hard to be accounted for. The king of Assyria with his great host laid siege to Jerusalem; and so had other princes done without falling under so great calamity: but the case of Sennacherib had this peculiar in it, that he sent a defiance to God, and boasted himself of many victories obtained against him. Hear the message he sent to Hezekiah: *Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Hearken not unto Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Who are they, among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?* 2 Kings xviii. You see here the king of Assyria acting the same part with the king of Egypt; and, if his

power was broken all at once, he suffered but in the same way that the king of Egypt did ; and this judgment was brought upon him with the same view, to make him an example, and to vindicate and assert the supremacy of God in the eyes of all the nations.

This appears to be the first and original use of miracles, and they are an immediate and direct proof of what they are brought to assert, the supremacy of God. For, when the single question is, who is the mightiest, must it not be decided in his favour who visibly exerts the greatest acts of power ? In this case no difficulty can arise from the supposition that other beings as well as God are able to work miracles. The miracles performed by the magicians in Egypt were so far from lessening the authority of the works done by Moses, that they added to it : for the greater the powers were which God humbled and subdued, the greater evidence did he give of his own superiority. So that, whether you suppose that evil spirits have natural powers to do such and the like works, or are sometimes employed and permitted by God, for the punishment of men, to deceive them by such appearances, in both cases they are equally subject to the power of God.

With respect to the people of the Jews, miracles had a double use : for by their long continuance in Egypt they became infected with the errors and superstitions of the country, and served their idols. So that they wanted a proof that the God of their fathers was indeed the supreme Being, as much as the Egyptians themselves. Thus the Prophet Ezekiel says in the name of God, *In the day when I chose*

*Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the Lord your God;—then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against me;—they did not cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt, Ezek. xx. 5, &c. Which account given by the Prophet shews plainly their corrupt state in Egypt; which was not easily worn off, as appears from their frequent acts of disobedience in their passage through the wilderness, and their great propensity to fall back into idolatry: so that God was frequently provoked to destroy them; and, had they been chosen for their own sake, they would have been destroyed: but, God having made choice of them to be his own peculiar people, and intending to manifest himself to the heathen world by the protection of that people, he saved them for his own name's sake: which is the account the Prophet Ezekiel gives, speaking in the name of God, I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt, ver. 8, 9.*

But there was another use of miracles peculiar to the Jews, in which the Egyptians had no concern: for Moses was sent not only to be their deliverer, but also to be their lawgiver. With the Egyptians

he had no covenant to make, nor new statutes to give : he required of Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go ; which in justice and equity he ought to have done, considering how his country had been saved by one of that family, and how highly he offended against the laws of hospitality by detaining them as slaves, who came into his country upon the hopes and promise of protection. But the Jews were called out of Egypt to be the peculiar people of God, and to be put under a new covenant and new laws, under the immediate government of God ; blessings which they had no right to expect, and for the accomplishment of which Moses could give them no assurance, but by the evidence of such works as plainly proceeded from the hand of God, and proved the commission which Moses had to speak in his name.

The Jewish government, being a theocracy, leads us to expect a series of miracles in the administration by the immediate hand of Providence ; and so indeed we find the case to be : and the wonderful preservation of that people, when obedient, and the as wonderful punishments, when they were disobedient, were standing proofs to themselves, and to all the nations round about them, that their God was the only Lord and Governor of the world. But Moses had no successor as a lawgiver : prophets and righteous men were often sent by God to reprove and admonish the people for their manifold transgressions of the law given by Moses, but without any authority to add to, or diminish from it. And so the case stood, till the great Prophet, like unto Moses, came in the full power and authority



of God to make a new covenant, not with one people, but with all the nations of the earth, *Jefus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles and wonders and figns.*

It has been before obferved, that the great doctrines of natural religion have for their evidence the works of nature, and want not the fupport of miracles. But, when any new doctrine is published to the world, or any new command, of which nature has given no notice, it is of neceffity that fuch new doctrines fhould be eftablifhed by new proofs. One thing indeed we learn from natural reafon, that God is to be trusted and obeyed in whatever he promifes or commands: but ftill a proof is required, that fuch new doctrine or command does really proceed from God. And this fhews how neceffary miracles are to the introduction of a new revelation: not that miracles can prove the truth of any doctrine; but they directly prove the commiffion of the perfon who does them to proceed from him by whole power alone they could be performed. This diftinction between miracles confidered as a proof of the doctrine, and as confirming the authority and commiffion of the perfon who reveals it, will plainly appear, upon confidering what the cafe would be, fhould any man openly perform unqueftionable miracles, and then retire in filence, without declaring any purpofe he had: the great works might aftonifh and confound us; but we could not poffibly make any ufe of them: we might indeed conclude, that fome great and invifible power affifted and enabled the man to perform the works; but what that invifible power had to do with us, or we



with it, we could by no just inference conclude. But, should such a man declare himself to be a messenger from God commissioned to publish his will to the world, and appeal to the great works which he did as a proof of the authority he had received; the miracles, though, considered in themselves, they do not directly prove his doctrine, yet do they establish his authority, and give the force of a divine command to what he publishes in God's name.

The law of Moses then requiring submission and obedience to commands and doctrines which have no establishment in the light of reason and nature, it was necessary to found them upon the authority of God, to which no submission could be due, till sufficient evidence was given of it, to guard men against imposition and deceit either from wicked men or wicked spirits: and this made miracles to be a necessary proof in the establishment of a new revelation.

We see then to what purposes miracles were originally introduced, and in what manner applied, by Moses: and, whoever considers of what consequence it was to the happiness of mankind to have a standing evidence always before their eyes of the unity and supremacy of God manifested in his government of the Jewish nation, and how far the Mosaic dispensation prepared the way, and laid the foundation, for the accomplishment of his great work in the salvation of the world by Christ Jesus, will see reason to think that the end proposed was worthy of God, and fully accounts for his interposition by signs and wonders, which were acts not only of

great power, but of great goodness and benevolence towards mankind.

If we consider the miracles of the Gospel, we shall find that they had the same ends in view. If Moses withstood the magicians of Egypt, and manifested a superiority of power over them, and the false gods whom they served, our Saviour did much more in opposition to the power of Satan, and the wicked spirits who had taken possession of men, and tormented them in divers manners: in subduing them he shewed such an uncontrollable power, that they were obedient to his command; and, when he said Go, they were forced to go, yielding a ready, though unwilling, obedience. And, as the Gospel spread, idolatry fled before it, the heathen deities became dumb, and their oracles were silenced. And, if we look abroad into the world, and take a view of the nations where idolatry and superstition once prevailed, and where the knowledge of the unity and supremacy of God is now established, which happy change can only be ascribed to the propagation of the Gospel, we shall see how fully and perfectly this great end was answered by the miracles wrought by Christ.

If Moses had a commission from God to publish his will to the people of the Jews, Jesus had a far more ample commission to publish the terms of God's salvation to all mankind: and, as these terms were of God's appointment, and not such as human wisdom could suggest, they stood in need of the evidence of miracles to support them.

It has been observed before, that no miracles can alter the clear dictates of natural religion. The

same may be said with respect to any former divine revelation : for to suppose a revelation to come from God, and to be fully established by miracles, and that a later revelation upon the like proof and authority should abrogate and render the former void, would be setting up miracle against miracle, and destroy the authority of both : and therefore, admitting the Mosaic revelation and the Christian to be both of divine original, they must necessarily be consistent, and each be in its proper place to carry on the great and ultimate views of Providence. This evidently was the case of Moses, who came to prepare the way for the full and perfect declaration of God's will, reserved till He should come who was the end of the law : and to this purpose are the words of our blessed Saviour, *Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled,* Matt. v. 17, 18. And during the whole course of his ministry he constantly appealed to the testimony of the law and the prophets : *Had you believed in Moses,* says he to the Jews, *you would have believed me ; for he wrote of me.* And his Apostle St. Paul, in his defence before king Agrippa, gives this account of the Gospel he preached : *Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.* And indeed one revelation admitted to be of divine authority must be a touchstone to try all succeeding revelations by : for God cannot con-

tradict himself; and the great works done by Moses and by Christ are not only an evidence of their divine authority, but are a bar to all succeeding pretenders. The miracles reported to have been done in the heathen world are unworthy of God, considered either in themselves, or the end proposed by them: for let it be observed, that God never works miracles merely to astonish and surprize people, but always to serve some great ends of providence: and though he has in favour of his people, and sometimes even of particular persons, wrought a miracle; yet, when he published the Law and the Gospel, he did not rest the authority upon one or more single miracles, but upon a long series of miracles exhibited from day to day for years together. And, if miracles are properly applied as a proof of the purposes and the will of God, miracles wrought without being attended with any declaration of God's will in which we have any concern, are very improper instances to be set up in opposition to those of Moses and Christ, upon which the happiness of mankind depends in this life, and that which is to come. This consideration gives weight and authority to the miracles of the Gospel: for it was a design worthy of God to restore mankind to that happiness which they had forfeited: and it was a work in every view of equal dignity and benevolence with the creation: for, if God is adorable in the work of the creation, he is equally so in the work of redemption; and there is at least as much goodness in making men happy, as in making them at all.

With what colour of reason can the pretended

miracles of the heathen world be brought into this question, which were done upon trifling occasions, unworthy of the interposition of God? Look into all the ancient oracles; see to what mean purposes they are applied, and how often they prove destructive to those who relied on them; and then tell me what marks you see of divine wisdom or goodness in them, that should set them upon an equal foot with the miracles of Christ Jesus.

We read in the Old Testament of some miracles wrought in behalf of particular people, and for particular purposes: but neither are these, though of divine authority, to be set in competition with the miracles of the Gospel: for they were not introductory to any scheme of religion, or new declaration of God's will, but are rather to be considered as acts of government, and suitable to the character of God as king of Israel; for, where the government itself was divine, no wonder to see the measures of the government to be of the same kind. And this character of God being peculiar to the Jews, is the reason why such miracles were frequent under the Jewish law, and are very rarely to be met with under the Gospel.

Secondly, I am to consider what sort of works are to be admitted for miracles in proving the truth of any religion.

The first suspicion that men naturally have of any one who pretends to prophecy or inspiration, is, that he has contrived the whole matter himself: for we have seen many visions and inspirations imposed on the vulgar by men of very bad heads or very bad hearts. And therefore the first inquiry is, whether



the miracles might not proceed from human art or cunning.

And shall I undertake to prove, that it exceeds the power of man to raise the dead to life, to give sight to the blind, and to cure all diseases by the word of his mouth? No: never was any such attempt set up. But perhaps no such miracles were ever really done, and the people were deceived by false appearances. As for instance; When the man born blind was restored to sight, he did not indeed recover his eyes, but all the rest of the people lost theirs; which I think would be the greater miracle of the two: for it is as easy to believe that the word of Christ should make one man see, as that it should make a thousand blind.

But must they, you will say, of necessity proceed from God, because they could not be wrought by men? Were they effects of nothing else but infinite power?

The miracles of the Gospel, being such works as neither human wisdom or power can perform, force us to have recourse to a superior invisible cause. But still you will say, Can the wit of man discover all the different orders of beings between himself and his Creator, their powers and properties, so as with security to affirm that no being but the all-wise and almighty God could perform these wonderful things; especially considering that no effects, neither the miracles of the Gospel, nor the works of nature, can prove directly an infinite power or wisdom? For who will be bold to say, that the wisdom and power of God were exhausted in the visible works of the creation, so that there is nothing either wiser or

greater than infinite wisdom and power can contrive or execute ?

Let this matter be rightly stated, and thus it will stand : The works of nature are certain proofs of an all-powerful cause ; not because they appear to be works of infinite power, and such as cannot be exceeded, but because of necessity they prove in course of argument a first cause of all things ; which first cause being unlimited, nothing is or can possibly be done, that the power of the first cause cannot do. And therefore the works of the creation must be and are admitted as an infallible proof of the being of a God. Let it then be remembered, that a revelation is not introduced to prove the being of a God ; that the miracles of our Saviour were not wrought to that purpose, but, supposing the being of a God, to prove God the author of the revelation : and then it must be allowed, that, if we bring as good arguments to prove God the author of the revelation, as can be brought to prove the being of God, all who believe the being of a God are equally obliged to believe the divinity of the revelation.

The first and most natural notion of God is, that he is the maker of the world, and all things in it. This was the notion the Jews had of God ; and, when they distinguished the true God from the heathen gods, they defined him to be the maker of the world and mankind. Look then into the miracles of the Gospel, and you will see this attribute of God as clearly demonstrated by them as by the works of nature : for there you will find, that the Author of the Christian miracles is the maker of mankind ; for by him men were made ; that is, dead bodies were

made into living men : for to raise a dead man, and to make a new man, are much the same thing. Any matter may be formed even by human art into the shape of a man ; but it is adding life that makes the man. If we believe we received our senses, our reason, our natural strength and vigour, from the true God at first ; look into the Gospel, and you will find the miracles of Christ are from the same hand : for to the blind he gave sight, to the deaf hearing, to the lame and sick strength and soundness, to demoniaes and lunatics he gave reason and a right mind. Or, if you choose rather to look into the material world for the proof of a God ; if you think the beauty, order, and regularity of the world speak God to be both author and governor of nature ; search the Gospel, and you will find the miracles of Christ derive themselves from the Governor of the world, and speak the same language with the works of nature : for at his word the stormy winds were laid ; the sea obeyed his voice : when he suffered, all nature trembled ; the earth shook, the veil of the temple was rent, the sun and the moon were darkened : which drew from the centurion attending at his execution the confession, *Truly this was the Son of God*. If you appeal to the natural sense and notions of mankind for the idea of the true God, and thence collect his essential attributes, justice, righteousness, holiness and goodness ; let the voice of nature be still ; and the Gospel shall speak more plainly, how just, how righteous, how holy and good God is, who is author of the salvation and redemption which is by Christ Jesus. Take what way you will to prove the being or the attributes of God, and in the same

way with equal advantage we will prove the God of the world, that is, the only true God, to be the author of Christianity; which all who believe the being of a God are bound to admit for a proof of the truth of Christianity: for either the works of nature are not a good proof of the being of a God; or the works of the Gospel, being of the same kind, and effects of equal power, must be allowed to prove God the author of the Gospel. And, when our Saviour styled the wonders that he performed, *the works that the Father had given him to finish*, he plainly appealed to the power of the Creator as manifested in the works that bore witness to him: for, if any one else could have done the same works, there would have been no reason for calling them the works of the Father, nor would there have been any room for the inference which our Saviour draws from it, *The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me*, John v. 37.

There is a question commonly asked upon this occasion, to which it may be proper to give an answer: that is, How we know that these miracles did not proceed from an evil power, since we have instances, as some think, of miracles so wrought? The answer is, We know this the same way that any man knows the works of nature to proceed from a good being: for how do you know that the Creator of the world was a good being? If you answer, that the Maker of mankind, the Author of nature, must of necessity be a good and holy being, because he has woven into the nature of man the love of virtue and hatred of vice, and given him distinct notions of good and evil, by which reason unerringly con-



cludes the Author of this nature and these principles to be himself good and holy; I answer the same for the Gospel of Christ: the love of virtue, and hatred of vice, is as inseparable from the Gospel of Christ, as from the reason of man; and the Gospel of Christ more distinctly teaches to know and acknowledge the holiness and goodness of God, than reason, or the works of nature, can do: and therefore those who acknowledge the Author of nature to be a good being, have much more reason to acknowledge the Author of the Christian miracles to be a good being. But then we are told this is arguing in a circle; proving the doctrines first by miracles, and then the miracles again by the doctrines. But this is a great mistake, and it lies in this; that men do not distinguish between the doctrines we prove by miracles, and the doctrines by which we try miracles; for they are not the same doctrines. God never wrought miracles to prove the difference between good and evil: and I suppose, if any man were asked how he proves temperance or chastity to be duties, murder or adultery to be sins, he would not recur to miracles for an argument. These and the like duties are enforced in the Gospel, but were always truths and duties before our Saviour's coming: and we are in possession of them without the help of miracles or revelation. And these are the doctrines by which we try the miracles.

But the doctrines which are to be proved by miracles are the new revealed doctrines of Christianity, which were neither known or knowable to the reason of man: such are the doctrines of salvation



and redemption by Christ, of sanctification and regeneration by the Spirit of God: and who ever yet brought these doctrines to prove the truth or divine original of the miracles?

I shall only add, that what has been said it concerns those chiefly to consider, who hold fast and admire the principles of natural religion, but despise or overlook the proofs of Christianity. If they will but consider the tendency of their own principles, they are not far from the kingdom of God: for the same reasons, that oblige them to believe in God, oblige them to believe in Christ also. And, as we have one God the Father of all, so should we have one faith, and one Lord, even Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of us all. And let them take heed, that, having been made partakers of so much grace, to the acknowledgement of the one true God, they fall not the more irrecoverably under condemnation by obstinately refusing to acknowledge his only and eternal Son, Jesus Christ the righteous.

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## DISCOURSE XI.

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PSALM viii. 4.

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son  
of man, that thou visitest him?*

WHEN we consider the care of Providence over the children of men, as it is manifested either in the works of nature or of grace, we naturally fall into the reflection of the text, and wonder to see so much done for men, who seem to have no merit or desert equal to the concern shewed for them. If we look up to the heavens, and view the sun, moon, and stars, and consider the power by which these mighty bodies were formed, the wisdom and contrivance by which their motions are regulated and adjusted; we see plainly, by the benefit we receive from them, that they were intended for our service: and yet what are we, that we should be so served? If we look round this earth, the place of our habitation, we find it filled with many kinds of creatures, and adorned by the bountiful hand of nature, as if it were meant to be a seat of pleasure and happiness; and we are sure that this part of the world, at least, was made for the benefit of man: here he is lord, and has dominion over the works of God; for on

earth there is no creature to rival him in power and wisdom, or that can challenge any share of authority with him. But this lord of the earth, does he not come into it helpless? is he not wretched whilst he is in it, and oftentimes miserable when he is to go out of it? What must we say then? that this noble palace was erected and adorned merely to be turned into an hospital to receive the blind and the lame, the diseased in body and mind; to be the seat of him *who is like a thing of nought, and his days like a shadow that passeth away.*

If we go on from the works of nature to the works of grace, the same reflection will pursue us still. One would imagine, that man, who had received so much from God, should at least continue to serve and obey his supreme Lord, and to acknowledge the Author of these great and good gifts: so far from it, that God was in a manner expelled from his own creation, and stocks and stones and the beasts of the field were exalted and set up to receive the honour and worship due to the Creator. The morality of the world became answerable to the religion of it; and no wonder: for why should he not turn brute himself, who can be content with a brute for his God? The wonder lies on the other side, that God should continue his care and concern for such creatures; that he should be willing not only to forgive their iniquities, but that he should contrive the means of their redemption; and that in so wonderful a manner, as to send his own Son into the world, not only to instruct and reform them, but to redeem them by making atonement for their sins by his own blood. Who that considers this can help

saying with the Psalmist, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

Though these reflections should naturally lead us to admire and adore the goodness of God, who has done so much, when we deserved so little; for what stronger motive can there be for gratitude, than undeserved favour? yet have they oftentimes another effect: for, when men consider that God does nothing without reason, and at the same time see so little reason why God should do so much for them, they begin to suspect whether he has done it or no, and to imagine that the whole history of the redemption is a cunningly devised fable. To consider the Son of God coming down from heaven, living among men, and at last shedding his blood for them, fills them with wonder and astonishment: and when they look on the other side, they can see nothing in man that bears any proportion to this concern shewed for him, or that yields any argument to justify the wisdom of God in this method of his redemption.

It must be owned, there is something plausible in this way of reasoning; and the more so, as it pretends to do justice to the wisdom of God, and cannot be charged with any great injustice done to the character of man. But this prejudice, be the foundation of it good or bad, lies as strongly against the works of nature, as it does against the works of grace: for it is as hard to conceive that God should create this world for the sake of placing in it such creatures as we are, as it is to conceive that he should send his Son to redeem us.

If you can justify the wisdom and goodness of God in making such creatures, it will be no hard thing to justify his wisdom and goodness in redeeming them : for to open a way for men to escape out of a state of misery is a more divine and beneficent act, than the putting them into it. If you stumble at the dignity of the Redeemer, and think that the Son of God was too great a person to be concerned in saving men ; for the same reason you should think that God, or the Son of God, was too great a person to be concerned in making such creatures as men : and from these and the like considerations you may as well conclude that God never made the world, as you do that he never redeemed it. But, in spite of all these reasons, you see plainly, that this earth was made for the habitation of men, wicked and inconsiderable as they are. Since therefore your consequence will not hold in this case, you have no reason to depend on it in the other ; but rather to think that, since it was agreeable to the wisdom and goodness of God to exert his power to make such creatures, it was also consistent that he should exert his power to save and to redeem them.

It can serve to no good purpose to give men a great opinion of themselves, and of the considerable figure they make in the universe ; nor can it be done with truth and justice. Experience, which shews us daily our own and the follies of those about us, will be too hard for all reasonings upon this foot ; and the mind of man, conscious of its own defects, will see through the flattery, which ascribes to it perfections and excellencies with which



it feels itself to be unacquainted. Or, could a man, in spite of his own experience, be persuaded to think himself very considerable, and worthy of all that God has done for him ; this opinion could tend only to make him proud and conceited, and to think the dispensations of Providence with regard to himself to be rather acts of justice, and due to his merit, than the effects of goodness and benignity in the Governor of the world. Such an opinion would in a great measure exclude a sense of dependence, and in a greater still a sense of gratitude ; which are vital and fundamental principles in religion.

But, if we set out with taking a proper view of ourselves in the first place, and with considering the many imperfections and follies to which we are liable as rational agents, the many weaknesses and infirmities which surround us as animal creatures ; and then survey the works of Providence, and the great care of God over us, manifested in his various dispensations in the natural and moral world ; we shall easily enter into the true spirit of the holy Psalmist's reflection, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him ? or the son of man, that thou visitest him ?* It is a reflection naturally proceeding from the sense of our dependence on God, and leading to the highest degree of gratitude, whilst we contemplate with admiration the greatest of his favours, and consider ourselves as unworthy of his least.

This is the natural sense which the reflection in the text suggests to us : yet has it, as I observed before, been used to other purposes ; and some have thought it unworthy of God to suppose that

in the great works of providence he had any special regard to so inconsiderable a part of the whole, as the race of men appears to be. The objection, they think, grows stronger, when the scheme of providence displayed to us in the Gospel of Christ for the salvation of man is laid before them; and it appears to them astonishing, that God should interest himself so particularly in an affair, which seems, when compared to the whole, of so little importance. If we ascribe this great work to the divine love and goodness, it cannot be controverted that they are strongly and evidently expressed and manifested in this proceeding; too strongly, it may be thought; since divine love and goodness must be bounded by divine wisdom, and can never degenerate into fondness and partiality; consequently, his love and goodness can never do what his wisdom does not approve as fit to be done.

Upon this foot it may be asked, Where is the wisdom of erecting such a building as this for the service of such a creature as man? The works of nature are so immense and wonderful, that, if they are formed for the sake of providing a proper habitation for man, the house seems to be of far greater dignity than the master, and the end proposed by no means to answer and justify the means made use of. So again, in the work of our redemption, if the only Son of God came down from heaven, and did and suffered all that is reported of him in the Gospel; what is there in man, considered in the most advantageous light, that bears any proportion to this wonderful method made use of to save him, or to justify the wisdom of God in sending the Lord

of power, and of the whole creation, to die for the meanest, perhaps, of all intelligent beings belonging to it?

Now, whether these reflections upon our own weak and infirm condition, and the low rank we hold in the order of intelligent beings, be a sufficient ground for calling into question the credibility of the great things said to be done for us, is a matter deserving serious consideration. And

The first question we should ask ourselves, is, whether we are proper judges in this matter? It is a great undertaking to judge of the wisdom of God, and to say what is fit, or not fit, for him to do; especially where the subject of the inquiry is the counsels of God in governing the natural and moral world; points, not only of the highest consequence, but of all others the most removed out of our sight.

In human affairs we pretty well know the powers and abilities of men, and can oftentimes judge of the ends they propose to themselves; and this knowledge of their powers, and this ability to judge of the ends they propose, qualifies us in many cases to estimate comparatively the means and the end, and to discern whether the thing aimed at is worth the expence or labour employed in obtaining it. This judgment cannot be made merely by considering and comparing the means and the end together; but consideration likewise must be had of the power and ability of the agent. The end of building an house is for the habitation of men: but, whether the house be too big, or too little, too magnificent, or not magnificent enough, can never

appear from confidering merely the end of building of an houfe, which is for men to dwell in ; but you muft take into the account the power, ftation, wealth, and other circumftances of the builder, and then you may reasonably fay whether too much or too little pains and coft have been beftowed on it. To apply this to the prefent cafe : When you view the works of nature, you think them too great and too magnificent to be intended for the ufe of man : but confider a little, Who is the builder ? Is it not one of whofe power and ability you cannot poffibly judge ? How do you know then that it was not as eafy (and doubtlefs it was as eafy) to God to produce this beautiful and wonderful order of things, as to have produced a much worfe, and more adapted, as you may imagine, to the circumftances of man, the inhabitant of this world ? You cannot fay, too much pains, or too much coft, has been beftowed : for all thefe confiderations are relative to the power of the agent ; and, when the agent has infinite power, this confideration is wholly excluded.

But farther ; in order to judge rightly in the cafe before us, we ought perfectly to comprehend the end propofed. If you fee a great building, but know not for what ufe it was intended, nor what ufe is made of it, it is impoffible to judge whether it be too large or too confined ; for that judgment muft arife neceffarily from knowing to what purpofe and to what ufe it was erected. And where is the man, who will pretend to know all the ends of God in the creation of the univerfe ? What relates to ourfelves we know tolerably well from fenfe and

experience : we feel the influence of the heavenly bodies, and are sure that we are the better for them ; but, that no others are besides ourselves, we can never be sure.

Since then we know nothing of the power of God but that it is infinite ; the true consequence from which is, that all possible things are equally easy to be effected by his hand ; since the purposes of God to be served in the creation of the universe are various, and more than we can discover, probably more than we can even imagine ; we act the absurdest part in the world, when we pretend to judge of the works of Providence by comparing the greatness of the works of nature with such ends and purposes as we can discover to be served by them : for, with respect to the infinite power of God, we talk childishly, when we call his works great, or little ; and, with respect to the ends and purposes of Providence, supposing a just measure of his works were to be taken from thence, yet it is a measure of which we are not masters.

As this reasoning must necessarily hold in the works of nature ; so is it equally strong, when applied to the works of grace. It is indeed a surprising and wonderful event, the coming of the Son of God into this world, being made man, and born of a pure virgin, living and dying as a man, to redeem sinners. But what is there that shocks your faith in this ? You think perhaps the means too great and too considerable to be made use of for the sake of the end proposed, which might have been obtained at a cheaper rate. But, when you say or think this, do you pretend to know by what other



way all the purposes of God in sending his Son into the world might have been answered? If you do not, possibly this was the only way to answer all the ends and intentions of Providence in this great work; and, if it was, the means used were necessary, and therefore, without doubt, proper: and, supposing them proper, you will not surely be surprised, that God should design, and his blessed Son undertake to perform, what was proper to execute the wise ends of Providence. It was indeed a very great thing for a man to be born of a virgin: but in what sense was it great? only as being unusual, and contrary to the established course, in our eyes: with respect to God, I see no reason to call it so. Were God to form a new race under this new law of nature, that all should be born of virgins, I conceive, there would be nothing in it more wonderful than in the present established course of nature.

It is more wonderful still to think of the Son of God living on earth in the form and fashion of a man: and, if we speak in relation to our own abilities of searching into this mysterious work, it is, and it ever must continue to be, a wonder: but, with respect to God, have you any reason to think this wonderful and mysterious, or a thing difficult to be performed? God has united our spirits, our souls, to these bodies: a wonderful and mysterious thing it is to us: but can you imagine there is any thing in the works of God, that is wonderful, mysterious, or difficult in the execution to him? If not, how weakly do we amuse ourselves, when we set ourselves with great wisdom to weigh the works of God in

our scales, and to judge which are great and difficult in the performance ?

But this is not the only mistake men are liable to, when they set themselves up for judges in this matter. That the redemption and salvation of men is the end of Christ's coming into the world, is certain, and is revealed in the Gospel : but whoever shall say God had no other purpose in view than this only, will judge hastily, and, I doubt, rashly. What relates to us immediately in this great dispensation, God has been pleased to reveal to us distinctly ; but he has no where told us that we are the only persons concerned : that others probably are, may be collected from many intimations in Scripture. Our blessed Redeemer has *all power given him in heaven* as well as in earth : *principalities and powers, the invisible powers, are made subject to him* : and they cannot be thought to be unconcerned in that work, for the sake of which their King was exalted, and *every knee made to bow* to him. How they are concerned, we know not : but this we know, that we are but a small part of the natural world. That there are many intelligent beings besides ourselves, we know : that they may be numberless, we have reason to believe : that God is the common governor of all, is out of question : that all his dispensations in the moral government of the world regard the whole, and will finally appear in the eyes of every rational creature to be just and equal, we have great reason to conclude ; and that God *will be justified in his sayings, and clear when he is judged*. If this be so, the great work of our redemption, however immediately it relates to us,

must be supposed adapted to answer the general ends and purposes of God's government in the universal moral world. And this plainly shews, that we cannot judge of the propriety of the means made use of for redeeming the world by considering only the relation they have to men; for probably they relate to others, and to other purposes, and are, upon the whole, in every respect proper and fit: but the propriety cannot be discerned by us, nor will it, till we come into a clearer light, and see the whole scheme of Providence together.

You see then, upon the whole, that the objections against God's government in the natural and moral world, founded upon the disproportion between the means made use of, and the ends proposed, are really the effects of shortsightedness, and of that great propensity which men have to judge, though they want proper materials to form a judgment upon.

But let us consider, whether the observations, which have given rise to these perverse reasonings, will not, if duly attended to, open a way to far other and far juster conclusions. That men are weak and wretched, and not worthy of the care of Providence over them, we know by sad experience; and have reason enough, in this view, to fall into the Psalmist's reflection, *Lord, what is man, that thou regardest him?* But still most certain it is, that God does regard man: all nature bears witness to the truth of this; for he is served by the works of nature: and, though the works of nature may serve an hundred purposes more, yet it cannot be doubted but that they were made to serve man, though

not him alone. This must appear upon the strictest inquiry: for, considering this solar system, of which we are a part, we have no reason to think but that it bears as great proportion to the whole, as any other system: in this system our earth is one considerable part; and this part was manifestly prepared for man, who has dominion over it. So that the human race is no inconsiderable part of the creation in this way of reckoning: and it is reasonable to say, that the world was made, if not for him only, yet as much and as truly for him, as for others.

Being then possessed of this fact, that, weak and infirm as we are, God has abundantly provided for us in this life; and that, considered as part of the natural world, we have a very full proportion of good things allotted to us; what conclusion does it lead us to, if we consider ourselves as part of the rational and moral world? Is it reasonable to imagine, that God has taken so much care of us in his natural government of the world, and that he will neglect us in the moral part of it? that he regards us as animals, but has no regard to us as rational agents? Can any man think seriously of God, as a reasonable, just, and upright being, and suppose this to be the case?

Now, these considerations lay a foundation for a just expectation from the goodness of God of his assistance in our case, where it is most wanted; that is, for his assistance to us as rational and moral beings, as capable of being happy or miserable by virtue or by vice.

There is a similitude and proportion in all the

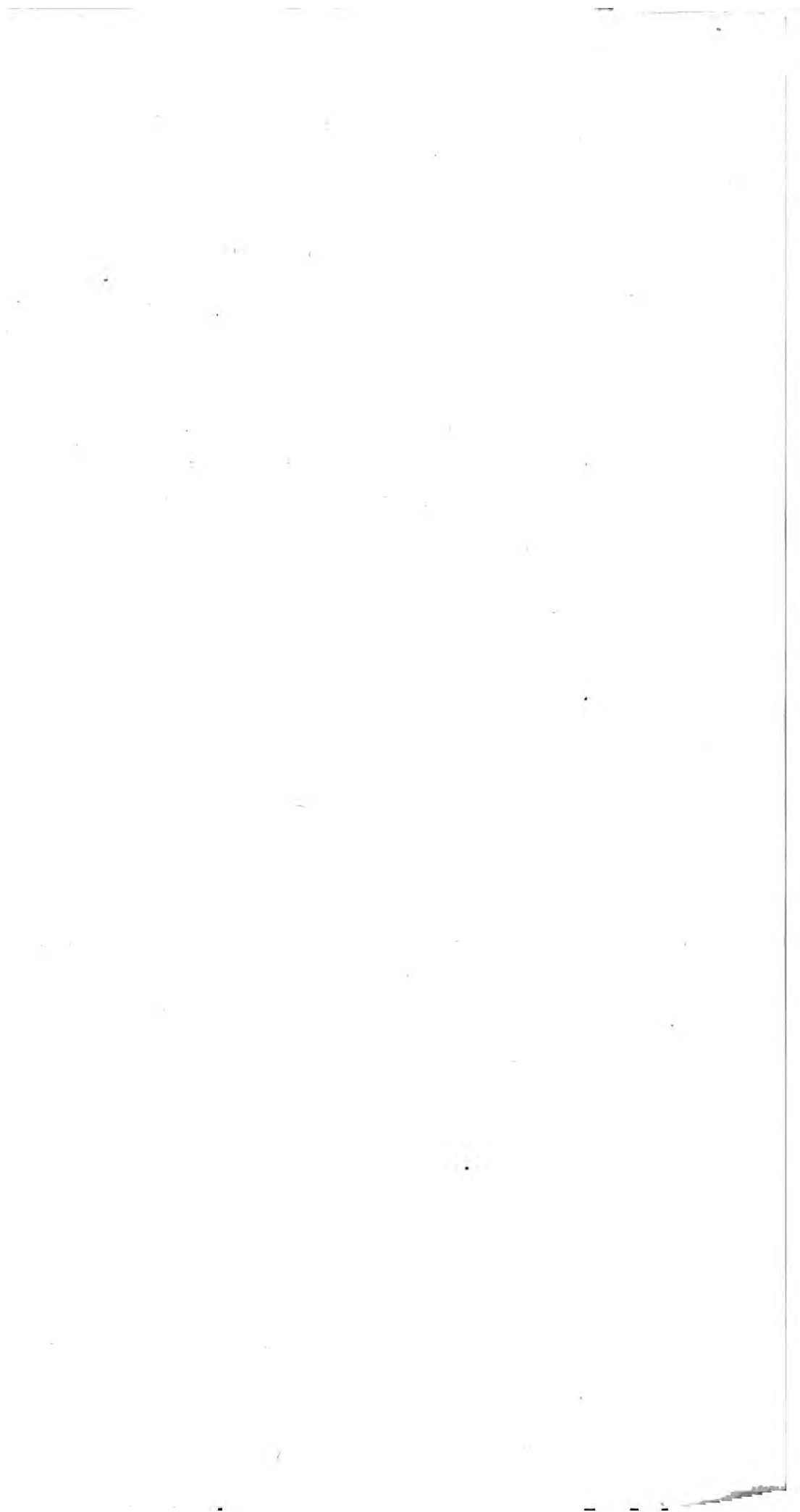
works of God: and it is reasonable to infer, from the visible regard shewed to us in one respect, the regard had for us in all; especially in the principal and most concerning relation in which we stand towards him; that is, as rational agents. And this leads us directly to suppose that God will provide for our well-being as moral and religious creatures, with a care, at least, equal to that shewn for us in our natural capacity in this world.

Join now to this presumption what the Gospel has expressly revealed to us, and see whether the whole is not of a piece, and consistent.

The Gospel tells us, that God has sent his Son to redeem us: you wonder he should take so much trouble for such creatures: but is it not as becoming his goodness to redeem us, as it was to make us? You will say perhaps, we are since that become sinners. True; and yet ever since that he has preserved us, and afforded us the blessings of this life: and is it not of a piece to open to us the hopes of a better? Mistake not my meaning: I do not mean to infer from what God does for us in this world, that he is bound in justice to do as much for us in respect to another. I know of nothing that he is bound in justice to do for us. But surely it is safest reasoning upon the ways of providence from the manifest works of providence: and by seeing how God has dealt with the children of men as part and as inhabitants of this natural world, it is reasonable to conclude in what manner he will treat them as part of the moral world. And, if we consider what we see and know of the works of nature, and of the good we enjoy from them, and compare them



with the greater works of grace, as manifested in the Gospel of Christ Jesus, we may easily discern the consistency and harmony of God's dealings in both cases ; and see too, at the same time, that the methods of Providence by which we hope to be saved, and which we have from revelation, are liable to no other objections, than the methods of Providence by which we live, and which we see daily with our eyes. In both cases the works of God are indeed wonderful, and we unworthy of the least of them : and we may justly say of both, *Lord, what is man, that thou regardest him ? and the son of man, that thou visitest him ?*



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## DISCOURSE XII.

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ACTS x. 34, 35.

*Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

THESE words, if not carefully attended to, may seem to carry a sense contrary to the meaning of the Apostle in delivering them. St. Peter in the text declares, that God, without respect to any national or personal privileges, was ready to admit all people into the covenant made with Christ Jesus, provided they were duly prepared for such admission. Some from his words have concluded that there is no necessity of becoming disciples of Christ, but that it is sufficient if we live according to the principles and light of nature; forasmuch as *every one who feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*: and thus supported, as they think, by one passage of Scripture, they have been emboldened to despise and reject all the rest as of no use to them, and to put their salvation upon their own strength, in opposition to the method revealed and declared by the Son of God. This error is common, as well

as dangerous: and, since the great regard which some pay to moral virtue is purely opposition to the Gospel, it is worth while to examine this passage of St. Peter, and to place his meaning in a true light, that the doctrine of the Gospel may not be overthrown by its own authority.

The Jews had a notion that the blessings of the promised Messias were to be peculiar to themselves, and not to be extended to any other nation or people whatever, whom they looked on as aliens from God, and not under his care and protection, as they were. Hence in the Prophets they plead their privilege, and tell God that he is not God of the heathen, but of the people of Israel; which conceit of theirs St. Paul refers to and confutes in his Epistle to the Romans: *Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? yes, of the Gentiles also.* The Disciples of our Lord, and especially St. Peter, were as deep in this opinion as others; and, during our Saviour's abode on earth, they were confirmed in it by what they observed in him: he declared, *he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:* and, when he sent out his Disciples to preach, he expressly charged them *not to go into the way of the Gentiles, nor to enter into any city of the Samaritans; but to go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:* and after his resurrection, when he enlarged their commission, and bade them *Go, teach all nations;* they understood him not, but were inquisitive about *his restoring the kingdom to Israel.* After the ascension the Apostles continued at Jerusalem preaching to their own nation, till, upon the persecution of St. Stephen,

many fled into other parts, and, though they went as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch, yet they *preached the word to none but Jews only*, Acts xi. 19. And when St. Peter, admonished by an heavenly vision, had admitted some Gentiles into the church of Christ through baptism, he was called to an account for it by the Apostles and brethren who were in Judea, chap. xi. 1: nor were they satisfied, till he told them what vision he had seen, what also Cornelius had seen, and in what a miraculous manner the Holy Ghost was poured forth on the Gentiles, before he ventured to baptize them: and then, under the astonishment of this conviction, they held their peace, blaming his behaviour no longer; but glorified God, saying, *Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*, Acts xi. 18. St. Peter himself was equally surpris'd, when he found, by comparing Cornelius's vision with his own, that God had determin'd to admit the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, into the church of Christ; and he expresses himself in the same manner, though not just in the same words with the Apostles and brethren. They say, *Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*. St. Peter says, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*. These two reflections, as they are made upon the same case, one by St. Peter, when he was with Cornelius, the other by the Apostles and brethren, when St. Peter related the story of Cornelius, so are they in substance the same: and St. Peter, when he says *that in every nation he that fear-*



*eth God—is accepted with him*, and the Apostles and brethren, when they say *that God hath granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life*, mean one and the same thing: and therefore, in the text, *to be accepted with God* means no more than to have from God the offer of *repentance unto life*; and both certainly mean our having admision into the covenant with God through Christ Jesus. So that the whole of what St. Peter says in the text amounts to this: “ I now at length perceive that God has  
 “ not confined his mercies to a particular nation  
 “ only; but that all are capable of inheriting the  
 “ promises in Christ Jesus, who are duly prepared  
 “ by righteousness, and the fear of God.”

This will farther appear to be the true interpretation, if we examine the case of Cornelius, and what the acceptance was that he found. Cornelius was a Gentile, and one of the best of them; *a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway*: and yet his goodness did not make it unnecessary for him to become a Christian. The heavenly vision was not sent to satisfy him that his righteousness was sufficient, and that he had no need to look out for farther assistance or direction: on the contrary, it was sent to inform him where he might seek and find a proper instructor. St. Peter had also a vision to prepare him to do the duty of an Apostle to the Gentile centurion; and, when this devout man came to him, in obedience to the heavenly warning, he instructs him in the faith of Christ Jesus, and baptizes him with water: upon which St. Peter says, he finds that men of all na-

tions, who do righteously, are accepted with God. He could not possibly mean, that those who did their best upon the light of nature, had no need of any other teacher: that reflection could never rise from the case before him: for why did he then instruct Cornelius in the knowledge of Christ, and baptize him in his name? St. Peter therefore certainly meant, that all Gentiles duly prepared were capable of the blessings of the Gospel through the mercy of God; in opposition to his former error, that none but Jews had such a privilege. And the Apostle undoubtedly understood that the best of the Gentiles had need of the Gospel; or else his commendation of the goodness of God amounts to this only, that he perceived that God would give to the honest-minded Gentiles, who feared him, and did righteously, that which they had no occasion to receive.

From the words and circumstances of the text thus explained we learn what is the true notion of that acceptance, which St. Peter says the Gentiles of all nations are entitled to through the mercy of God.

But then there arises a difficulty from the terms to which St. Peter has limited this privilege: for he does not say that men of all nations are accepted of God; but that in every nation *he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness*, is accepted of him. Now, one great end of the Christian religion being to instruct us in the fear of God, and in works of righteousness, it may seem strange, that in order to the obtaining of this benefit of being duly instructed in the fear of God, and in works of righteousness, it

should be required, as a previous condition, that we should fear God, and do righteously: which condition supposes us already in possession of the main thing for which the privilege itself is granted; and consequently, the privilege becomes in a manner useless by our having the qualifications necessary to the obtaining it. To clear this matter, we must consider what the Apostle to the Hebrews teaches us, chap. xi. 6. *Without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* The meaning of which is, that a man cannot offer himself to God, much less enter into the covenant of his mercy, without a firm persuasion of his being, and a due notion of his attributes. He must know *that he is*; otherwise he can never move or advance towards him: he must know also *that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him*; or else he cannot be encouraged to move towards him: which two articles of belief infer a just fear of God as the supreme governor of the world, and a desire to please him as the dispenser of rewards and punishments according to the good or evil which men do. This is the faith, without which, the Apostle to the Hebrews says, it is impossible to please God: this is the faith, with which, St. Peter says, the men of every nation are accepted with him. And in truth these qualifications are so necessary to a man's being accepted with God, and admitted into the covenant of his grace through Jesus Christ, that without them the Gospel cannot be so much as tendered to him: for upon what foot would you press men to become Christians in order to obtain the mercy of God, who

have no sense of the fear of God, and, consequently, no concern about pleasing or displeasing him? The Gospel does not teach, but suppose this doctrine: and, was even an Apostle to preach to a nation perfectly ignorant of God, he must lay by the Gospel, and first convince the people from reason and nature of the being of God, and the necessity of righteousness in order to deserve his favour, before he could invite them to embrace the Gospel as the perfect rule of righteousness prescribed and ordained by God himself. And therefore, when St. Peter says, *that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him*, he is not to be understood as limiting the mercies of God to certain persons of the best character, but rather as declaring the natural order of things. It is frequently taught, that our Lord came to save sinners; and therefore he began his preaching with an exhortation to repentance in the same words that John the Baptist had done before him, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*: which is as much as if he had said, Turn to God, and fear him, working righteousness, that ye may be made members of the kingdom of his Son, which now approaches.

But, should the case of Cornelius, *who was a devout man, fearing God with all his house, giving much alms, and praying alway*, from which case St. Peter makes the reflection contained in the text, incline us to believe that he means a greater degree of goodness by fearing God, and working righteousness, than was commonly to be found; and, consequently, that what St. Peter says can be applied only to the most virtuous and best-disposed heathens; upon



this supposition, both the case of Cornelius, and the declaration of St. Peter, evidently prove, that the best of men stand in need of the assistances of the Gospel of Christ to make themselves secure of obtaining the end of their hopes, glory and immortality, from God, who is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him. I would desire those who are of a different opinion, and think that they have no reason to trouble their heads about the Christian religion, provided they lead good moral lives, to consider the character of Cornelius: he was devout, and feared God with all his house: he was very charitable, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God continually. This, I suppose, they will allow to be a description of such a moral man as they mean: and I would ask then, For what purpose did God send a vision to Cornelius, and another to St. Peter, that Cornelius might be made a Christian? Was all this care thrown away upon a mere unnecessary point, that might as well have been let alone? Was Cornelius thus called to the profession of the Gospel, and was it of no consequence whether he had been called, or no? If God made choice of Cornelius, one of the best of the Gentiles, to shew that some of them were capable of his grace, he did at the same time demonstrate that all had need of it: for, if the best, with all the light they enjoyed, wanted this assistance, what could the worst do without it?

It may be asked perhaps, What would have become of Cornelius, had he died, as he had some time lived, a devout Gentile, in the fear of God, full of alms and of prayers, without having been



called to the knowledge of Christ Jesus? which question, if pursued through all its views, would open a large field of discourse, but such as would afford rather speculation than profit; since the case, however determined, could no way affect us, who have been called to the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Let it then be taken for granted, that Cornelius, had he died in the circumstances before described, would have found rest to his soul from the mercy and goodness of God: and let this other question be considered, which is much more to our purpose, What would have been the case of Cornelius, if he had rejected the call, refused to hearken to St. Peter, and had insisted on his own merit and virtue, in opposition to the grace that was offered him through the Gospel? Would such a refusal have been a pardonable error? Could he have maintained the character of one fearing God with all his house, after such an open contempt of the divine call? Could he ever have prayed more to God to guide and direct his way, after he had absolutely denied to be guided and directed by him? Would even his alms have been an acceptable offering to the Almighty, after he had renounced that obedience which is better than sacrifice, and which is the only thing that can sanctify our imperfect works? If reason and natural religion teach us that it is our duty to please and to obey God, what part even of natural religion could this Centurion have exercised, after he had solemnly rejected the counsel of God, and followed his own will in opposition to that of his Maker declared in the heavenly vision? As bad as this supposed case of Cor-

nelius would have been, it is the very case of those who, having been betimes instructed in the knowledge of the Gospel, and called to the faith and obedience of Christ Jesus, do despise and reject that faith under the colour of preserving the purity of natural religion, and living according to the dictates of reason and morality. It makes no difference in the case, that their call has been through the ordinary administrations of the church, and that Cornelius's was by a vision directed to himself: the voice of God is the same, whether he speaks by his apostles, or by his angels: whoever acts by the appointment of God, speaks with his authority: and, the regular powers of the church being ordained by him, when the church speaks to her children conformably to the commission received, it is the voice of God calling men to repentance unto life through Christ Jesus. And, whatever the condition of those may be who have never heard of the Lord who bought them, ours is certainly very bad, if, having heard of him, we reject and despise him. It is one thing not to believe in Christ, because we know him not; it is another to know him, and to disbelieve him. Though such ignorance may be an excuse, yet such knowledge must be condemnation.

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## DISCOURSE XIII.

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MATTHEW xxii. 40.

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

THE two commandments here referred to are set down in the verses immediately preceding the words of the text. At verse 37 we read, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment,* verse 38. At verse 39 follows, *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Then come the words of the text, *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*: the meaning of which saying is plainly this, that the whole reason of religion lies in these two general commandments; that in these all particular duties and precepts are founded; that nothing can be of any obligation in religion, but as it relates either to the love we owe to God, or the love we owe to our neighbour. In speaking to these words, I shall,

First, Shew you the true meaning and import of them; and,

Secondly, Make some useful remarks on the whole.

In St. Mark's Gospel the same thing is said in different words, though to the same effect. The words parallel to the text are these: *There is none other commandment greater than these*, Mark xii. 31: that is, there is nothing in religion of an higher obligation than these two precepts: all the duties of religion must be governed by these two principles: beyond them there is nothing greater, nothing to limit or restrain them; but by them must every thing else be limited and restrained. The reason of this is plain: for, the relation between God and man being once known, the first conclusion is, *That we ought to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds*; that is, to the utmost of our power: and, until this general principle be established, the particular duties owing to God cannot fall under our consideration. There is no room to inquire after the proper instances of expressing our love to God, till the general obligation of loving God be known and admitted. The same reason holds likewise as to the other general head of religion, *the love of our neighbour*: for, the relation between man and man, and the common relation of all to one great Master, being supposed, the result is, that we ought *to love our neighbour as ourself*; that is, to do all we can to promote the happiness of each other: and, unless we have this general sense, we cannot be concerned to know in any particular case what is the proper instance of love which we ought to shew towards our neighbour.

But, these general principles being once established, the particular duties flow from them naturally. The love of God, and the love of our neighbour, if carefully attended to, will easily grow into a complete system of religion. The duties of religion are all relative, regarding either God or man; and there is no relative duty that love does not readily transform itself into upon the mere view of the different circumstances of the persons concerned. Love, with regard to a superior, becomes honour and respect, and shews itself in a cheerful obedience and a willing submission to the commands of authority: love, with respect to our equals, is friendship and benevolence: towards inferiors it is courtesy and condescension: if it regards the happy and prosperous, it is joy and pleasure, which envy cannot corrupt: if it looks towards the miserable, it is pity and compassion; it is a tenderness which will discover itself in all the acts of mercy and humanity.

In negative duties this principle is no less effectual than in positive. Love will not permit us to injure, oppress, or offend our brother: it will not give us leave to neglect our betters, or to despise our inferiors: it will restrain every inordinate passion, and not suffer us either to gratify our envy at the expence of our neighbour's credit and reputation, or our lust by violating his wife or his daughter; but it will preserve us harmless and innocent: for *love worketh no ill to its neighbour*. This deduction of particular duties from this general principle was made by St. Paul long since: *Owe no man, says he, any thing, but to love one another: for*



*he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet: and, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Rom. xiii. 8, &c.*

This notion of love, as being the fulness of the law, and of all the commandments being comprehended in this saying, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, will lead us to the true and natural interpretation of a passage in St. James, which, as it is commonly understood, is liable to great difficulties and objections, and to those who have plain sense, and can follow it, must appear absurd: *Whosoever, says he, shall keep the whole law, and offend in one point, he is guilty of all*, chap. ii. ver. 10. This is a position something strange, that an offence against one law should be a breach of all laws, however different they are in kind and degree; that he who commits adultery, for instance, should therefore be guilty of murder and robbery, and other the like heinous offences nothing related to the sin of adultery. But let us consider the Apostle's reason in the next verse: *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.* This reason, as interpreters commonly expound it, amounts to this: All laws are founded upon one and the same authority of God; therefore every offence against any law is a contempt of the authority upon which all laws depend;

and therefore every act of disobedience is a breach of the whole law, because subversive of that authority upon which the whole law stands. But there are many objections against the reason thus stated: first, it is liable evidently to all the difficulties of the Stoics' paradox, that all offences are equal: for, if the guilt of sin depends, not upon the nature and circumstances of the sinful action, but upon the authority of the lawgiver, then every sin, being an offence against the same authority, is of the same guilt and heinousness; and there will be no difference between killing your neighbour and your neighbour's horse; for he that has forbid you killing your neighbour, has likewise forbid you doing any act to the hurt and detriment of your neighbour. Secondly, the Apostle's inference in the latter part of the verse does not answer to the principle laid down in the former part: *He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.* This is his principle; and he infers, *Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law:* no doubt of it; because there is a law against murder as well as against adultery. But what is this towards shewing that the breach of one law is the breach of all? The inference therefore should have been upon this foot: now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art guilty of all the laws by disobeying the Author of all laws.

But this passage of St. James will have another appearance, when fairly examined. In order to it, we must look back to that which gave occasion to it, and follow the Apostle's argument step by step.

The whole depends upon the notion, which is common to the writers of the New Testament, that *love is the fulfilling of the law*. St. James considers the whole duty of man to man as contained in one law, namely, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*: and then he argues rightly, he who offends in one point is guilty of the whole law: for, whether it be theft, or murder, or adultery, that you commit, it matters not; for any of these crimes is inconsistent with the law, which contains and is the whole, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. But hear the Apostle's own words: in the eighth verse you read thus, *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well*: where, first, you are to observe, that he calls this the royal law, not because given by Christ the king, as some tell us, for all laws are in that sense royal laws; but because it is the first supreme law, from which all others proceed, as distinct branches, and by which they must all be governed. Secondly, you must take notice what stress the Apostle lays upon their *fulfilling* this royal law: *If ye fulfil the royal law,—ye do well*: that is, if you attend to it in all instances, so as not to offend against it in any case, ye then will do well. The Apostle proceeds in the next verse, *But, if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors*. The law in this verse is the same law that was mentioned before, that is, the royal law: if, says he, you have any partial regards, you will not then fulfil the law of love, but will be found to be transgressors of that law: for, as it follows in the tenth verse, *whosoever shall keep the whole law, and*

yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. In this verse he considers the royal law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, as the whole law; and all particular commandments as points of that law. And what he says amounts to this: Whatever regard you may have to the law of loving your neighbour, which all profess to walk by, yet assure yourselves you cannot keep that law, if you offend against any one rule of charity; for every such single offence is a breach of that whole law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. In the eleventh verse he gives the reason of his assertion: *For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill*. The words in the original, here translated *for he that said*, are of doubtful interpretation. The sense followed by interpreters and translators has misled people in the understanding of this whole place. Instead of *for he that said*, it should be rendered, *for the law which said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill*. The place thus rendered contains a clear reason of what went before: if, says he, you offend in any point of charity or duty, you become a transgressor of this whole law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*: for this law of loving thy neighbour, which says to thee, *Do not commit adultery*, says likewise to thee, *Do not kill*. And now, if you go to the latter part of the verse, you will find it exactly suited to the whole thread of discourse which went before: for thus it follows, *Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law*; that is, of that general law of loving thy neighbour, which said as well to thee, *Thou shalt not kill*, as, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*.



How this royal law speaks to us in the language of all particular laws and precepts is easily understood, and is distinctly explained by St. Paul in the place already produced: *For this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet: and, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, Rom. xiii. 9.

As to the different version of the eleventh verse in St. James, which I have made choice of, our own translators plainly saw the propriety of it, and have given that version in the margin of the Bible. To them therefore, and their reasoning, I refer you.

This place in St. James being thus understood and explained, there is no occasion for any niceties or distinctions to support the reason and equity of his doctrine, or to shew how a man, by offending against one law, may become guilty of all; since this assertion will no longer be found to be part of the Apostle's doctrine. What he teaches is plainly this: The great and fundamental law of the Gospel is this, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. The force of this all see, and all acknowledge; and, whilst they pretend to be Christians, all must pretend at least to obey. But, says he, whoever in any manner offends, injures, or oppresses his brother, it matters not in what way, whether it be by undue and partial preference of one to another, by contempt, or slander, by theft, adultery, or murder: whoever, I say, in any of these instances sins against his brother, will be found to be a transgressor



against this great, this vital principle of religion, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. For this reason he tells them, the way to do well was *to fulfil the royal law*, that is, to observe all the points of it; because no point could be transgressed, but the transgressor must be found guilty of the whole law, which is a general law of love extending to all points. There is nothing hard in this sense, nothing but what any man may see the reason of: for certainly to injure our neighbour in any way makes us guilty of the breach of the law, which commands us to love our neighbour; for one injurious action is as inconsistent with love as another; and in this respect injurious actions have no difference, for they are all equally inconsistent with the great law.

The giving light to this passage in St. James has not misled us from the main purpose of this discourse; for we have seen at the same time the true extent and meaning of the text, with respect to one of the laws referred to in it, and which is easily applicable to the other. St. James has fully taught us our Saviour's meaning, when he said, *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*.

But let us turn to consider the other general head referred to by our Saviour in the text, namely, *the love of God*. This, says our Lord in the thirty-eighth verse, *is the first and great commandment*. From this head are to be deduced all the service, worship, and honour, which we owe and pay to our Creator. I observed to you before, that all the duties of religion are relative: which is true in that part now under consideration; for the duties

we owe to God are founded in the relation between God and us. Were there no such relation, the perfections of God might be matter of admiration, but could not be the ground of duty and obedience. I observed likewise to you, that love naturally transforms itself into all relative duties, which arise from the circumstances of the persons related. Thus, in the present case, if we love God, and consider him as the lord and governor of the world, our love will soon become obedience: if we consider him as wise, good, and gracious, our love will become honour and adoration: if we add to these our own natural weakness and infirmity, love will teach us dependence, and prompt us in all our wants to fly for refuge to our great Protector: and thus in all other instances may the particular duties be drawn from this general principle. Prayer and praise, and other parts of divine worship, which are the acts of these duties, are so clearly connected to them, that there is no need of shewing distinctly concerning them, how they flow from this general commandment.

Having thus given you an account of the text with respect to both the principles of religion referred to in it, *the love of God*, and *the love of our neighbour*, I would now, in the second place, lay before you some observations which seem to arise naturally from the whole.

The first is, that these two principles, from which our Lord tells us all religion flows, must be consistent with one another; otherwise they could not both be principles of the same religion. The love of God therefore can in no case oblige us to act

contrary to the love of our neighbour. Our Saviour has told us indeed, that the time would be, when some should think they did God good service by destroying their brethren : but I do not find the religion or the zeal of those persons much commended ; but this very character is given of them to shew how little they knew or understood their duty. And yet, could such a case ever happen, in which it might become our duty to hurt our neighbour, in order to promote the honour of God, it could not be a just character of false zeal, to say that it made men think they did God good service by destroying or abusing their neighbour ; because, upon this supposition, it might happen to be the character of true religious zeal.

There is one thing in our Saviour's argument which may perhaps mislead men in judging upon this case, and which therefore may deserve to be particularly considered. Of the love of God our Saviour says, *it is the first and great commandment* : the love of our neighbour he styles *the second, like unto it*. Now from hence perhaps it may be inferred, that the love of God, which is the first and great commandment, is a law of a superior obligation to that which is only the second, and may therefore in some instances control and overrule it. From whence it would follow, that we might lawfully overlook the love of our neighbour, in obedience to the superior obligation we are under to love God. Now, upon supposition that our duty to God and our neighbour could ever interfere, I should readily allow that we ought to love God rather than man : but our Saviour's saying the love

of God is the first commandment, is no manner of reason to think that it ever is, or can be, inconsistent with the second.

The love of God is properly styled the first commandment, in respect to God who is the object of the love, and because it is indeed the foundation of all religion, even of that commandment which is styled the second. But this is so far from shewing that the love of God may ever clash with the love of our neighbour, that it proves the contrary; for, if the love of our neighbour is deducible from the love of God, it must ever be consistent with it.

I know very well that the ancient writers of morality have not gone higher for principles to build their precepts on, than to the common desires of nature, and the several relations of man to man: but that is their fault; for they might have looked farther with very good success: for, if we consider God as the common father of mankind, and (as from his goodness and impartiality we must needs judge) equally concerned for the welfare of all his children, we shall have a very sure foundation for all the moral duties. No man, who thinks himself bound to love and obey God, can think himself at liberty to hurt or oppress those whom God has taken under his care and protection: no man, who believes it his interest as well as his duty to please God, but must likewise believe it his interest and duty to be kind and tender towards those who are the children of God, and in whose happiness he is not an unconcerned spectator. For this reason the love of God is called the first and great commandment; and for this reason it never can be inconsis-

ent with the love of our neighbour, which is the second. In all cases therefore where your duty to your neighbour is plain and clear, depend upon it your duty to God concurs with it. All scruples to the contrary are wicked, perhaps wicked hypocrisy; for it is the greatest indignity to God to use his name, and pretend his honour, to cover the injuries you are doing to his creatures, and your own brethren.

The second observation I would make from the text is, that, our Saviour having declared *that on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*, it is certain that nothing is or ought to be esteemed religion, that is not reducible to one or other of these principles.

But what then, you will say, must become of the institutions of religion, which, considered in themselves, and according to their own nature, are not properly to be referred either to the love of God, or our neighbour? for, if all that is religion may be so referred, it should seem that these institutions, which cannot be so referred, are no part of religion. It is certain that mere positive institutions are not founded upon any moral reason of the actions themselves: if they were, they might easily be drawn from these general precepts without the help of a positive command: for the whole moral reason of religion is either the love of God, or the love of our neighbour; and to make any thing else to be religion, strictly speaking, that does not partake of this moral reason, is ignorance and superstition. But then there is a very manifest difference between religion and the means of religion: and what-



ever is part of our religion, and yet not so upon the account of the moral reason, can only be esteemed as a means of religion; not ordained for its own sake, but for the sake of that religion which is founded upon moral reason.

This distinction between religion and the means of religion would be of use, if carefully attended to; it would teach men where to point their best endeavour, and where to place their hopes and expectations: for, if your zeal and fervour be spent only upon the means of religion, and goes no farther, ye are still in your sins.

And from hence it is plain, that there can be no competition between the duties called moral, and those called positive: for, if the positive duties are the means and instruments appointed by God for preserving true religion and morality, true religion and morality can never be at variance with the means appointed to preserve them. And, as to the obligation of observing these duties, it is on all sides equal: for, since we are bound to obey God by all the ties of moral duty, and since the institutions of religion are of God's appointment, whatever the matter of the institution be, the obligation to obey is certainly a moral obligation: which, duly considered, will shew, that the text extends to all parts of religion, and that *on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

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# DISCOURSE XIV.

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## PART I.

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HEBREWS iii. 12.

*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.*

THE words of the text contain an earnest exhortation, as is evident upon the first view: and the subject of the exhortation is faith towards God; for faith is the principle destroyed by an *evil heart of unbelief*. But faith, as some think, is no proper subject for exhortation: for, if faith is a mere act of the mind judging upon motives of credibility, it is as reasonable to exhort a man to see with his eyes, as to judge with his understanding; and the warmest admonition will not enlarge the sight, which will still depend upon the goodness of the eye, and the distance and position of the object. In faith the case is much the same: if the affections are thoroughly raised, and made eager to embrace the faith, they may chance indeed to step in between the premises and conclusion, and make men profess to believe, without knowing or considering the reasons of belief; which is to destroy the founda-

tion of faith: or, if they keep their due distance, and leave the cause to be decided by reason and understanding, their influence will be nothing, and they might as well have been left out of the case; since faith will follow the judgment the mind makes upon the motives of credibility.

But then, if this be the true notion of faith, that it is merely an act of the mind assenting to a truth upon motives of credibility, how comes it that in every page we find the praises of it in the Gospel? What is there in this to deserve the blessings promised to the faithful? Or, whence is it that the whole of our salvation is put upon this foot? Abraham, we are told, *was justified by faith, and by faith inherited the promises: by faith we become the sons of Abraham, and heirs together with him of the hope which is through Christ Jesus: by faith we have admittance to God, and are entitled through the Spirit of adoption to cry Abba, Father: by faith we are delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God: by faith we wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.* But how come all these prerogatives to belong to faith, if faith be nothing else but believing things in themselves credible? Why are we not said to be justified by sight, as well as by faith? For is there not the same virtue in seeing things visible, as in believing things credible? Is not the understanding as faulty when it rejects things credible, as the eye when it does not perceive things visible? Tell me then, what is faith, that it should raise men above the level of mortality, and make them become like the angels of heaven?

But farther ; if faith be only an act of the understanding formed upon due reasons and motives, how comes it to be described in Scripture as having its seat in the heart ? The Apostle in the text cautions against *an evil heart of unbelief* : and the same notion prevails throughout the books of Scripture, and is as early as our Saviour's first preaching. In explaining the parable of the sower to his disciples, Luke viii. he tells them, *Those by the way-side are they that hear : then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved*, ver. 12. So again, *That on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart hear the word, and bring forth fruit with patience*, ver. 15. The first sort are those who had an *evil heart of unbelief* : the second are those who, as the same Apostle to the Hebrews expresses it, chap. x. had a *true heart in full assurance of faith*. In the Acts of the Apostles, Philip tells the Eunuch, that, if he *believed with all his heart*, he might be baptized, chap. viii. 37. And Barnabas exhorts the Antiochans, *that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord* ; which is only a periphrasis for faith, chap. xi. 23. The Apostle to the Romans has *ex professo* determined this matter : *If thou shalt confess*, says he, *with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*, chap. x. 9. In the following verse he gives this general reason for his assertion : *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*.

Since then the Scripture, read to you for the

text, contains an exhortation to faith, which supposes a man's faith to be influenced by his affections and inclinations ; which is not always true, if we consider faith merely as the assent of the mind to a credible proposition : since there are also such things ascribed to faith in Scripture, such promises made to it, as cannot belong to it in this acceptation : since faith, thus considered, is a bare act of the mind ; but the faith of the Gospel is described as having its seat and operations in the heart of man : it is necessary, for the right understanding of the text, to inquire,

First, What is the true notion of faith.

From whence, in the second place, it will appear, That it is a proper exhortation, *Take heed, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief.*

The first thing to be inquired after is the true notion of faith.

Every step by which we advance to the last degree of perfection in faith, is an act of faith, though of a different kind, and not entitled either to the praises or rewards of the Gospel. And hence has arisen great part of the confusion which has obscured and darkened this question concerning faith : for, when men, not distinguishing between the intermediate acts of faith, and that faith which is the ultimate end and perfection of the Gospel, ascribe that to one, which only and properly belongs to the other, no wonder if they are found inconsistent with themselves, and destroyers of reason and religion, whilst they seem to themselves to labour for the promotion of the doctrine of righteousness.

To render what I mean plain and intelligible, I



desire you to consider the degrees and steps of faith by which men arrive at Gospel righteousness. It is one degree of faith to believe the Gospels to be true and faithful accounts ; and it is a degree that leads to greater perfection : he that wants this faith is at a stand, and can never proceed farther. But this is not the faith we seek after. It is a farther degree of faith to believe the miracles of Christ and his Apostles to be true and real miracles, and wrought by the power and Spirit of God. But neither is this faith complete : for the miracles were wrought, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of something else : and therefore to believe the miracles, without believing what the miracles were intended to prove, is not Christian faith. Farther still ; it is another and a more advanced degree of faith to believe that the Spirit of God was given to the Apostles in a large measure, and to Christ, the author of the salvation, without measure. But neither is this the faith which Christ came to propagate : for, should I ask you, Why are we taught, and why are we to believe, that God gave the Spirit to his Son without measure, and to the disciples in a very wonderful manner and degree ? would you not easily answer, that these heavenly endowments were both given and declared to make them fit teachers, and us ready disciples, of the doctrines of God ? It is evident then, that these gifts were subservient to a farther end, and that Christian faith does not terminate here. But if, notwithstanding this, you will apply all that you read of faith in holy Scripture to these or any of these kinds of faith, and then imagine that faith is

a very strange principle of religion, and of foreign growth, repugnant to the sense and reason of mankind, and disclaimed by the light of nature ; which are the usual compliments bestowed on it in the world ; you may thank yourself for the delusion : the doctrine of the Gospel of Christ is clear of the reproach.

Faith, which is the principle of the Gospel, respects the promises and declarations of God, and includes a sure trust and reliance on him for the performance. Beyond this there is no farther act of faith. We are not taught to believe this in order to our believing something else : but here faith has its full completion, and leads immediately to the practice of virtue and holiness, the conditions in which all the promises of God are founded. For this end was the Son of God revealed, to make known the will of his Father, to declare his mercy and pardon, and to confirm the promises of eternal life to mankind : he that believes and accepts this deliverance from the bondage of sin, and through patience and perseverance in well-doing waits for the blessed hope of immortality ; who passes through this world as a stranger and pilgrim, looking for another country, and a city whose builder is God ; this is he whose faith shall receive the promise, whose confidence shall have great recompence of reward.

If these are hard sayings, what defence shall we make for natural religion, which requires almost the same faith, but without giving the same evidence ? Is it not the profession of every religion to believe God to be a rewarder of them who diligently seek

him? Could you have any natural religion without this principle? This the Gospel requires of you: and, if Jesus Christ has given you more evidence for this faith than ever nature could afford her children, forgive him this injury. Is it become less credible that God will reward the righteous, because he has sent his Son into the world to declare his full purpose so to do? Is it harder to trust him now, since he has appeared to us in signs and in wonders and in mighty works, than it was before, when we saw him only by the glimmering light of nature? Are the express promises of God, confirmed to us in Christ Jesus, of less weight than the general suggestions of nature? If these express promises, these clear evidences of the purpose of God are not the things complained of in the Gospel, what are they? Faith has ever been the principle of religion, and must ever continue so to be: for, when all other gifts shall cease, faith, hope, and charity will be the only Gospel graces which time shall not destroy.

Religion is a struggle between sense and faith. The temptations to sin are the pleasures of this life: the incitements to virtue are the pleasures of the next. These are only seen by faith: those are the objects of every sense. On the side of virtue all the motives, all the objects of faith engage: on the side of vice stand the formidable powers of sense, passion, and affection. Where the heart is established in the fulness of faith, the heavenly host prevails, and virtue triumphs over all the works of darkness: but, where sense governs, sin enters, and is served by every evil passion of the heart. If this

be the case; if religion has nothing to oppose to the present allurements of the world, but the hopes and glories of futurity, which are seen only by faith; it is no more absurd to say men are saved by faith, than it is to say they are ruined by sense and passion; which we all know has so much of truth in it, that it can have nothing of absurdity.

To this account of faith the definition which the Apostle has given of it (in the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews) exactly agrees: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Things hoped for are the things of futurity, things which are not seen, as we learn from St. Paul, Romans viii. 24. We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for?* Now without faith there can be no hope: for, if we do not believe things future, we cannot possibly hope for them. Hope therefore is indebted to faith for all its objects: for these things with respect to hope would be mere non-entities, were it not for faith. Considered therefore as things hoped for, they owe their substance and their being to faith. *Faith then is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The things not seen are those good things which God has prepared for them who love him, the rewards of virtue and holiness, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath the heart of man conceived. And that these things are chiefly meant by the Apostle, is evident from the great number of instances subjoined in this chapter, in which the thing not seen is generally the promise of God, that is, the thing promised by God. Now, the promises of God*

being neither objects of sense nor science, but such things as are made known to us by his declaration, the evidence upon which they are received is the evidence of faith. The reason why we believe there are such rewards, is, because we believe the word of God: the reason why we hope to receive them, is, because we judge *him faithful who has promised.*

Since then all the blessings of holiness, all the hopes of religion, are founded in faith, is it not very natural to say, that the man who follows after holiness and piety, induced by the glorious prospects of futurity, is saved by faith? that he who sacrifices the world and its enjoyments to the hopes of eternity, depending entirely upon the truth of God, that he will perform the word which is gone out of his mouth, is saved by his faith, without which he could have had no hopes, no expectations, to place against the present enjoyments of the world? Do but consider the posture of mind a man is in, when he deliberates upon the good and evil of his own actions, and is determining his choice whether to follow the pleasures of sin, or to endure the hardships and fatigues of virtue: What are his motives, what are his deliberations? Is not the whole contest between things present and things to come, the realities of this life, and the uncertainty of the other? Most certainly this is the whole debate: for, put the things of this life and the next upon the same foot of certainty and reality, and there is no man fool enough to deliberate on his choice. Were the glories of heaven the object of sense; could we with the eyes of flesh look up to



the throne of God, the heavenly Jerufalem, and *discern the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the fpirits of juft men made perfect, and Jefus the mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of fprinkling, that fpeaketh better things than that of Abel*: could we have this view, a man would no more part with his inheritance above for the fhort enjoyments of fin, than he would fell the reverfion of an earthly crown for one morfel of meat. The caufe of fin therefore is never argued upon the comparifon between the glories of heaven, and the pleasures of life. No wicked man was ever fo weak as to fay, it is better for me to eat, drink, and be merry this day and the next, than to reign in eternal glory and immortality. But thus he reafons, The things about me are prefent and real: I fee, I feel the world; and every fenfe directs me to the enjoyment of it: but for heaven, where is it? Diftant it is, I am fure, and out of fight; and perhaps is only a delufion of fickly imagination. When this reafoning prevails, as too often it does, tell me, I befeech you, is it not a victory gained by fenfe over the power of faith? Had faith been ftrong enough to have placed in view the fubftance of things hoped for, to have made evident the things not feen, could the world fo eafily have prevailed? I truft, it could not; for the things of faith as much excel the things of fenfe, as the heavens are higher than the earth. But, where faith is not ftrong enough to make a competition between the things of futurity and the prefent pleasures, the world muft triumph, and the finner will be loft for want

of faith. On the other side, what is it that makes men willingly endure afflictions and persecutions? Do you think the righteous man so very silly, as not to know that pleasure is better than pain, ease and tranquillity to be preferred to vexation and torment? Can you imagine that he chooses oppression for oppression's sake? No certainly: but his faith, his trust and confidence in God, make him esteem the promises of God as if they were present before his eyes; to the hopes of them he sacrifices the world; and, after the example of his great Master, the author and finisher of our faith, *for the joy that is set before him, endures the cross, despising the shame.* Thus Moses by faith, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.* Mark the reason which follows, and the power of his faith: *esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of reward. By faith also he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.* But what confidence was this? What forces, what allies, had he to support him against the united strength of Egypt? Thus sense indeed would reason. But *through faith he endured, as seeing him who is invisible: though he had no visible protector, yet through faith he saw the hand of God stretched out for his deliverance.* This was his confidence, this his support.

Towards the close of this eleventh chapter the Apostle sings the triumphs of faith under all the cruelties of men: *Others, says he, were tortured;*

*and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. All these persisted in faith, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. The resurrection was a state they had never seen; it was what they could only hope for: but the promise of God was to them more than the evidence of sight; and to their trust and confidence in him they willingly gave up all that their eyes beheld, and submitted to the evils, which sense is ever warning us against.*

From this account it will be easy to understand what the Scripture means, when it tells us *that faith overcometh the world*: for religion is a contest between the world and faith, between things present and things to come. Faith puts us under the conduct of future hopes and fears, exempts us from the power and influence of things present; which present things are the world: and therefore it is properly said of faith, *that it overcometh the world.*

To this notion of faith agrees likewise what St. Paul had said concerning it in his comparison between faith, hope, and charity, and other spiritual gifts, such as speaking with tongues, prophesying, and healing of distempers. These shall cease: *But now remaineth, says the Apostle, faith, hope, and charity; and the greatest of these is charity*: for charity and universal benevolence is the very grace and ornament of heaven, the employment and the pleasure of blessed spirits. Nor can faith and hope ever

be parted from true religion : for there is no being so great as not to depend on faith in God, and trust in his power and wisdom, or to be above hoping any thing from his goodness and benevolence. And therefore the Apostle says expressly of faith and hope, that they shall remain, with charity, the greatest of the three. Other gifts are bestowed for the service of the Church, such as tongues, miracles, and the like; and they may well cease, when the occasion which required them ceases : but faith, hope, and charity are not occasional gifts, but are essential to religion, and must continue as long as religion itself.

From this account we may perceive likewise how the heart comes to have such an interest and influence in the faith of a Christian. It is the love of the world that is the enemy of faith : and is not the heart of man the very magazine from which the world supplies itself with arms ? Where dwell self-love, lust, envy, and covetousness, are not these the evil treasure of an evil heart ? and are not these the fiercest combatants against faith ? and may not an heart thus stocked be properly stiled *an heart of unbelief* ?

In other matters of faith, which seem to be of a more abstracted nature, and to depend entirely on the reason and judgment of men, the heart often interposes with too much success : for these are so nearly related to the faith which subdues the world and the heart, that the heart, watchful for itself and the world, disturbs the mind, and raises such clouds of passion, as intercept the light of truth. To believe Christ to be the Son of God, to have dwelt

for ever in the glory of his Father, from thence to have come to our redemption, and to have published the faith in signs and wonders and mighty works, are such killing blows to the love of the world, that the heart cannot be unconcerned whilst these things are debating: and, though they can only be tried at the bar of reason, yet the heart will be counsel on one side or other: and even in these cases there is reason to remember the apostolical admonition, *Take heed, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief.*



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## DISCOURSE XIV.

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### PART II.

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**I** PROCEED to consider the character given in the text of an unbelieving heart; namely, that it makes us *depart from the living God*. What may be proper to be said on this subject may be reduced, I think, under these three heads:

First, to shew, That it is for want of faith, considered as a principle of religion, that men *depart from the living God*.

Secondly, That faith cannot be a principle of religion, until it has its effects and operations in the heart.

Thirdly, That the motions and operations of the heart are in great measure under our own power and government.

And from hence it will evidently appear, how much it is the business and concern of a religious life to be watchful over the heart, to guard against all such affections as will destroy the influence of faith, and render the heart incapable of receiving the impressions of the Spirit of God.

First then, we are to shew, That it is for want of faith, considered as a principle of religion, that men *depart from the living God*. What is meant by *departing from God*, will appear by comparing this with other equivalent expressions made use of in this chapter. In the eighth verse the Apostle introduces the Holy Ghost speaking in the language of the Psalmist, and thus forewarning the people, *Harden not your hearts*. In the tenth verse God complains of the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, saying, *They do always err in their hearts, and they have not known my ways*. In the verse immediately after the text the Apostle thus explains his meaning: *But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*. So then, to be hardened in heart, to err in heart, not to know or walk in the ways of God, to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, are one and the same thing as departing from the living God: and the meaning of these figurative expressions is clearly explained at the seventeenth verse: *But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned?* As sinners are said *to depart from God*, so those who forsake sin, and are converted, are said, in the language of Scripture, *to turn to God*. Of the holy Baptist, who came preaching repentance from dead works, it was foretold, that he *should turn many to the Lord their God*, Luke i. 16. And the apostles Paul and Barnabas thus describe the purpose and end of their mission: *We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God*, Acts xiv. 15.

The propriety of these expressions will appear, if

we consider God, under the representation made of him by our Saviour in the parable of the prodigal, as the Father of the family ; and finners as prodigal sons, who, weary of their Father's government, forsake his house, and, reduced by luxury and riot, enter into the service of strange masters, till the sense of want and their own misery brings them back to beg admittance again into their Father's house. Thus the nations of old forsook the service of God, their heavenly Father, and fell under the hard bondage of strange deities : they were apostates from him who had a right to their obedience, and slaves to those who had no dominion over them : when they received the Gospel, it was not putting themselves under a new master, but returning to their old one, and yielding that obedience which was always due, though never paid before. Since therefore by faith in the Gospel of Christ we become the servants of the living God, and are once more entered into his family, it is easy to apprehend the reason why the Apostle in the text charges an unbelieving heart with apostasy from the living God : for, if Christian faith be the principle by which we are united to the living God, whatever destroys this principle does at the same time dissolve the union ; and we cannot make shipwreck of the faith without departing from God. An unbelieving heart therefore, that is, an heart void of Christian faith, is guilty of apostasy.

But you may ask perhaps, May not the heart possibly depart from God through the solicitations of vice and pleasure, and faith at the same time stand sound and uncorrupted ? And there is this ground

for putting the question, that we see many men who are buried in wickedness, whose life is but one continued scene of guilty enjoyments, who sacrifice their honour, their faith, and their religion, to lust, covetousness, or intemperance; who yet profess to believe all the doctrines of the Gospel, and do really believe them, for aught that any man knows to the contrary. But, when I reflect upon the express declarations of the Gospel, *that every one who believeth shall be saved, that all the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed*; if these characters can subsist together, if the same person at the same time may be both a believer and a worker of iniquity, there is a greater contradiction in the Gospel than any that has yet been pretended by its keenest enemies.

How must we then account for this difficulty? The true answer, I think, is, that the difficulty arises from confounding and blending together ideas which are perfectly distinct, from not separating between faith considered as a principle of knowledge, and as a principle of religion. In common life we know many things upon the evidence of faith: such are the things which we receive upon the authority of historical evidence, or upon the report and testimony of credible witnesses: and such influence has this principle of knowledge in the world, that there is hardly any thing of consequence that is not determined by it. There is not a trial that affects either our lives or our fortunes, the issue of which does not depend upon this principle of knowledge, the judge and the jury not being supposed to have the evidence of their own senses of the facts which come under their determination. I mention this to

put it out of dispute that faith is one of the sources or principles of our knowledge. Now mere speculative knowledge has nothing in it of moral good or evil: a man is not better or worse for what he knows, till he comes to act, or to be influenced to action by his knowledge. Bare knowledge therefore is nothing akin to religion; for religion is not one of those very indifferent things, which has neither good nor evil in it. The speculative knowledge therefore of truths depending upon divine testimony is mere knowledge, and not religion: for there is no difference in the simple act of the mind, whether the assent be grounded upon divine testimony, or human testimony; unless you think that every thing must be religion, that depends upon our belief of the being of God: which is not true; because there may be this belief, where there can be no religion; for St. James has told us, *that the devils believe and tremble*. Now the wicked man's faith can be nothing more but this speculative knowledge or belief of divine truths: for it is evident it has no effect, no influence; and is therefore so far from being the saving faith of the Gospel, that it is not in any degree religious. Our Lord in the Gospel has given us a short description of religion, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and thy neighbour as thyself*. Now, in order to love God, we must know him, and his attributes; in order to love our neighbour, we must know our neighbour, and his condition: and there is just as much religion in knowing God without loving and obeying him, as there is in knowing our neighbour without loving or regarding him. The man who



believes God, and pretends to a right faith in divine matters, and lives in the neglect of God, in contempt of his commands, and sins in defiance of knowledge, has just as much faith, as the Priest and the Levite had charity, who saw their neighbour stripped and wounded, and lying half-dead in the road, and *looked on him, and passed by on the other side.* The knowledge of God is but like other natural knowledge, as long as it has its residence in the head only: to become a principle of religion, it must descend into the heart, and teach us to *love the Lord with all our minds, with all our souls, and with all our strength:* and if this be true of the knowledge of God, which is the first and greatest of all divine truths, it must be true in all other instances whatever. The faith then of the Gospel, and which the wicked man is an utter stranger to, is that faith which makes us *cleave steadfastly to the Lord with full purpose of heart.* And this will farther appear under the second head, which was to shew,

Secondly, That faith cannot be a principle of religion, till it has its effect and operation in the heart. If we consider religion under the notion of action, this proposition has, I think, nothing strange or surprising in it: for it is not only true of faith, but of every principle of knowledge and action: it is altogether as true of sense, as it is of faith. As faith makes us cleave to God, so sense makes us cleave to the world: but, till sense has possession of the heart, it has no power or efficacy, and is of no use and service to the world. We learn from sense the existence and reality of things temporal: but this assent of the mind to the evidence of sense

never made any man wicked or worldly-minded : for, if it did, no man would ever be righteous ; for the best man that ever was in the world had his knowledge of external things from the evidence of sense. But, when sense stirs the desires and affections of the heart, then it becomes a principle of action, and a fierce combatant for the world against the powers of faith. If we remember what was said of the wicked man with regard to his faith and persuasion about divine truths, we shall find how exactly the righteous man is in the same case in respect to sensible things : as the wicked man has the knowledge of faith, but nothing religious, so has the righteous man all the knowledge of sense, but nothing sensual : the difference therefore between a sensual man and a righteous man does not consist in this, that one knows most of sensible things, and the other most of divine things, for this in both cases may be, and often is, false ; but it lies in this, that one pursues the objects of sense, the other the objects of faith.

To trace this parallel between sense and faith a little farther may give us perhaps a true conception of the nature of faith, the thing we seek after. Let us consider then how the case stands between sense and faith, things present and things to come, between sensuality and religion. The desires which God has planted in our nature, are the springs of action ; and we always propose the obtaining some end, which is the object of some desire, in every thing we do. It is evident then, that, where there is nothing to move and incite our desires, we must be unconcerned and inactive. All objects of our

desires are first objects of the understanding, according to the known saying of the poet, *ignoti nulla cupido*. But there are many objects of the mind which are never objects of the passions; for the mind must not only apprehend the thing, but likewise apprehend it as a real thing, and as having the relation of good or evil to a man, before it can have any effect upon our inclinations. From this account it is plain, that to make a man perform the actions either of religion or of common life, his desires, which are the springs of action, must be moved: and since nothing can move the desires, which is not first the object of the understanding, he must have the knowledge of the things of this life, and of religion, and consider them under the notion of good or evil with respect to himself.

Now the enjoyment of the things of this world is the business and employment of the sensual man: the good things of futurity and another life are the religious man's care and concern. As the objects are of different kinds, so the means of obtaining the knowledge of the objects are likewise different. Things present are represented to our minds by every sense; the things of futurity by no sense: and in this single point lies the great advantage which the world has over religion. The world has as many ways of making itself familiar to us, as we have senses: religion has only the dark glimpse of futurity, such as reason, in its present feeble and low condition, can discover. The only thing then that is wanting to set religion upon as good a foot as the world, and to make it able to bear up against

the impressions of sense, is a certain principle of knowledge with respect to the objects of religion : for, could we as evidently possess ourselves of the reality of the things of another life, as we are possessed of the reality of the things of this, there would be no more competition between sense and religion, than there is comparison between the things of this life and of eternity. To supply this darkness of our knowledge in religion is the very end and design of revelation : for, could we as plainly discern the good things of futurity, as we see and feel the good things present, there would be no more want of revelation to make us acquainted with the other world, than there is to make us acquainted with this. Now, as sense is evidently to be distinguished into a principle of knowledge, and a principle of action, so is faith likewise. We never esteem a man to be sensual or worldly-minded, merely because sense has furnished him with a comprehensive knowledge of sensible objects : so neither is a man to be accounted a religious man, because of that faith which flows from revelation, considered merely as a principle of religious knowledge. This distinction between sense as a principle of knowledge, and a principle of action, may be seen in any or in every instance. An honest man knows the use and value of riches, as well as a thief. It is not therefore the knowledge of the object, but the immoderate desire of it, that makes the difference : and one man may be justly hanged for stealing five pounds, and another be very innocent who had seen and examined the value of the mines of Peru. In religion the case is just the

same : faith, as long as it continues to be a mere object of the mind, is no principle of religion ; and one is no more a religious man for knowing the articles of religion, than he is a sensual man for walking with his eyes open and seeing the world. An unbelieving heart is the same thing in faith, that an antipathy is in sense, and supposes us rather to hate than not to know our duty. Many men are ruined by the love of wine and strong liquors. Stop but the passage to the heart, and these objects lose all their force and power, and a man sees the wine sparkle with less concern than he sees the moon shine. And this is the case of all those who have a natural aversion to strong drinks, which is no uncommon case. This aversion affects sense only as it is a principle of action, and leaves it free as it is the principle of knowledge : and in like manner, the unbelieving heart destroys that faith which is the life and principle of religion, though it may not, perhaps, disturb the objects of faith, which have their residence in another place.

Upon the whole then ; since religion is not a mere science and speculation, but is to be the work and employment of our lives, and to exert itself in the love of God and our neighbour, as our blessed Saviour has taught us ; since the knowledge of any thing, or the belief of any thing, considered merely as acts of the mind, are no principles of action ; but every action proposes to itself some end, which is the object of some desire ; it evidently follows, that faith cannot be a principle of religion, till it becomes the object of our desires, that is, till it has its effects and operations in the heart. This notion



of faith is not only probable, but necessary, upon the view of our own nature, and the origin of all our actions, which arise in the same manner, whatever the principle of action be. Even sense works in the same manner, and, powerful as it is, has no effect, till it has made its way to the heart, the seat of all our passions and affections. There, and there only, it prevails as a principle of action. Sense produces no sensuality, till it warms the affections with the pleasures of the world; and faith produces no religion, till it raises the heart to love and to embrace its Maker.

The great advantage the world has over religion lies in the certainty and reality of its objects, which flow in upon us at every sense. To supply this defect on the part of religion, revelation was given to assure us of the certainty and reality of things future; without which assurance they could have no effect or influence on our affections. The objects of faith then support religion in the same manner as the objects of sense promote and encourage the love of the world: and, as there could be no sensual love of the world, if there were no objects of sense; so neither could there be any religion, where there are no articles of faith: for as, in general, there can be no desire, where there is no knowledge; so, in particular, there can be no principle of faith, where there are no objects of faith.

All the articles of the Gospel tend to one of these ends, either to assure us of the certainty of the revelation and redemption by Christ Jesus, or to set before us the very substance and image of the

things hoped for. For this last purpose our Lord rose visibly from the grave, to give us the very evidence of sense for that part of our faith, which seemed to be most contradictory to the experience of sense. For the first purpose, to assure us of the certainty of the revelation and redemption by Christ Jesus, *our Lord was declared to be the only-begotten Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; by whom the worlds were made, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power; that we, knowing in whom we have trusted, might hold fast the confidence and profession of our faith without wavering: (for he is faithful that promised.)* When Christ was declared by the voice out of the cloud to be the Son of God, the same voice gave the reason of the declaration; *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him, Luke xvii. 5.* To reject therefore these articles of the Gospel, is to reject the revelation and the redemption of Christ, and to set out purely on the foot of natural religion. How reasonably you may do this, and how well it becomes your condition, the time will not permit me now to shew.

These objects of faith are our motives and incitements to holiness and righteousness; and, if we suffer them to have their due influence on our hearts, they produce that faith, which is the life and spirit of a Christian, which unites him to God, and will entitle him to glory at the great day. How far it is in our power to promote or obstruct this influence, will appear under the last head, which was to shew,

Thirdly, That the motions and operations of the heart are in great measure under our own power and government.

I shall not spend much of your time in a plain case, and in which every man's own experience is his best instructor. We find daily, that we can check our passions and inclinations, to serve the purposes of this life ; and, if we would do as much for that which is to come, we should answer all that the Apostle in the text requires of us, when he exhorts us to *take heed of an evil heart of unbelief*. Were it not in our power to suspend the influence of our passions, man would have no more freedom or liberty than a stone, and would, consequently, be utterly incapable of religion. It is not in our power to feel, or not to feel, the impressions of sense : our eyes, our ears, and every sense, present before us the objects of the world, whether we will, or no ; and, if these objects can as uncontrollably take possession of our hearts, as they do of our minds and imaginations, all men must as necessarily follow the dictates of sense, as they admit the objects of sense : which would destroy, not only the power of faith, but all moral virtue, all distinction of good and evil. But this is not the case : for, though we cannot see things as we will, yet it is in our power to pursue and court them as we please : we can supple our inclinations, and make them yield to our will ; as is evident in the many instances where men sacrifice their present enjoyments to the distant prospects of honour or preferment : for the future things of this life are no more the objects of sense than the things of another life ; and

it is not sense, but judgment, that refuses the present good for a distant advantage: and it is but an instance of the same reason and judgment to restrain the sensual appetites, and to make room for the hopes of immortality to enter in and possess the heart; and this is truly the work of religion. God has placed before us life and death, things present and things to come. If things temporal have this advantage, that *they are seen*; yet the things which are not seen have this prerogative to balance that advantage, that *they are eternal*. The truth of these things is founded both on reason and on the testimony of God. If we receive his testimony, it is well: but, if we interest our hearts in the cause, and act as men resolved to secure to themselves these blessed hopes, then is our faith made perfect. And, since this depends upon the due regulation of our desires, which are subject to the will and judgment of man, it is plain that the true Christian faith is an internal principle, a religious habit and disposition of soul, which, like other good habits, depends upon the care we take to preserve the innocence and purity of our hearts and minds. And this sufficiently shews the reasonableness and the sense of the Apostle's exhortation in the text, *Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.*

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## DISCOURSE XV.

ACTS XV. 1, 2.

*And certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders, about this question.*

WE learn from the text, and other parts of holy writ, that the earliest and purest times of the Gospel were not free from disputes and controversies in religion: that the authority of the Apostles, though confirmed by signs and wonders, was not sufficient to lay the heats and prejudices of men; which, like ancient inhabitants, having possession and prescription to plead for their right, were with great difficulty removed: that the Apostles themselves, however agreed in one and the same doctrine, were of different opinions as to the prudential methods of dealing with the opposition they found; some giving way to the torrent, that men might have time to cool, and recover the calmness of reason and judgment; others endeavouring resolutely to stem the tide, and not to give way, *no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue.* Hence



arose the contest between Peter and Paul ; so that, as the Apostle of the Gentiles himself tells us, *he withstood Peter to the face.*

To the same cause likewise we may ascribe much of the present difficulty and obscurity of the books of the New Testament : for the writers being necessarily drawn into controversy by this means, which always has, and in the nature of the thing must have, reference to the opinions and prejudices of the disputers ; there are many things in Scripture which appear dark to us, for want of a distinct knowledge of the errors and misconceits which the writers oppose ; many things delivered down to us, in which it is not easy, at first sight, to distinguish how far the holy Penman argues upon the truth of our common Christianity, and how far upon the principles and concessions of his adversary. From whence it has come to pass, that some things have been taught by unskilful interpreters of Scripture, as the doctrines of Christianity, which were no better than the errors of judaizing converts.

These difficulties, thus woven into the holy writings, have furnished even to learned men constant matter of dispute and controversy ; and some points have laboured under a difference of opinion in most ages of the Church : and so far has length of time been from diminishing these disputes, that every writer of name and authority has enlarged this field of controversy ; and to examine, adjust, and expound the sentiments and opinions of men of renown in the Church of God, who have gone before us, is left as an additional labour and study, and oftentimes as a fresh matter of contention.

Add to these causes already recited, the passions, the weakneses, and prepossessions of mind, which the best men are not free from; and which darken and obscure things in themselves oftentimes clear and intelligible; and you will have before you, perhaps, a just account of the causes which have filled the world with so many doubts and differences in opinion concerning the weightiest matters of religion.

But since from this account there appears little hope of coming to an entire harmony and agreement of opinion, what must an honest man do? Whom shall he choose to follow? And, when he has chosen, with what security and confidence can he proceed? since there will be always some to tell him, that he is a blind follower of a blind leader. How far this difficulty has been pressed, even to the rendering all religion precarious and uncertain, and to the discarding the Gospel itself, which is represented as encumbered with so many doubts, such different comments and expositions, that the wit of man knows not how to extricate him from this labyrinth, and lead him to one spot of firm ground, whereon to rest the sole of his feet; how far, I say, this argument has been urged to this purpose, I need not say: it will be more to our purpose to call this matter to a fair examination, and to assert the grounds and principles of our faith, notwithstanding this fierce assault that has been made upon them.

Now there are two things which this argument leads us to consider; and which, when fairly stated, will, I think, exhaust the whole difficulty.

The first is with respect to the revelation itself;

to consider how far these difficulties affect the authority of the Gospel : for if it is, as it is represented, so very dark and obscure, that common honesty, with the assistance of common sense, cannot discern in it what is the will of God ; then it cannot be a rule or measure of religion, or designed as such by God, who is too wise and too good to give laws to the world, which can be of no use to them, but to perplex and confound their understandings.

The second is with respect to ourselves ; to consider how we may attain to a certain rule of religion under the Gospel revelation, notwithstanding the many controversies and disputes, which are too visible to be denied, and oftentimes too fierce to be excused.

And if it shall appear upon the whole, that these difficulties do not affect the authority of the Gospel, nor preclude us from the certain knowledge of the faith and obedience required under the Gospel ; then, whatever use may be made of these controversies, they cannot in reason be urged as objections against revealed religion, the certainty of which, either as to its authority, or the clearness of its doctrines, is no way impeached by them.

The first thing is, to consider the authority of revelation, and how it is affected by any difficulties or obscurities that are found in it.

The authority of revelation depends upon this, that it is the will and word of God ; and he that knows he has the word of God, knows that he has a revelation of certain authority. The first question then is, Whether this knowledge may be attained, before we have a distinct and explicit understanding

of all the parts of the revelation? If it may, then it is certain, that the obscurity of some parts of the revelation cannot destroy the authority of the whole. We know very well, in all ordinary cases, that these are two very distinct acts of knowledge, and not in the least dependent upon one another, to know who spoke such words, and to know the true sense and import of those words. One man may certainly know who spoke them, though he knows not the meaning of them: another may know the meaning of them, without knowing who spoke them. In revelation the case is the same: our Saviour spoke many things in parables, which the disciples understood not, and which he afterwards explained to them. Now I would ask any man, whether the disciples did not as certainly know that those parables were the word of Christ, before he explained them, as they did afterwards? If they did, those parables were to them of the same authority, though not of the same use, when they were obscure, as when they were explained. In human laws the case is the same: the authority of them depends not upon their being distinctly understood by all men; for the man, who has no ability to expound a statute, may yet be certain of its authority, if he will have recourse to the proper records. And there are many statutes of this realm, the authority of which no man doubts of, though, at the same time, those who are best able to judge are not agreed in the meaning and exposition of them: and what would you think of a man, who should affirm that we have no statute-book in this kingdom, or none of any authority; and give you this reason for it, be-

cause that which we call our statute-book has many difficulties and obscurities in it, many things which are not to be reduced to a certain and determinate meaning? And yet the argument is as good, nay, just the same, in this case, as when it is applied to revelation; and a man argues with the same shrewdness, who tells us we have no Gospel, or none that we ought to admit, because the Gospel we pretend to has many difficult passages in it, many things that are hard to be understood: for the obscurity of some laws is as good an argument against the authority of the statute-book, as the obscurity of some texts is against the authority of the Gospel.

This will farther appear to be true, if we consider the proper proofs of a revelation, and how they operate: for they will be found to take place, and have their full effect upon the mind, antecedently to our having a distinct understanding of all the parts of a revelation: and consequently our not having a distinct understanding of all the parts of a revelation is no objection to the authority of a revelation, which is founded upon proofs the objection cannot reach. Now these proofs are three: the qualities of the person who is sent to make the revelation: the main end and purpose of his coming: and the miracles which he gives in evidence of his commission. If the person be sufficiently qualified to be entrusted with so great charge; if nothing appears to make it justly suspected that he is a deceiver; if no private views, no self-interest, no ambition are discoverable; if he be in all respects such an one as we may reasonably suppose God would make choice of to send on his errand: if the end and design of his



coming is such as we may well suppose God to be the author of; if it tends to promote the honour of God, and true religion, to secure the general happiness and welfare of mankind, without any partial views and regards: if his mission be attested by such signs and wonders, as plainly point out to us the hand of God supporting and encouraging the work; if they are openly shewn before friends and foes, and attended with such other circumstances, as are necessary to place them above suspicion: in this case we have a certain evidence of the mission and authority of this person to make known to us the will of God, and are bound to receive what he shall publish in God's name, as the law of God. Now all these proofs we certainly may have, without being able to understand, or fully comprehend, all that such a person delivers; and yet, in force of these proofs, we are bound to believe what he delivers to be the word of God. Men do not speak accurately when they say, the doctrines are proved by miracles; for, in truth, there is no connection between any miracles and doctrines: miracles prove the authority of the person, and the authority of the person is the ground of receiving the doctrine. Now it is one thing to know the authority of the person, another thing to know what he says. His authority makes what he says to be law, and your want of knowledge in the meaning of what he says will not unmake the law: for if it could, ignorance would be the supreme authority, since no authority could make a law, which ignorance could not repeal. How far we are concerned in these obscurities, or what obligations they lay upon us, which perhaps may be

none at all, is another question : but I think it is evident, that no body of laws, human or divine, becomes void and of none effect, because some parts are hard to be understood, or not to be understood. And if men dispute upon such places, and divide into a thousand opinions about them, such divisions do still less affect the law, which owes not its authority to the agreement or disagreement of interpreters.

But it may be said, and I think very justly, To what purpose is any thing delivered as law, or revelation, which is too obscure to be understood? The very end of the law is, to be the rule of our actions ; and how is this end to be attained, whilst we continue ignorant of the meaning of the lawgiver? Men may blunder, and make dark laws, and so miss the scope they aimed at ; and the wonder is not great : but how should any obscurity darken the law of God? since we cannot but suppose, from the very end and nature of a law, that his intention was to be understood ; and his wisdom permits us not to doubt but that he was able to explain his meaning.

This brings us to consider the fact, whether the Gospel has such difficulties and obscurities in it, as may make us esteem it unworthy of the wisdom of God.

The Christian revelation is contained in the books of the New Testament ; but they are not all of the same kind, nor do they fall under the same consideration in this question. Had men given themselves time to think coolly, and to make the true separation in this case, we had not perhaps been told, that the difficulties of some parts of the Scripture are an objection to the revelation itself.

The books of the New Testament may be considered either as historical, as doctrinal, or as controversial, and some as a mixture of the two last. By the historical, I understand the narrative of our Saviour's life and death, and of the preaching of his Apostles after his resurrection and ascension. These, as they are merely historical, afford none of those difficulties which are so much complained of: the story is plain and simple, and the different accounts of it, in the several Gospels, vary no more from each other, than may naturally be expected from different pens.

By the doctrinal, I understand those matters of faith, and rules of duty, which do not regard this or that particular case, but were intended for the use of the whole world, and are to continue to the end of it. And if there be a clear law, and clearly expressed, in the world, this is the law. Can words more clearly express the honour and worship we are to pay to God, or can more familiar directions be given in this case, than are to be found in the Gospel? Is not idolatry clearly condemned in the Gospel? Is there any other thing relating to divine worship, that we yet want instructing in? Are not the duties likewise, which we owe to each other, made evident and plain, and can there be any dispute about them, except what arises from lust, or avarice, or other self-interest? As to the peculiar benefits of the Gospel, are they not declared without obscurity? Can you read the Gospel, and doubt whether Christ died for you; whether God will grant pardon to the penitent, or his assistance to those who ask it; whether he will reward all such

In glory, who continue the faithful disciples of his Son? What other revelation do we want, or can we desire, in these great and weighty concerns? Or, what is there wanting to make up a complete system of religion? These things you read in the Gospels, these things you read in the other writings of the Apostles; in these there is a perfect harmony and consent of all the inspired writers.

But still, you say, there are difficulties in Scripture. And so there are: but they are such as do not interfere with the clear revelation made by Christ. The controversial parts of Scripture, such I mean as combat the particular opinions and errors of the Jews or others, are in many places dark, and hard to be understood: but had there never been any dispute with the Jews or others, had all obeyed without dispute, the Gospel had been perfect; and is perfect still, however divines, or others, may differ in expounding the particulars incident to those debates. Had St. Paul said nothing of election or reprobation, (and, as these terms are generally understood, nothing perhaps he has said,) our Gospel had not been less complete; since these points, however understood, make no alteration in our duty, and they ought to make none in our faith. It was a proper part of the Apostles' office to root out the prejudices and errors which stood in the way of the Gospel of Christ; and whilst they were disputing with Jew and Gentile, and proving that Jesus is the Christ, they were doing the work of their great master. These writings, conveyed down to us, are of inestimable value, and worth our utmost pains and study to understand, being transcripts of



that wisdom with which the Apostles were endowed. They contain the great doctrines, and the great proofs, of Christianity; in which points they are not only of the greatest authority, but have likewise the greatest clearness: the particular disputes which are intermixed refer often to principles and opinions, which we can hardly, at least not surely, discover; and when men apply things pointed to one single view by the Apostles, which view they have no clear sight of, to the general doctrines of Christianity, no wonder if they disturb the whole, and spread confusion over the clearest parts of the Gospel.

To this conduct have been owing many of the disputes which have perplexed the world; and men have forgot the plain parts of Scripture, while, to the utter ruin of Christian charity, they have worried one another about the obscure ones. To give one instance of this: If there be any thing plain in any book in the world, this is plain in Scripture, *That without holiness no man shall see God.* This is the foundation of all religion, the ground upon which the revelation itself is built; and yet who is there that wants to be informed, that doctrines destructive of this great article have been advanced upon the authority of Scripture? Who has not heard that good works are not necessary to justification? and heard St. Paul quoted for a voucher! not where he is delivering the general doctrines of Christianity, but where he is beating down the particular mistakes of his countrymen. As to these parts of Scripture, happy is he who understands them, for he shall discover much of the wisdom and justice of God in his dealings with his ancient people, the



people of the Jews : but he that understands them not, has this comfort, that his salvation, his religion, depends not upon any controversy that concerned the Jews only, but upon the plain declarations of God made to all mankind.

Thus much may serve to shew, how far the difficulties and obscurities, which really are found in the holy Scripture, do affect the common cause of religion : and I think it is evident, that our common religion stands clear even of these difficulties.

Other difficulties there are, which more properly belong to religious men, than religion : such are the disputes and nice inquiries of the schools, which often enter into the debates of learned writers. But it is strange to find these urged as objections against the Gospel, by any sober-minded man. For what are these disputes to the Gospel ? God has promised his assistance to all who endeavour to serve him : is there any difficulty in understanding this ? Let the schools consider the nature of grace, and how it influences the mind, and divide it into an hundred sorts, what is that to the Gospel ? or what is it to a man who is assured that God will assist him, and who knows that God cannot want means to make good his promise ?

In like manner there are many doubts about the sacraments of the Gospel, and how and what grace they confer : but, dispute as you will, this one point is clear, *He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.*

Suppose this, you will say, to be true, and that these doubts and difficulties do not affect the authority or truth of the Gospel ; yet they are so

blended with the cause of religion, that they are not easily separated from it by unlearned and unskilful men : and this at least renders the Gospel of little use, since it is a rule, the straightness of which cannot be discerned by the generality of mankind. And this brings me to my second head,

To consider these difficulties with respect to ourselves.

From what has been already said it is evident, that the Scriptures contain a plain and intelligible system of religion : and would men follow the directions of what they do and may understand, and not think themselves under direction of what they do not understand, there would be no great difficulty in this case. But the misfortune is, that men often fancy they understand what they do not, and raise rules and principles of religion to themselves out of places of which they are perfectly ignorant : and how can this be avoided ? In the first place, it is at every man's peril, if he makes any rule to himself, contrary to the plain express commands of God, which he does or may easily understand. In human laws, the main of the subject's duty is plain ; and if he mistakes any dark passages, yet so as to keep strictly to his known duty, the consequence perhaps may be tolerable, and he excusable : but if a man from any dark statute should infer a right to rob and murder his neighbour, and act accordingly, (which acts of violence are plainly forbid in the law,) he ought to suffer, not for misunderstanding the obscure law, but for transgressing the plain one. The same reason holds as to the divine law :

if a man takes care to observe what he does understand, his mistakes may not be dangerous : but if he forms to himself a liberty from the obscure places, inconsistent with the plain intelligible laws of the Gospel, and acts accordingly ; those plain laws, which should have been his rule, will be his condemnation.

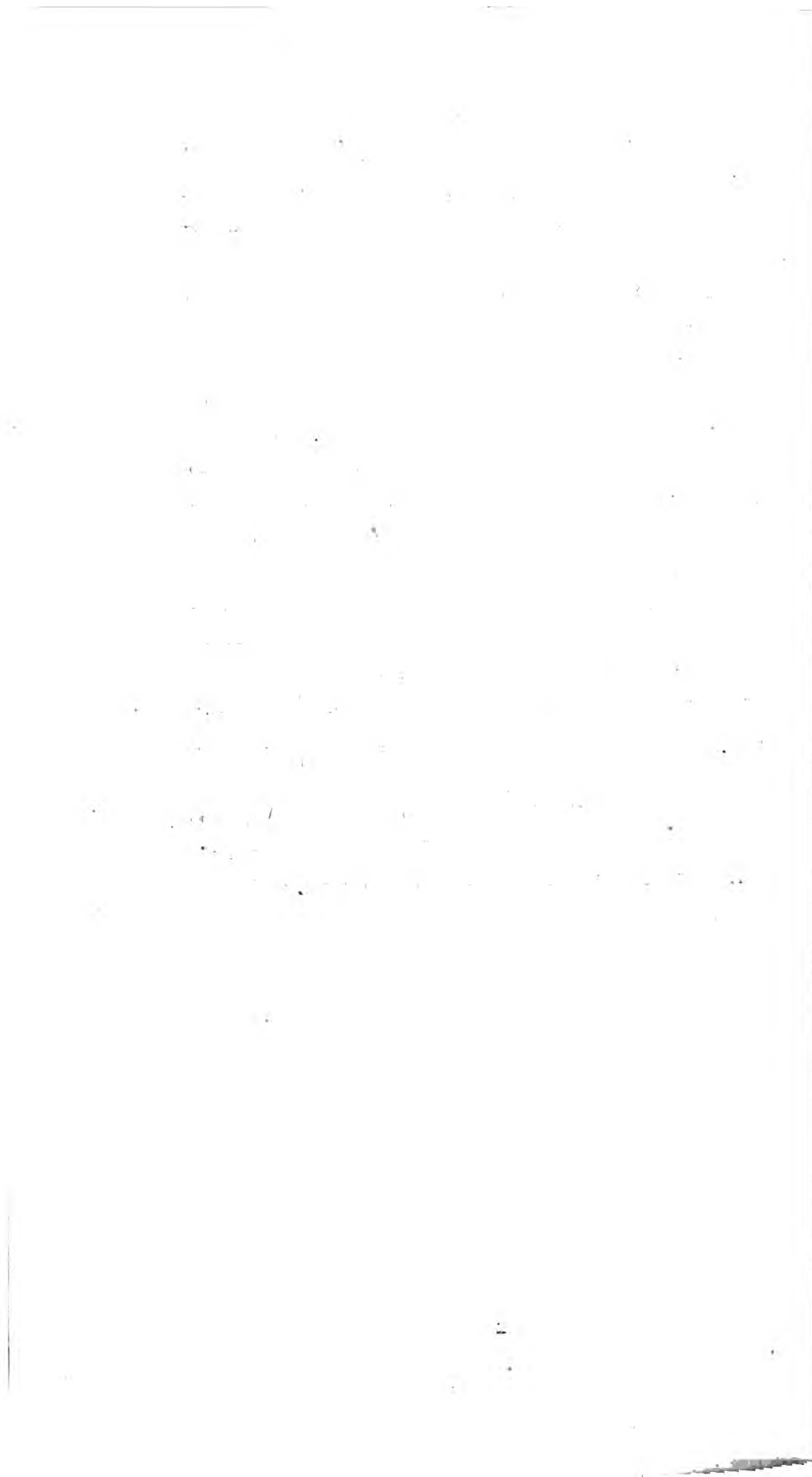
But plain places are not equally plain to all capacities ; and therefore even in this there may be a latitude ; a latitude which we cannot determine, but which God, who is to be the judge, both can and will : and the great difficulty which men make to themselves in this case, seems to me to arise from a misapprehension of the judgment of God. Among men all are judged by the same rule, one law comprehends all, and is of the same interpretation and extent in all cases. That it is so, is the effect of human weakness ; for in truth and equity, if we could come at them, no two cases are perhaps exactly alike, or equally subject to the same rule : but men cannot allow for the different capacities and circumstances of men, which they cannot judge of ; and therefore all who are esteemed to have reason enough to govern themselves, are concluded under one law ; and only children, idiots, and madmen are excepted cases. Though in truth the degrees by which men approach to madness, or folly, could they be limited, which they cannot, would deserve a distinct consideration.

Now, if you conceive the judgment of God to be like the judgment of man, and that all shall be tried by one and the same rule ; no wonder you

ask, how ignorant men shall come to the knowledge of their duty under the present doubts and difficulties which cloud religion.

But the truth is this; God, who gave all men one law, gave every man that share of reason which he enjoys: fools are capable of receiving no law; and no man is farther capable than in proportion to the degree of reason which God has given him: and consequently, in truth and equity, the law is no farther a law to him, than his reason is capable of receiving it. And since reason comes as much from God, as the law itself; it is wrong to imagine that the true sense of the law is the only and the single rule by which God will judge: since it is evident in equity and justice, that the sentence on every man must arise from the complex consideration of the law that was before him, and the degree of reason which he had to apply it.

This great difficulty therefore, I beseech you, trust with God; and doubt not but that the righteous Judge of the world will do righteously.





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## DISCOURSE XVI.

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EPHESIANS ii. 18.

*For through him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

**T**HESE words, rightly understood, will give us a distinct conception of the nature of the Christian religion, as it stands distinguished from all others, whether natural, or pretending to revelation. All religions pretend to give access to God, by instructing men in what manner to approach him by prayer and supplication: how to please him, and obtain his favour and protection, by such works as each religion accounts to be holy and acceptable to God: and how to reconcile ourselves to him, after having offended him by our transgressions, through sorrow and repentance, or such other means as have been devised and instituted as effectual to this end. But the access to God, which the Gospel opens to us, is to be had only under the guidance and direction of God's holy Spirit, and in the name, and through the mediation, of God's own Son. This access is the only one which the Christian religion knows any thing of; for we cannot come to God, but by

his holy Spirit, and through his Son : and this is what no other religion does or can pretend to.

The end of all religion is manifestly this, to please God by serving him according to his will, in order to obtain of him happiness in this world and in the next : for the belief that God is the governor of the world, and the giver of every good thing, is the foundation of all the religious worship and honour which are paid to him. All religions being thus far the same, they differ when they come to prescribe the method, and to appoint the proper means by which God is to be served and applied to.

Two things there are, which must necessarily be regarded in the choice and appointment of these means ; the holiness and majesty of God, and the nature and condition of man : for unless the means prescribed are such as are suitable to the holiness and majesty of God, he can never be pleased by them ; for whatever is contrary to his holiness, or injurious to his majesty, must ever be an abomination to him. On the other hand, the means of religion must likewise be adapted to the use of man, must be such as he can practise, and such as, his present condition considered, will enable him to serve God acceptably ; for without this, how proper soever the means may be in themselves, yet they can be of no use or service to him.

If we examine all the schemes of religion which either prevail in those parts of the world where the Gospel is unknown, or which are set up in opposition to the Gospel where it is known, we shall find that they split upon one or other of these rocks. The Gentile religion is inconsistent with the holi-

ness of God, as mixing impure rites and ceremonies with its worship, and allowing the practice of such vices as even nature abhors: it is injurious likewise to his majesty, as dividing the honour, which is due to him alone, among the creatures; teaching men to pay religious worship to those who by nature are not gods. On the other side, natural religion, which seems to be the most growing scheme, and is set up in opposition to the Gospel, taking its rise from the purity and holiness of God's nature, and the essential difference of good and evil, prescribes a worship pure and holy; but it prescribes it to men who have lost their purity and holiness, and are no longer able to perform the rigorous conditions: it requires brick without allowing straw; exacting of men, in their present degenerate state, the purity and holiness of uncorrupted reason and nature: it affords no strength or assistance to men, to secure against sin; and when they have sinned, it cannot give them any certain assurance of pardon and forgiveness: so that men, not being able to perform its conditions, and having no security of the mercy of God without performing them, can have no settled peace or satisfaction in it.

From these two considerations plainly appears the deplorable condition of mankind without the interposition of God by a new revelation of himself to the world: for, after the utmost efforts that you can make to frame a religion in all respects proper, you will still find that it will be defective in one or other of these respects. If you require such degrees of holiness from men, as may render their service acceptable to the holy God, you will require what

they cannot perform ; and thereby preclude them of any access to him : or, if you consult the present powers of men, and require no more righteousness, than they by their strength can arrive at ; if you indulge the passions which you cannot correct, if you allow the vices you cannot reform, if you tolerate the infirmities which you cannot remove : by thus adapting religion to the condition of men, you will render it too impure to be accepted by God, who *is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* ; and the communication between heaven and earth will still be shut up against all such who *hold the truth in unrighteousness*.

The Christian religion alone has effectually provided against both these cases : it requires a worship spiritual, pure, and holy ; its laws are just and righteous, but abate nothing of the strictest rules of reason and morality ; it exacts from us not only an outward obedience and conformity in our actions, but it searcheth the very heart and reins, and requireth *truth in the inward parts* ; it restrains every dissolute thought of our minds, and every inordinate desire of our hearts. On the other side, that the gracious purposes of God may not be defeated by the weakness and infirmity of men, it has provided proper remedies for every want : it has brought down from heaven the pardon of God to all the sins of men, which was sealed with the blood of its great author, the ever-blessed Son of God : it has reconciled us to our offended Father, and conferred on us anew the spirit of adoption : it has put us under the direction of the Holy Spirit, who is our fellow-labourer in the work of God, and who so ef-

fectually helpeth our infirmities, that *when we are weak, then are we strong*; who is our stay in prosperity, and our support in adversity, and the undivided companion of our spiritual warfare, leading us through Christ to God, who is the end of all our hopes. And, as it has thus strengthened and enabled us to draw near to God, so has it likewise as effectually secured our access to him, through Christ, who *sitteth at the right hand of God, to make continual intercession for us*; to offer up, and by himself to perfect, all our prayers and praises, before the throne of God; to supply all our wants, to confirm our faith, to strengthen our virtue, and to make our repentance available to the remission of our sins; and, at the last, if we perform the conditions on our part, to receive us into the kingdom of his Father for ever.

The use I would make of the text, and of what has been already discoursed on it, is to observe to you,

First, that these means of salvation, which the Christian religion has provided, were necessary to the life of the world, the state and condition of man considered.

Secondly, that these means being necessary, it was likewise necessary to reveal to mankind the doctrine concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that the belief of these doctrines is necessary to every Christian, as far as the right use of the means depends upon the right faith and belief of the doctrines: for, as the Apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that whoever *comes to God, must believe that he is*; so likewise, whoever comes to God through Christ, in



the Spirit, must believe that the Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Christ, and able to direct him; that Christ is the Son of God, and able to bring him to his Father. And by this means shall we be able to justify to ourselves the wisdom and goodness of God in revealing this wonderful knowledge to men, inasmuch as he did it, not to impose arbitrarily upon their faith and their understanding, but in order to perfect and render effectual their salvation.

First, I would observe to you, that these means of salvation which the Christian religion has provided, namely, the assistance of the Spirit, and the mediation of the Son, were necessary to the life of the world, the state and condition of man considered.

I would not here be understood to affirm, that these means were so absolutely necessary in themselves, that God could not by any other method save the world. The wisdom and the ways of God are infinite and unsearchable: we cannot, and therefore ought not to pretend to set bounds to them. To inquire, in what other way God might possibly have saved mankind, will neither make us wiser in this world, nor happier in the next.

What I would then be understood to mean, is this; that the condition of man before the coming of Christ was such, that he could not, by the help of reason and nature, so apply himself to God, as to be secure of his pardon and mercy; but there was a necessity of providing other means besides those of reason and nature, which no one could provide but God alone: that he has provided us with the assistance of his Holy Spirit, and appointed his own Son for our Redeemer and Mediator. Some means

being therefore absolutely necessary to be provided, and these being the means made choice of by God ; we may safely affirm, without prying too far into the hidden mysteries of God, that these means were necessary to the salvation of the world.

The truth of this proposition thus limited, is that which does most plainly shew us the reasonableness of the Gospel, and the wisdom and goodness of God in the revelation of it : for, suppose the contrary to this to be true, that men were able of themselves to do the whole will of God, and so to apply to him as to engage his favour and mercy, and to obtain salvation for themselves at his hands ; and you will find it very hard to account for the reasonableness of the Christian religion, which provides preternatural assistances to enable us to do that which nature can do without them ; or for the wisdom of God, in making the revelation to serve those ends which men knew how to accomplish without it. But, if you consider man in the state under which the Scripture represents him before the coming of Christ, lost to God and to himself, the slave of passion, and the servant of sin, equally unable to govern himself, and to serve his Maker ; you will then see the want there was of a Mediator to be the ambassador of our peace, and to reconcile us to God ; you will then see the want there was of the Holy Spirit's influence to enable us to subdue those unruly passions and appetites, which were a partition-wall between us and our God ; that we might serve our Maker in spirit and in truth, and *perfect holiness in the fear of God.*

Give me leave to stay here a little to represent to

you the economy of God in the Gospel dispensation, which the Apostle, in the text, has shut up in few words; *We have access to God, through Christ, by the Spirit.* To give you a distinct conception of this, and of the different offices of the Son and of the Spirit, you must conceive the Spirit of God as always present with us; the Son, as always in the presence of the Father. The Spirit dwells with the faithful, to guide and to direct them, to second and encourage all their good desires, to help them in overcoming their infirmities; in a word, to labour together with them in the work of their salvation, to make their calling and election sure. The Son of God is at the right hand of the Majesty on high; there he is our advocate, he intercedes for us, he receives and offers up our prayers, he obtains for us the remission of our sins in virtue of the one oblation which he once made of himself upon the cross, the memorial of which is ever in the sight of God. This will teach us what it is to *have access by the Spirit, through Christ.* For the Spirit abideth with us, he is at our right hand, and by his happy influence it is, that we draw near to Christ, and by him approach to the Father. The Son is our high-priest, clothed with majesty and power, and seated at the right hand of God, able to save all who will come to him; through whose powerful and always prevailing mediation and intercession the way is opened to pardon and reconciliation. The Spirit is our comforter, given us to dwell and to abide with us, to be a principle of new life within us, to quicken our mortal bodies, that, dying to sin, we may live unto God through holiness. To draw men to God

is the work of the Spirit, who therefore resides and dwells with men : to reconcile God to man is the work of our High-priest, who lives in the glory of God, making continual intercession for us.

And now, consider the calamitous condition of mankind under what view you please, you will always find a proper remedy provided by the mercy of God. If you reflect upon the holiness of God, and his hatred of sin and iniquity, and begin to fear that he can never be reconciled to sinners; take courage, the work is difficult, but the Son of God has undertaken it; and how great soever the distance between God and you is, yet through the Son you may have access unto him. If still you fear for yourself, that all may again be lost through your own weakness, and inability to do good; even here help is at hand, the Spirit of God is your support, he is the pledge and earnest of your redemption. But,

Secondly, these being the necessary means of salvation, it was likewise necessary to reveal to the world the doctrines concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit: and the belief of these doctrines is necessary to every Christian, as far as the right use of the means depends upon the right faith and belief of the doctrines.

*He that hath the Son, says St. John, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life: and again, whosoever denieth the Son, hath not the Father.* For since we can only come to the Father through the Son, to deny the Son, is to cut off all communication between us and the Father. The same may be said of the blessed Spirit, through whom we are



in Christ: *If any man, says St. Paul, have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his: our blessed Lord has himself told us, That this is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.*

When we were to be put under the conduct of the Spirit, and all our hopes depended upon our obedience to, and compliance with, his holy motions; was it not necessary to inform us who this Spirit is? to let us know, that he is sufficient to the office allotted him; that, knowing perfectly the mind of God, even as the spirit of a man knoweth the things of a man, he is able fully to instruct us and to direct us in the ways of God; that, being infinite, and unconfined in time or place, he is equal to the extensive charge committed to his care, and can be ready at all times, and in all places, to succour the faithful servants of God; that, being the Spirit of power and of might, he is able to rescue us out of all dangers, and protect us against all the powers and principalities of the kingdom of darkness? It may be hard perhaps to human reason to conceive, that this holy Spirit is the eternal Spirit of God, and so intimately united with God, as to know the mind of God as perfectly, as the spirit of a man which is in him knoweth the mind of man; but it would be harder still to believe, that the Spirit could do what is ascribed to him in Scripture, without believing him to be this great and glorious person. It is a more rational act of faith, to expect from the eternal Spirit of God the sanctification of our souls and bodies, spiritual aid and assistance in all our trials and temptations, and whatever else is necessary to our salvation; than it would be to expect the same

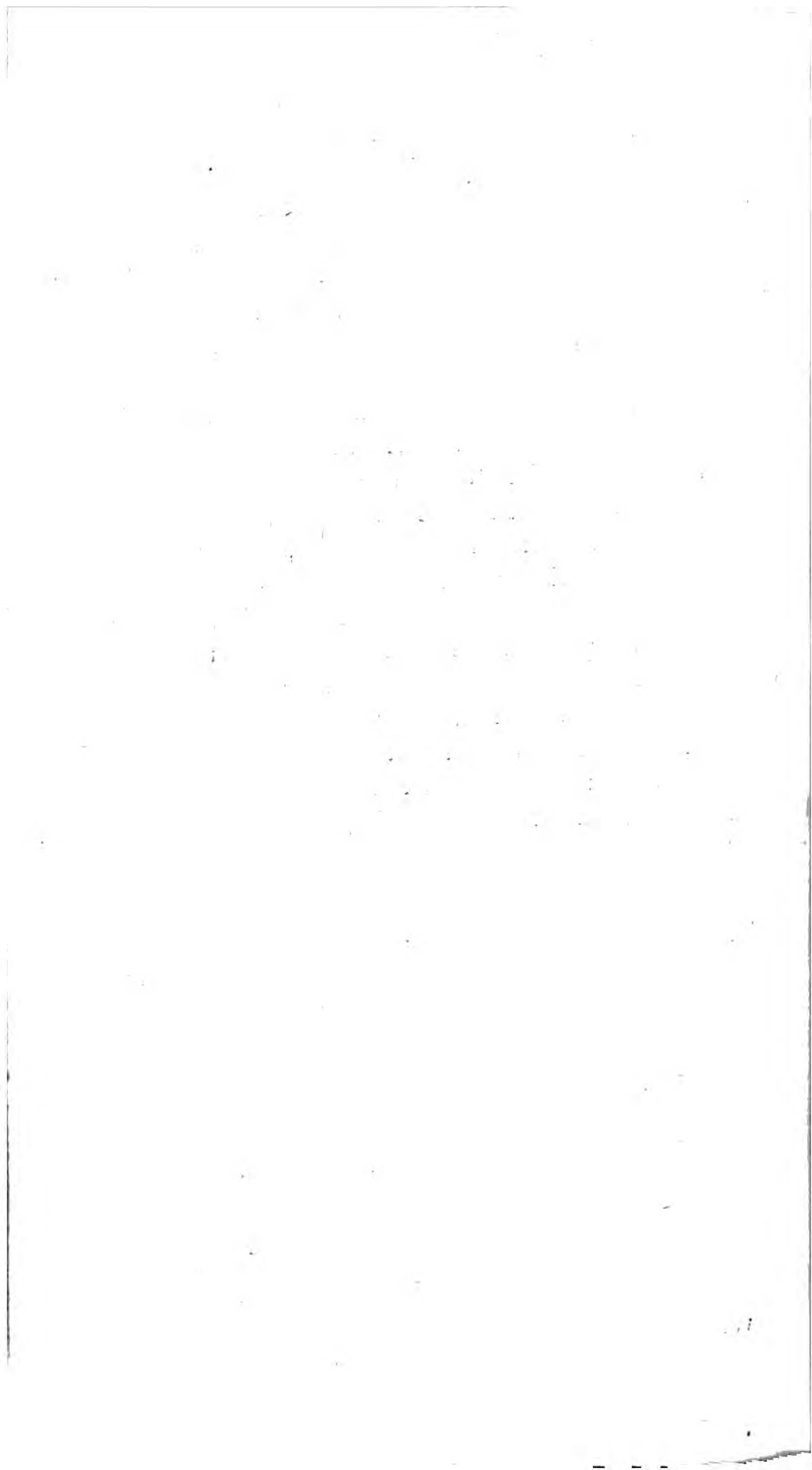


things from any other spirit, of whose power and attributes we knew nothing. The power and mightiness of the Spirit, made known to us by God, is a reasonable, a just foundation for the hope and confidence we have in him; but, were we ignorant of his power, our trust in him would be without ground; and we should lose this boasting, which is now the glory of our faith, that *we know in whom we have believed*. Since therefore, by the determinate counsel of God, the redemption of the world was to be the work of his Son; and the sanctification of it, the work of his Spirit; he has dealt with us more like reasonable creatures, in declaring to us the dignity and power of the persons in whom we are to trust; than he would have done, had he required of us the same faith and reliance on those persons, without declaring to us how able and powerful they are to help us. If therefore it be reasonable for God to save the world, by redeeming it by his Son, by sanctifying it by his Holy Spirit, it cannot be unreasonable for him to make known his Son and his Spirit to the world, that all men everywhere may by the one Spirit of God, and through the only Son of God, approach to the Father. And this shews how foolishly men charge God, when they complain of the heavy imposition laid upon their faith and their understanding by the Gospel doctrines concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has revealed this for our sakes only, not for matter of speculation, or for the enlarging of our knowledge; but that, having a reasonable ground of assurance and hope in him, we may, through faith, and patient abiding, inherit the promises.

You see now what every Christian has to expect and hope for from the assistance of the Spirit, and intercession of the Son of God. We all were strangers to God, and children of disobedience; we are now reconciled to God, and can approach him as our loving Father. Having thus access to the Father, our all depends on the use we make of this great privilege. By having access to God, we are not placed in a state of security, but in a state of probation: we are received as prodigal sons come home; if we continue obedient, we may hope for the inheritance; but, if we turn prodigals again, our case will be desperate. This is the condition of Christians. The Scripture has told us what our present state is; but, as to our future state, that depends upon our obeying, or not obeying, the commands of God. And those who look for farther security, and expect to be ascertained what their future state will be, do very much impose upon themselves, and ascribe to the Holy Spirit an office, of which the Scripture knows nothing. God has done, and will do, great things for you; let not this make you vain and presumptuous, but let it excite your care, that the gift of God may not be bestowed on you in vain; and always bear in mind the Apostle's advice, *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.* Some imagine, that God's working with us is a reason why we should be confident and secure of our salvation: but you see St. Paul was of another mind. He writes to those who certainly had the Spirit; for he tells them, that God did work in them both to will and to do: but does he

tell them that they were safe and secure, and out of all danger? No, he says nothing like it; on the contrary, he calls upon them to fear and tremble, lest, having received so great a gift, they should by their negligence, as thinking themselves secure, forfeit all the hopes of the Gospel.

God says, with respect to the old world, *My Spirit shall not always strive with man*: the case is the same under the Gospel. The Spirit of God works with us, but will not always strive with us; and therefore, whilst we may have the help of God's Spirit, we must lay hold of the opportunity, and work with him. And whoever considers this, will find he has great reason to tremble and fear; for, if he loses the opportunity of making the best use of the assistance of the Spirit when it is offered, he may lose the Spirit, and himself, for ever. Let us therefore work whilst we have the light, and continually pray in the words of our church, *O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us.*



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## DISCOURSE XVII.

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EPHESIANS ii. 8.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*

WE have here, in few words, the argument which St. Paul always insists on, when he has occasion to set forth the kindness of God towards mankind. Life and immortality are the greatest blessings that we have any notion of; and these were brought to light by the Gospel of Christ: him God gave for a redeemer to the world, *that whosoever believeth on him should not die, but have eternal life.* And even that through faith in him we are saved, is the gift of God; for of ourselves we are able to do nothing. These things are taught us in the compass of the text, *We are saved by grace*: we had no title or claim to salvation, but God of his own good will hath sent among us plenteous redemption; and, according to the richness of his mercy, and the great love wherewith he loved us, hath, together with Christ, quickened us who were dead in sins. The condition of this salvation on our part is faith; for we are saved by grace *through faith.* We must be-



lieve our Redeemer, that he cometh from God, and hath the words of life; and must rely on him to perform the word of salvation which is gone out of his mouth. But neither upon the performance of this condition can we say that our own arm hath saved us, or that we have done any thing towards perfecting our redemption; for this salvation through faith, and this faith, is *not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.*

I shall discourse on this proposition, that faith is the gift of God: First, I shall endeavour to shew what the Scripture doctrine on this head is; and, Secondly, shall suggest to you some considerations proper to this subject.

First then, let us consider what the Scripture doctrine on this head is. The faith which St. Paul speaks of in the text is such a faith as is effectual to salvation; for it is the faith through which, by grace, we are saved: this faith he asserts to be the gift of God. There are different significations of the word *faith* in Scripture: sometimes it signifies barely an assent of the mind to the revelations and doctrines of the Gospel, grounded upon such evidence as the things were capable of. This faith sometimes is merely the effect of common sense; for men cannot help believing the things they see. Sometimes this faith is grounded on the necessary deductions of reason from common principles; by this means we arrive at the knowledge of God: a man of reason can no more avoid believing the existence of a first cause, than a man with eyes can avoid thinking that there is a material world, in which he lives. But neither has this assent of the

mind the true nature of faith in it: *Thou believest,* faith St. James, *that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble.* But neither of these kinds of faith being the faith through which we are saved, you cannot say, that St. Paul asserts of these, that they are the gift of God; any farther than as sense and reason are his gifts, by which we know these and all other things. Nor do we teach that nature and reason cannot lead to the speculative knowledge of divine truths; for the evidence of all divine truth resolves itself ultimately into either sense or reason; which are the common gifts of God to mankind, by the principles of which the truth of all things, depending upon the deductions of sense and reason, may be proved and examined. From the exercise of reason we come to know God, and the essential difference between good and evil; and by these principles are enabled to judge of any doctrine, whether it be agreeable to the pure and holy nature of God; which is the first presumptive argument for the truth of any divine revelation; that it is holy and pure, and such an one, as, were God to have given a law to the world, he would have given: from reason we learn the unlimited power of God; and from sense and reason we know the limited power of man; and are enabled to distinguish between the works which the power or policy of man can perform, and the works which can flow only from the unbounded power of God: from hence we can judge of the positive arguments of a divine revelation, the works and miracles which are offered to the world in confirmation of its truth. Thus far the natural gifts of

sense and reason can carry us ; but the result is barely the assent or dissent of the mind to the things under inquiry ; which assent alone is not the faith through which we are saved.

But let it be observed, as to these first rudiments of faith, that though reason and knowledge may attain to them, yet the exercise of reason and knowledge depends upon the will and inclination ; which are not naturally much given to dwell upon the subject of religion, but are engaged in the affairs and concerns of the world, and taken up in the pursuit of present pleasures and enjoyments : that, were men left to themselves, but few would arrive even to this degree of faith ; not for want of understanding to discern, but for want of will to inquire after, the things which make for their salvation. Thus, at the first preaching of the Gospel, all the worldly-minded men, and generally all the great men, were professed enemies to our Saviour. No sooner did he appear to preach a new doctrine, but they opposed him : not that they had time or opportunity to examine his pretensions ; but this presumption, that his doctrine would thwart their interest, and lessen their power and authority among the people, prevailed with them to endeavour to stifle and suppress this new doctrine before it spread to their prejudice : in which they were evidently guided, not by sense or reason, but by a perverse will and evil disposition. And since men cannot but know, from their natural notions of good and evil, that any revelation coming from a pure and holy God must cross their evil designs and affections, they cannot but lie under a great indisposition

to inquire after divine truths, in which, as long as lust and passion have the dominion over them, they can promise themselves but little comfort or satisfaction: so that, to enable men fairly to examine the truth of a divine revelation, and to acknowledge it upon full and sufficient evidence, there must be such a disposition of mind to receive whatever may appear to be the will of God, as may enable you to be impartial judges. This our Saviour requires of us, when he says, *If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself*; that is, if any man has so far got the victory over his own passions and lusts, as to be ready to give himself to the direction of God's will, whenever it may be made appear to him; this man is in a right disposition to receive the truths of the Gospel, and to judge whether Christ be indeed the Prophet of the Most High. Now this disposition is far from being natural to man, according to the nature man has at present; and therefore thus to prepare and dispose men's minds to receive the Gospel, is the work of the Spirit, and is ascribed to him constantly in Scripture, where there is occasion to speak of it: *No man, says our Lord, can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.* And again, *No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father*; that is, unless the Father, by the grace of his Spirit, inclines and disposes his will to attend to the words of life which I deliver. To the same purpose he speaks in another place, *He that is of God, heareth God's word*; where, to be of God, is no more than to be of the number of



those who are disposed to obey God; for, if to be of God signifies any thing more, it will hardly leave any tolerable sense for the word. Our Saviour would not say, Those who obey God will hear God's word; which is saying, Those who obey God, will obey God: and therefore, to be of God, must signify no more than to be ready and disposed to receive the will of God, by the influence of his grace. To be of God, and to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do the will of God, are manifestly put to signify the same thing, because the same thing is affirmed of them. Our Saviour says, *No man can come unto him, unless he be drawn of God*; and yet he says, *He that is of God will hear his word*; and, in another place, *If any man is willing to do the will of God, he shall know of his doctrine*; and if so, then to be willing to do the will of God must amount to the same thing with being of God, and being drawn by God. From whence it follows, that those who are willing to do his will, that is, disposed to receive his truth, are drawn by him; that is, all who are well disposed to receive the faith of Christ, owe their disposition to the grace and influence of God's holy Spirit. Accordingly we read of Lydia, that *God opened her heart to attend unto the things which were spoken of Paul*; where, opening her heart, can signify nothing but inclining her will to attend to, and examine, the truths of the Gospel, which were the things spoken by Paul. And, as faith is ascribed to this disposition wrought by the Spirit of God, so the want of faith is ascribed to the contrary disposition, where a man is under the power of lust and appetite, and possessed with the



love of this world and the pleasures of it: *If our Gospel be hid, says St. Paul, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

But, secondly, faith signifies likewise trust and reliance on God; and includes a confident hope and expectation, that God will perform his promises made to us in his Son. It is described as an active principle of religion, influencing the mind to obedience to the law of God. This is the faith through which *we are saved*, and is affirmed by St. Paul to be *the gift of God*: to this faith we owe our growth and progress in all kinds of Christian graces and virtues; this is the foundation of them, and this it is that makes them acceptable to God, that they are done in faith. That faith is perfect which is attended with a good conscience, *void of offence towards God and towards man*. These two St. Paul couples together in his advice to Timothy, enjoining him *to hold the faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck*: so that faith cannot stand without a good conscience; that is, it is no faith which does *not purge the conscience from dead works, and perfect holiness in the fear of God*. Now all that reason can do, is to assent or dissent to any doctrine; but obedience must come from the will. Wicked men often believe; but, like the devils, they tremble at the majesty of God, and do not love or delight in him, or seek to do his will. Faith then is made up of the concurrence of the will and the under-

standing. The understanding is still the rule to judge truth by; but the will is not the right rule of action, and therefore the assistance of the Spirit, to induce the will to follow the understanding, is necessary in the perfect work of faith: and this work is ascribed to the Spirit in Scripture. Our Saviour, speaking to his disciples, tells them, *I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.* Christ abideth in his members by his Holy Spirit; and therefore we are told, *that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost.* So then our Saviour's doctrine is, that without the assistance of his Spirit we can do nothing, but with it we may bring forth fruit. To bring forth fruit, in the phrase of Scripture, is to be obedient to the laws of God, and to be employed in the works of righteousness: so that faith cannot be perfected, or become the governing principle of our lives, without the assistance of the Spirit, to subdue our wills to the law of holiness. Faith in this sense is reckoned among the fruits of the Spirit, both in the Epistle to the Galatians, and in that to the Corinthians: *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.* So, in the Epistle to the Philippians, the Apostle tells them, *It is given unto them in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake:* where the Apostle's doctrine is manifestly this; that both to believe in Christ, and to suffer for Christ, are the gifts of God through his Holy Spirit. I shall not multiply quotations upon this head, which lie ready to any diligent inquirer's search; but shall spend the time

that remains in suggesting to you some proper observations on this subject.

And, first, our ascribing faith to the operation of the Spirit does not make our faith cease to be a reasonable act of the mind : and yet this surmise is apt to affect men ; and they think it is for want of reason to prove our religion, that we require the gift of faith to make it go down. But the case is far otherwise : the Apostle advises us, *always to be ready to give to every one that asketh it of us, a reason of the faith that is in us* ; consequently, reason and faith, or reason and the gift of the Spirit, are consistent ; or else it would not be possible for those who receive faith by the Spirit, to give a reason of the faith that is in them. Besides, a revelation sufficiently attested, that is, sufficiently proved to reason, is presupposed to the work of faith ; for the gift of faith administers no new arguments for religion : and therefore, if it be not a reasonable religion before we have faith, it cannot be so afterwards. The first work of faith upon the minds of men, as I proved by comparison of several parts of Scripture, is to dispose them to listen after and obey the will of God. Lydia's heart was opened by grace ; this did not make her, right or wrong, take up with the Apostle's doctrine, but it is said, that *she attended to the words that were spoken by Paul*. Now, the more you attend to a thing that has no reason in it, the less you will like it : let the Spirit therefore supply the grace of attention in the greatest measure ; if there wants reason or evidence in the things we attend to, attention will serve no other purpose than to shew us these defects : so that this

gift of the Spirit neither influences the reason of man, nor the reason of the thing ; consequently, this gift of the Spirit is no ways inconsistent with reason. So neither is that other gift of the Spirit, by which we are disposed to a readiness to obey the will of God ; for my being ready to obey the will of God cannot make a doctrine to be the will of God, which is not the will of God ; or make me see arguments to prove a doctrine where there are none : consequently, let a man be ever so ready to obey the will of God, it cannot affect his judgment in discerning what is the will of God, or disturb the exercise of reason in searching for the doctrine which does contain the will of God. And therefore this gift of the Spirit likewise leaves a man free to examine the proofs of religion, and does not influence his mind one way or other in judging the truth : for a man who is willing to do the will of God must necessarily be very unwilling to do what is not his will ; and therefore will be very loth to take up with any doctrine for the will of God, which is not sufficiently proved to be so. This grace therefore only puts him upon searching and examining the pretences of religion, upon the exercise of reason, to discern where truth lies : and this, I suppose, will be allowed to be the most reasonable thing a man can do. Thus, you see, the assent of the mind to the truth of religion is an act of reason, and must be so notwithstanding the gifts and assistances of the Spirit. And as reason is not disturbed by the gifts of the Spirit, which are previous to the assent of the mind ; so, I hope, it will not be thought it can be influenced by those that are con-



sequent to it. Faith is not perfected but through obedience. The power to obey and to love God we ascribe to the Spirit. Now you cannot obey God, till you know what is the will of God; therefore you must first judge of religion, before this gift can operate: and therefore this gift cannot affect your reason one way or other. After you have proved and consented to the truth of the Gospel, it is highly reasonable you should obey it. But though reason, upon due application, can discern the truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt will: and therefore it is one thing to judge with reason, another thing to act with reason: and the grace of obedience is given us by the Spirit, that we may not only think, but act, like reasonable creatures.

I do not remember that God ever promised to force or subdue our reason to the belief of the Gospel by his Spirit: if he had taken this method, he might have saved the trouble of working signs and wonders and miracles, and all other arguments might have been spared, which are only appeals to reason, and would have been needless, had the Spirit been given to particular persons for the conviction of their minds. The Apostle often prays, in behalf of his converts, *that God would enlighten their minds and understandings; that he would increase their knowledge; that he would give them a right judgment in all things.* But I think it will be agreed, that the more enlightened a man's mind is, the larger the compass of knowledge and understanding, and the better his judgment is, the more acute he will be in distinguishing truth from falsehood; consequently, the better able to judge of religion,



and the less ready to receive it without sufficient evidence, that is, without reason.

In the second chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul treats of the method by which we arrive to the knowledge of spiritual truths: *They are*, he says, *spiritually discerned, and the natural man cannot receive them, they are foolishness to him*; and, upon this authority, even the use of reason has been rejected in inquiries of religion, and men sent to the Spirit for proof. But what the Apostle says here will be found consistent with what has been already said upon this head. In the third verse he tells the Corinthians, that *his preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power*; that is, he did not preach from natural topics, but preached the things which the Spirit had revealed to him; and gave the works of the Spirit, that is, signs and miracles, for proof of his doctrine. But this was a reasonable proof still, and such an one as reason could judge of. Verse the fourteenth he says, *The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God*: which is very true; for how should natural reason furnish arguments to prove the revelations of God, which have no connection with natural principles of reason? But then he adds, *These things are spiritually discerned*; or, as he words it in the eighteenth verse, *they are discerned by comparing spiritual things with spiritual*; that is, by comparing the proofs of the Spirit and the revelations of the Spirit together. This comparison is the work of reason; for reason discerns the agreement between these spiritual things, and, by considering the works

and wonders of the Spirit, submits to the revelation of the Spirit. So what the Apostle affirms here is only this, that the revelations of God are not to be examined or known by principles or proofs of natural reason, but must be manifested by the proofs of the Spirit; for we have no proofs from reason for the revelations of the Gospel, but we have the works of the Spirit, by which they are attested. And here it is plain what the work of the Spirit is: it brings proofs to the reason of man, but does not bring the reason of man to the proofs: so that reason and faith, or reason and the gift of the Spirit, are consistent.

Secondly, as to the measure in which the Spirit is given, the Scripture is not express: this we are sure of, that all to whom the Spirit is given do not obey the Spirit; for we read of some who *resist the Spirit of God, who do despite to the Holy Spirit*: from whence it is evident, that all who are lost, are not lost for want of due assistance from God; since they had the offer of the Spirit, but refused and withstood his holy motions. God has engaged in Christ to give us all things necessary to our salvation; and therefore, as far as the Spirit is necessary, so far we are sure of his assistance. As men improve in virtue and holiness, they contract a greater familiarity with the Holy Spirit; with such he is said *to dwell, to abide with them*: which answers to what our Saviour says, *To him that hath, it shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away*. The plain consequence of which is, that we should, according to the Apostle's advice, *work out our salvation with*

*fear and trembling; for God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* If therefore we cease to work whilst we have time and opportunity, God will withdraw his grace from us; *even that which we have, shall be taken from us.* We cannot work without God: therefore should we work with fear and trembling, lest, if we neglect the appointed time, we should be left destitute of help, without hope or remedy.

Lastly, We may collect what are the signs and marks of grace in the regenerate; even this, that we keep the will of God. I before observed, that to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do his will, are one and the same thing: if so, then all who do the will of God, are drawn of God; and all who are effectually drawn of God, do his will. From whence it follows, that all who live virtuously and holily have the Spirit of God, and all who do wickedly are of their father the devil. From whence it follows, that it is a vain and ill grounded confidence that some men have in their spiritual attainments, whilst they work the works of darkness: for he only that doth the works of the Spirit hath the Spirit of God; *and hereby do we know that we love him, if we keep his commandments.*

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## DISCOURSE XVIII.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.  
For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do  
of his good pleasure.*

**T**HERE have not, perhaps, been any more unhappy disputes in the Christian church than those relating to the natural powers of man to work out his own salvation, and those relating to the nature and measure of the grace and assistance promised in the Gospel of Christ. On one side it is insisted, that virtue and vice owe their being to the freedom and choice of the agent, and lose their name when they are the effect of force and constraint; and, consequently, that to suppose men to be made righteous by any influence from any other being than themselves, is contrary to reason. And hence it is that some of the advocates for mere human reason, as sufficient to all the purposes of salvation, despise the promises, made in the Gospel, of grace and spiritual assistance; and others of them so explain them, as to leave them no meaning at all. On the other side, some zealous asserters of the doc-

trine of grace, in order to magnify this free gift of God, allow nothing to reason or the natural powers of men; but think it the highest presumption, and the greatest affront offered to the grace of God, to suppose that men can do any thing for themselves. It is, in their own way of expression, to make the power of God attendant on the weakness of man, and to make the grace of God the servant and handmaid of human reason. And thus it is agreed on both sides, by those who carry their respective opinions to the greatest length, that either the power of man to work righteousness must exclude the grace of God, or the grace of God must exclude all the effects and endeavours of human reason.

But as inconsistent as they may think these things to be, St. Paul, who was better instructed in the principles of the Gospel of Christ than the ancient or the modern teachers of these doctrines can pretend to be, has thought fit to join them together, and has called upon all Christians *to work out their own salvation*, for this very reason, because *God works in them both to will and to do*. If St. Paul be in the right, God's working with us by his grace is so far from being a reason against working for ourselves, that it is the greatest inducement to it, and lays us under the highest obligation to *give all diligence to make our calling and election sure*.

Let us then consider St. Paul's doctrine, and see what are the natural consequences for a Christian to draw from it.

The words of the text evidently consist of two parts; an exhortation, and an argument by which that exhortation is enforced. The exhortation you



have in these words, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*: the argument to enforce it follows in the next words, *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*. An argument which may at first sight seem rather to lead to confidence and assurance, than to fear and trembling: for if God be for us, who can be against us? or what is there to fear, or to tremble at, when we are thus supported and maintained in our spiritual warfare? And the argument is indeed applicable both ways, with respect to different kinds of fear. The disciples of the Gospel have many enemies to encounter with, many temptations to struggle with; they are exposed sometimes to death, often to afflictions and persecutions, and almost always to the hatred and contempt of the world. Now with respect to these adversaries, the argument in the text may furnish us with great confidence and assurance, and we may with the Apostle say, *Who shall harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?* for, notwithstanding all the trials you are exposed to, *God is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*. But as there is a fear which respects our enemies, and is a fear of being conquered and brought into subjection by them; so likewise is there a fear which respects our friends, and is a fear of losing their favour and assistance; and the more a man is dependent upon his friends, the greater is, and ought to be, his fear of losing their protection: and this fear naturally inspires us with diligence and care to observe and fulfil the commands of our great patrons, to study their humour

and inclination, and to conform ourselves to them. And of this fear the Apostle speaks in the text, *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling*; for it is a work that you are by no means sufficient for of yourselves; and therefore have a care how you forfeit the favour of him upon whom you entirely depend: *Of yourselves ye can do nothing; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.* That St. Paul intends this sort and kind of fear, may be seen by his own way of reasoning. In the beginning of this chapter, he presses humility upon the Philippians, he warns them against strife and vainglory, and, after some arguments, drawn from the example of Christ and the great reward he obtained, to recommend humility to them, as if humility and fear, in the present case, were the same thing, he thus concludes; *Wherefore, my beloved, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.* If we believe that God works in us both to will and to do, it will make us humble, because we can do nothing without him; for in such a case what have we to be proud of? Weakness and a state of dependence are inconsistent with confidence and presumption: it will make us likewise fear and tremble, fear to displease, and tremble to disobey, him from whom cometh our salvation.

That this fear is the fear of offending God, and losing his favour, is farther evident from the next verse, *Do all things without murmurings and disputings.* Now what fear is it that makes men obey cheerfully, without repining, without seeking for excuses to free themselves? Not the fear of punishment; for who grumble more than slaves? who repine more at

their service, or more readily seek and invent pretences to decline the orders of their master? But where the fear that possesses the heart is the fear of disobliging a kind friend, or a beloved master, or a patron upon whom we depend, there fear gives wings to obedience, and makes a man all ear and no tongue, ready to receive but not dispute the command. The following verse supplies us with the like argument: the words are these, *That ye may be blameless and harmless, or, as the margin reads it, sincere, the sons of God, without rebuke.* Now then the fear the Apostle speaks of is the fear of a son, the fear of offending the father he loves; it is a fear which makes obedience blameless, and sincere, and without rebuke; which no fear can do, but a fear of offending him we love, and him we depend on. Other fears may make the hands or the feet obedient; but this fear only reaches the heart, and renders obedience perfect and sincere.

The Christian law indeed, like all other wise laws, is fortified with rewards and punishments; and these rewards and punishments God has proposed to us as motives of obedience, of that obedience which he has promised to accept and reward: and therefore there is no doubt but that those who obey upon these motives, shall for their obedience be rewarded.

But this fear cannot here be meant: for, first, it will not agree with the Apostle's argument for fearing: for surely it is no reason to fear punishment, that God works in us to will and to do; we should have much more reason to fear it, if he did not: and this help and assistance of God is our

greatest comfort and consolation against such fears. Secondly, *To work out his salvation with fear and trembling*, is the duty of every good Christian. Now to fear punishment is a proper restraint upon the evil wills and affections of men, but it is no good man's duty; and yet to such the Apostle speaks, as we may see in the verse of the text, *Ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence*; and by the character he gives them in the seventh verse of the first chapter, *Both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the Gospel, ye are all partakers of my grace*. Now to these good Christians he says, *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling*: this he enjoins them as a thing not only highly becoming their condition, but as necessary to it. But the fear of punishment can never be necessary to any good man's condition, nor can it ever be made matter of precept or command. For the law is not made to instil the fear of punishment into men's hearts; nor is it the design of the lawgiver to spread fear and terror into the minds of his people: penalties are added to enforce obedience, and therefore concern not those who are ready and willing to obey. It may be matter of wise admonition to Christians to set before them the danger of disobedience, and to exhort them with our blessed Lord, to *fear not those who can only kill the body, but after that can do nothing; but to fear him who has power both over body and soul, and can throw them both into hell-fire*: but when do you ever find it enjoined, as matter of duty, to be afraid of hell? Is it any part of the good subject's obedience to live in perpetual apprehension of racks and gibbets, be-



caufe racks and gibbets are provided for murderers and robbers? *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?* fays our Apoftle, *do that which is good.* So that to fear the power, belongs not to him who does good. God has commanded all men to live righteoufly, and threatened fevere punifhment to thofe who live otherwife; but he has no where commanded all men to live in fear of punifhment: but the exhortation in the text belongs to all men, it belongs to the moft perfect Chriftians; and therefore the fear in the text is not the fear of punifhment, which can neither be matter of command or exhortation to thofe who do not want it, that is, to all good Chriftians, who from the heart obey the truth. And this may ferve to diftinguifh the fear and trembling mentioned in the text, from the fear which belongs to criminals and flaves; which fear, the Apoftle tells us, *perfect love cafteth out.*

But fince there is a fear and trembling neceffary to the working out of our falvation, and which muft, and ought to rule the affections of the beft of men, let us confider more diftinctly the nature of this fear. Now the reafon why we ought to fear, is, becaufe *God worketh in us both to will and to do:* let us examine then how far this argument goes, and that will fhew us the nature of that fear which is the confequence of it. To will and to do good, are the terms and conditions of our falvation; and therefore from whence we have the power to will and to do, from thence we have the means of falvation. Now falvation comprehends in it all the good we are capable of enjoying, without which our life is death, and our hope mifery: fo that, if



we depend upon God to work in us both to will and to do, we depend upon him for all that is, or can be, valuable to man. And farther, *God worketh in us of his own good pleasure* : we have no right or claim to his assistance ; freely he gave, and freely he may take away, whenever he pleases. Now consider yourself in this state of dependence, and see what it is you have to fear. All your danger is in losing the favour of God ; and therefore for that too must be all your fear. Now this fear has more of care and solicitude in it, than of terror or amazement : for it is one thing to be afraid of a man, lest he should hurt you, and another thing to be afraid of losing his favour : the first fear is terror, the last is carefulness. So that the text is parallel to that passage in St. Peter, *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure*. St. Peter, you see, speaks directly of the call and election of Christians ; but so far was he from thinking this call and this election to be absolute, that he advises those who have the call and election, to give all diligence to make them sure ; plainly teaching us, that though God has called and elected us in Christ, yet it depends on our own care to make them effectual to salvation. It is one certain way to forfeit the gifts of God, not to make use of them ; for why should he bestow his gifts in vain ? And therefore it is a great argument for diligence and application, that we depend not upon our own strength, but the assistance and power of God. As for things which are entirely in our own power, it may possibly be more for our convenience, and as well for our business, to do them to-morrow as to-day : but no man will

run this hazard when the thing is in his power to-day, but may be out of his power to-morrow. And this is an argument for immediate care and industry : God worketh in us when he thinks fit ; and therefore when he thinks fit you must work too ; for his grace will not wait upon your humour, and be ready at your beck : and should you neglect the present opportunity, it may be your last ; since you have no security but from his good will and pleasure ; and to play with his offers, and neglect his call, is not the way to obtain them. There is no constant care without constant fear. A man will not be careful to perform what he is not afraid to lose ; and therefore, in this case, that which is an argument for care, is an argument for fear likewise.

But farther, this fear arises from a sense of our own insufficiency, and our dependence upon God : but our insufficiency is no reason why we should be afraid of God. Because I cannot help myself, it is no argument that I must be afraid of him that can : and since God does help our weakness, it is great reason we should love and adore him, but not that we should dread and fear him. So that the fear that arises from hence, is not in the least degree inconsistent with the perfect love of God. For the same reason that we ought to fear mightily, we ought to love entirely, because *God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*. That it is of his good pleasure that he assists us, is a great evidence of his love to us, and a great argument for our love to him. Since then the cause of this fear is in ourselves, for it arises from our own weakness

and inability ; we ourselves, properly speaking, are the only objects of this fear. We cannot be afraid of God, because he loves us and helps us ; but we may well be afraid of ourselves, lest, being weak and foolish, as we are, we should not use, as we ought to use, the manifold gifts and graces of God. Now then we are come to that which is indeed the good Christian's fear, his constant fear ; and that is, the fear of himself : *Let him that standeth, says the Apostle, take heed lest he fall.* There is no man so perfect, but that he ought to carry this fear about him ; and where his fear points, there must his care and diligence be applied, that is, to himself still : he must watch his passions and affections, lest any of them break out into open enmity against God : his rebel heart must be guarded, lest it quench the holy flame which God has kindled in it, lest it do despite to the Spirit of God, which comes to dwell and inhabit in it. And this is a just and an holy fear, a fear which is not injurious to the love of God towards us ; which carries in it no secret mistrust of his kindness or affection, nor is any blemish to our faith or hope in him : nay, it is a security to them all ; it preserves the love of God towards us, as it keeps us from those offences which would alienate his love from us ; it preserves our faith and hope, by preserving us from those sins which would destroy them, which would render our condition hopeless, and our faith vain. So likewise are the care and diligence, which proceed from this fear, free from any imputations of arrogance or presumption. We set not up for ourselves, as if our own arm could save us ; but for this very reason we

are careful and diligent, because of ourselves we can do nothing : and therefore are we zealous and careful to make use of those powers which God bestows on us. We are always working, but not our own work ; but we strive to *abound in the work of the Lord*, as St. Paul expresses it : we hope to be rewarded for our labour, and yet not for our own, but, as the same Apostle assures us, *we know that our labour in the Lord is not in vain*. If we hope, we hope in the Lord ; if we fear, we fear ourselves. *Perfect love*, says St. John, *casteth out fear*, that is, the fear of him whom we love. Nor is this fear, thus to be cast out, the fear of God, for he is on our side : but a man's worst enemies are they of his own household ; and therefore we justly fear our own hearts and affections, and over them is all our care, *that we may keep ourselves unspotted from the world*.

From this account of the nature of holy fear, it will be easy to explain what it is to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*. God has given us many laws and commands, in obedience to which consisteth our salvation. He has promised us such degrees of assistance, as shall enable us to perform the conditions required of us. To do the will of God, to walk in his laws, is to *work out our salvation*. This to do, under the assistance which God has given us, depends upon ourselves : we can miscarry in no point, but in this which is left to ourselves. Here then all our diligence and care is necessary. We are prone to evil and mischief, and it requires our constant application to secure ourselves from falling under the dominion of lust and wick-



edness: and therefore we must walk circumspectly, watching and observing ourselves; we must be jealous over our own hearts, for out of them *are the springs of life*, as the wise man tells us. This makes the Christian state to be a spiritual warfare; a state of continual care and watchfulness, of fear and suspicion: so that it is no less than constant employment for a man to walk uprightly with his God. This constant care can come from nothing, but a persuasion that it is necessary in our condition; and he that is well convinced of his own weakness will be perpetually afraid of miscarrying; which fear will keep his diligence awake: so that *to work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, is, with the utmost care and diligence to set ourselves to perform the will and commands of God, to be diligent *to make our calling and election sure*.

There is, in the language made use of to explain the doctrine of grace, something liable to be abused by ignorant or crafty men. We say, that of ourselves we can do nothing; whence they conclude, that we have nothing to do. We say, that it is the grace of God which enables us to do every thing; from whence they conclude, that every thing must be left to the grace of God, and that we need only work ourselves into a strong persuasion that God is at work for us, and may fit still ourselves. And this persuasion, which is generally mere enthusiasm, they dignify with the name of Christian faith.

But let us try this language in a common case, and see whether it be so hard to be understood. Suppose a man wanted to move a weight, that required double his strength to move it; would it not .



be a very proper expression to say, Of himself he could do nothing? or would it follow, that, if he was offered help, he should sit still, and not put his own strength to the work? If a friend came to his assistance, would it not be properly said, that his friend enabled him to do what he did? but would it follow that his friend did all, and he nothing? I mention this only to guard men against being misled by mere sounds; and shall proceed now to consider some consequences of the doctrine and exhortation of the Apostle mentioned in the text.

And, first, it is evident, that the Christian state is not a state of security; for security is inconsistent with any kind of fear and trembling, and is indeed a condition that does not call even for care or diligence. In a state of security a man cannot even fear for himself; for, to be sure of salvation, he must be sure of every thing that is necessary to it; and therefore he must either be sure that he is to have no part himself in working out his salvation; or, if he is to have any, he must be sure and certain that he shall perform it: either of which excludes all manner of fear and trembling. Much less can he, who is secure of being saved, fear being punished: so that there is no kind of fear left for him; and the Apostle's exhortation will have no meaning in it to such a man. *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling*: with fear of what? since nothing is left to be afraid of. And yet to be sure of our salvation has been made by some a necessary sign of regeneration and adoption: and hence has proceeded the doctrine, that grace once received can never be lost; and, if so, those who have re-

ceived grace, can have no reason to fear and tremble. And yet it cannot be denied that the Philip-  
pians, to whom the Apostle writes, had received  
grace ; since from his own testimony we learn, that  
*they had obeyed always ; that in his bonds, and in the  
doctrine and confirmation of the Gospel, they had been  
partakers of his grace.* Grace then they had re-  
ceived ; what then had they to fear ? if grace once  
received cannot be lost, that is, if grace gives secu-  
rity of salvation. To make then the Apostle con-  
sistent with himself, we must affirm, that it is his  
doctrine that grace may be lost ; and that even  
those, who have made great progress in Gospel  
obedience, are not secure of their state ; but must  
labour on, and work on with fear and trembling,  
lest they come short of the promises that they have  
received. And from hence we may comfort and  
support good Christians, under the many fears and  
misgivings of mind that attend them in their spiri-  
tual warfare. That you fear, is no argument of  
mistrusting God : we have reason to fear for our-  
selves ; nor will this fear be taken from us, till we  
are removed out of this world. Were there any  
reason to think, that security as to our future con-  
dition was among the gifts of God's Spirit to the  
true children of Christ, then indeed our fears would  
be matter of disturbance to us : but, since the best  
must fear and tremble, why should we disquiet our-  
selves because we fear for ourselves ? since not only  
our present condition requires it, but it is even part  
of our security to fear, and to labour with care and  
diligence, which is the blessed fruit of holy fear.  
To fear that God will not perform his promises to

us, is a wicked fear : but to fear that we may fall short of those promises, is a reasonable fear, our present weakness considered ; and it is a spur to virtue. And those who would desire this thorn in the flesh to be removed, may be answered, in the Lord's name, as he answered St. Paul, *My grace is sufficient for you.* You are weak, but the Lord is strong, and his strength is perfected in weakness : so that, if your fear be active and busy, and sets you to work for the thing you are afraid to lose, there is no doubt but that through Christ you shall be enabled to do all things.

Secondly, From hence we may learn what to think of the works of Christians. It is, you see, the Apostle's command, *Work out your salvation.* Now then works are necessary to salvation ; and it matters little in what degree they are necessary, or how they are to be named : if they are necessary, you must do them ; and that is enough to secure the practice of virtue and holiness in the world. And for this reason God works in us, that we may not only will, but do ; that is, bring our good inclinations to perfection : for why does God work in us to will and to do, if willing and doing are not necessary to our redemption ? And perhaps the good works of Christians may not deserve all the hard words that have so liberally been bestowed on them, if we consider that they are not the works of men, but of God ; *for he worketh in us to will and to do* : and therefore our good works are the fruits of his Spirit ; and are holy because they proceed from an holy root, the power of God dwelling in us.

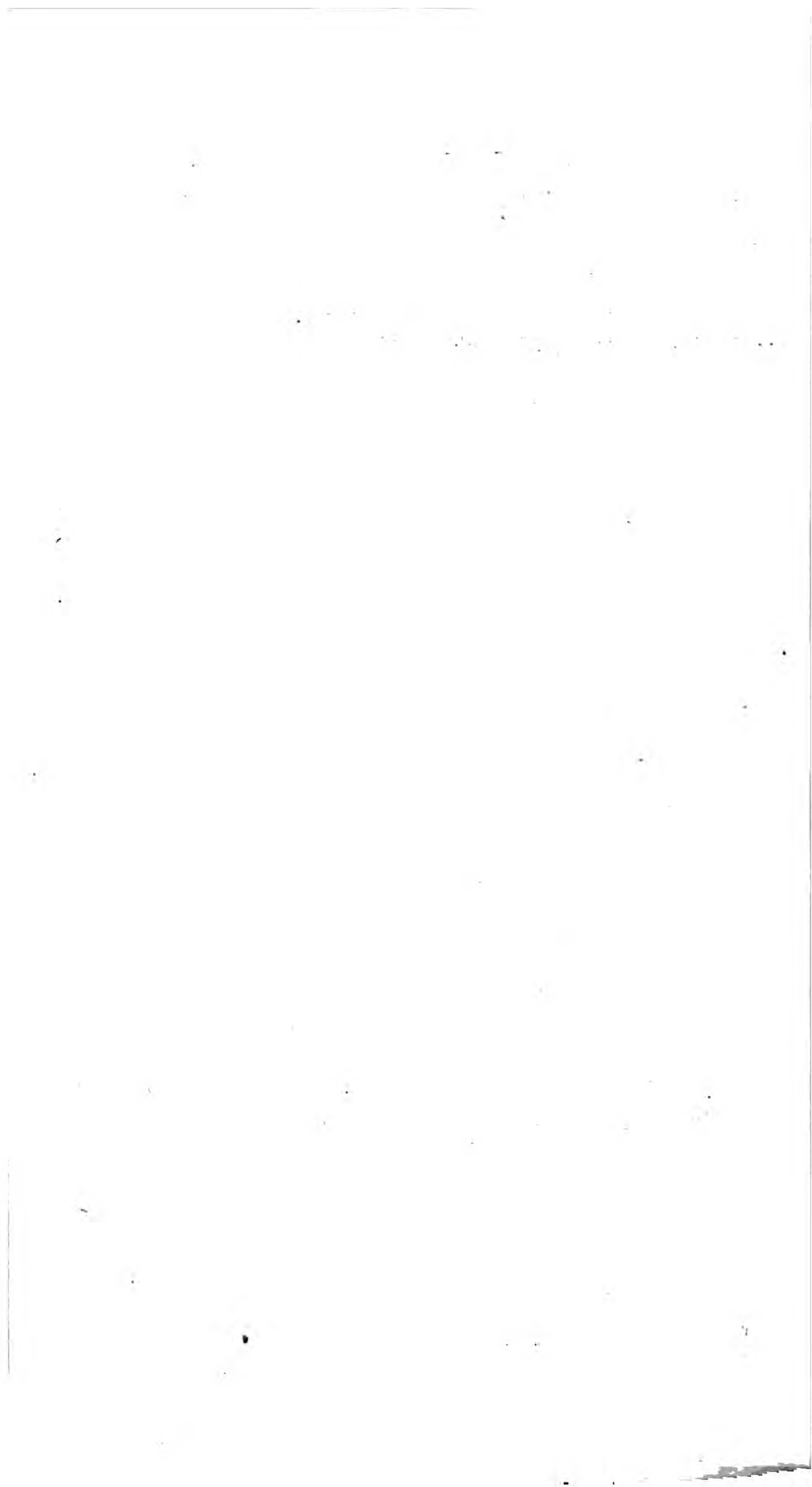
Lastly, Hence likewise we may observe in what

manner God works with the faithful : St. Paul makes it an argument for fear and diligence. From whence it is evident, that God does not so work in us, as to exclude our own care and industry ; that is, he does not work irresistibly : for supposing God to work irresistibly, the wit of man cannot make an argument out of it for private care and diligence. If God does every thing in us whether we will or no, what is left for us to do ? or what have we to fear and tremble for, when God alone has undertaken the whole care and business of our redemption ? The work of the Spirit upon the hearts of the faithful is to actuate and inspire them : but to perform what is good is the business of him who is actuated and inspired. Now it must be allowed, that it is one thing to give a man power to act, another to force him to act. A man's will is not influenced by his own power. He that has ten times the power to do a thing that I have, is nevertheless as free to let it alone as I am. And though the grace of God gives us great power and ability to work out our salvation, yet the power to will and to work is no constraint either to will or to work. And in this sense the grace of God is a great argument for diligence and care : for, if he furnishes us with power, it behoves us to see that we make a right use of it.

In a word then, you have the assistance of God to enable you to work ; which is a great reason to love and trust him, since he takes this care of you. Your danger now is only from yourself ; it is in your own power, but in no other creature's under heaven, to defeat your hopes. You only can rob

yourself of the assistance of God by doing despite to his holy Spirit, by not obeying when it is in your power to obey. Be careful therefore, my brethren, be watchful over yourselves ; and, whilst you have opportunity, *work out your salvation.*





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## DISCOURSE XIX.

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LUKE xiii. 23, 24.

*Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?  
And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate:  
for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall  
not be able.*

**T**HE fate of the world at the great day is so momentous a point, and in which every man, who is conscious to himself that he is accountable for his actions, is so nearly concerned, that it is no wonder to find men in every age inquisitive and curious to pry into this event. Hence have arisen many nice speculations concerning God's final judgment of mankind: sometimes we are asked, whether, consistently with the declarations of the Gospel, any of the heathen world can be saved; and sometimes, whether, the strictness of the Gospel morality considered, and the visible corruption of the world, it must not necessarily come to pass that the far greater part of mankind shall perish everlastingly.

One of these questions you see proposed to our

Saviour in the text, *Lord, are there few that be saved?* You have also our Lord's answer in the text, and in the verses which follow it in St. Luke: an answer applicable not only to this, but to all other questions of the like import; and which therefore very well deserves your consideration.

For the better understanding of which answer, we must consider, whence it is that men, not content to examine themselves by the law of God, and to learn from thence how their own case stands, are for launching out into the mysteries of God's judgments, and inquiring how it shall fare with this or that nation at the general judgment, and whether many or few shall be saved at the last.

Whoever will examine into the bottom of men's thoughts upon this subject, will find that the conclusion they make is commonly influenced by the consideration of their own circumstances. Every man in this case takes care of himself, and leaves the way open to his own salvation, how strongly soever he bars it against others. The great advocates of election and reprobation always reckon themselves in the number of the elect; and, that their iniquities, of which they are often conscious, may not rise up against them, they maintain that the act of man cannot make void the purpose of God, or the sins of the elect deprive them of the benefit of God's eternal decree. Thus secured, they despise the virtues and moral attainments of all men, and doom them with all their virtues to destruction; whilst they advance themselves with all their sins to a throne of glory prepared for them before the world began.

Akin to this was his conceit who asked our Saviour the question, *Are there few that shall be saved?* The Jews were God's peculiar people, and enjoyed very great privileges: *unto them were committed the oracles of God; to them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.* But, not content with these privileges, and being thus distinguished by God, they will hardly allow God to have any thing to do with the rest of the world, unless it were by severe judgments to afflict and to destroy them. With regard to these prejudices it is that St. Paul puts the question to his countrymen, *Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles?* And we know full well that the Gospel of Christ gave greater offence to the Jews in no one particular, than in opening the door of salvation to the Gentile world: they looked upon all nations, but their own, to be unclean, and accounted it *an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation:* and St. Peter was so possessed with this opinion, that he stood in need of a special warning from heaven, before he would baptize the honest centurion Cornelius. Upon the foot of this prejudice the question is put to our Lord, *Are there few that shall be saved?* He who knew what was in man, and understood their secret thoughts, gave an answer which went to the bottom of the inquirer's heart, and without doubt touched him to the quick; *There shall, says he, be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.* And

*they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And behold there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.* This part of the answer was levelled directly against the Jewish prejudice, and is a plain declaration that the salvation of God should be extended to east and west, north and south, to people of all parts of the world; and that many, who thought themselves alone entitled to God's favour in virtue of their peculiar privileges, should for their misconduct and misbehaviour be finally excluded from his presence.

The controversy which has been managed among Christians, concerning the salvation of the heathen world, turns upon quite another point than the Jewish prejudice did. It carries not with it the same contempt of mankind. The Jews thought none worthy to be sons of God but themselves: Christians think all worthy, and are desirous that all should be made partakers of the glory of God. The Jews thought no nation but their own capable of being received into the covenant of God, and therefore doomed all to destruction without remedy: the Christian thinks every nation capable of being admitted into the covenant of Christ; his only doubt is, whether any nation, not received into the covenant, is capable of the benefits of it. But then considering the infinite numbers of men already dead, without any knowledge of the Gospel, and the great number still which probably will die in the same circumstance; this notion entertained by some Christians, with respect to such persons, seems to be as peremptory and relentless as the prejudice.



of the Jews. And the limitation put upon God's mercy and goodness may be found perhaps to be as presumptuous, and as injurious to the honour and majesty of God in one case, as in the other. What then must we say to such inquirers as these? The answer in the text is given them both for their instruction and their rebuke; *Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* As if our Lord had said, You seem, by your curiosity in inquiring after the state of others, to be secure and at ease about your own. But turn your thoughts from others to yourself: as great as your advantages and privileges are, your way is still strait and narrow: strive therefore and labour to secure your own entrance into life; for many of those who have equal privileges with you, and profess to seek the kingdom of God, shall not enter into it.

As the opinions hitherto mentioned confine the mercy of God within a narrow compass, and leave the greater part of mankind under desperate circumstances; so there is another which goes into the contrary extreme, and sets the doors of heaven open to all comers, with little or no regard to the different qualifications of men. They who can make no title to the kingdom of God under the terms of the Gospel, or by the rules of virtue and morality, not willing to give themselves up to destruction, have persuaded themselves and others, that it is impossible that God should finally doom to misery so many of his creatures, as must necessarily suffer if they are to be judged by the strict

rules of morality, or the no less strict rules of the Gospel. And having no hope but in the mercy of God, no excuse but in the infirmities and weaknesses of human nature, necessity makes them eloquent upon this subject; and the finest things are said to display the goodness of God, and set it forth in the liveliest colours; and to represent the distress of nature, and the utter inability of man to do good in this fallen degenerate state. Thus concluding all men under sin, they hope to escape in the crowd: it would be inexorable cruelty, they think, to make all, or most men miserable; and therefore, let God be good, and all men be sinners, and they are safe.

To such inquirers as these, we say, that they mistake in all their reckoning: for, if it be just to punish sinners, no reason can be given why twenty should not be punished as well as ten, or an hundred as well as twenty. There were sinners enough in the world to have saved the world at the general deluge, if numbers would have done. When Sodom was destroyed, ten righteous men would have saved the city; but the number of the wicked was never pleaded in bar of justice. Neither does the race of men make so considerable a figure in the system of the universe, as to endanger the whole, if they miscarry. Let men be sinners, yet God will not want those who will serve and obey him: or, if he should, let him speak the word, and millions will arise at his command: *Think not therefore to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father; for God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.* If all men should forsake him, he can, when he pleases, repair the loss: he is not so weak, or in such

want of the service of men, as to be guided by such politic reasons as oftentimes, reasonably enough, prevail with temporal princes to spare an offending multitude. Leave therefore the rest of the world to the judgment and mercy of God, and mind you the law that is set before you as the condition of life, and *strive to enter in at the strait gate.*

You see by this account, that our Saviour did not think fit to answer the curiosity of this inquirer: and, since he declined the question, who alone was able to resolve it, it is absurd to ask the question of any body else; and it is great presumption in any body else to pretend to answer it. From natural religion we may learn much of the equity and justice of God, and of the terms of obedience upon which we may hope to partake of his mercy: but how many, or how few, will act by the laws of reason, and qualify themselves for the mercy of God, natural reason and religion can never shew. Nor is there any reason to expect a resolution of this doubt in the books of Scripture; for had it been a piece of knowledge proper to be communicated to us, why was it not declared by our Lord, when the question was so fairly stated to him? or why does he give such an answer here, as is plainly calculated not to satisfy the curiosity of mankind in this great point, but to restrain and to rebuke it? The question is, *Are there few that be saved?* The answer is in effect, What is that to you? mind your own business, and *strive to enter in at the strait gate.*

Two things there are, in which every man has a right to require satisfaction, and without which he can upon no reasonable grounds pretend to reli-

gion: one relates to the method of God's dealing with mankind, and comes to this point, Whether all men are capable; and, if not all, who are capable of salvation? The other relates to our own conduct and behaviour, and resolves itself into this inquiry, Upon what terms we may expect salvation? Now, as to these two necessary inquiries, our Saviour is so far from avoiding them, that he has expressly and clearly determined them. As to the first, he has told us, that salvation belongs to all men, of every country and nation; and that the kingdom of heaven is open to receive those who come from the east and west, from the north and south. As to the second, he declares, that all the workers of iniquity will be excluded from the presence of God; and therefore exhorts us to *strive to enter in at the strait gate*: and, to quicken our diligence, and to raise in us a concern equal to the interest we have at stake, he informs us farther, *that many who will seek to enter, shall not be able*. Being thus far instructed, what farther demand have you upon your teachers? Would you know before-hand what your lot will be? and whether you shall be in the number of those who shall seek and find, or among those who would enter in, but shall not be able? What has a teacher of religion to do in this matter? Is it ever expected of a lawgiver, that he should tell who will obey and be happy, and who will transgress the law and be punished? Nay, what has a learner in religion to do with this point? Do you want to be made either careless or desperate? Is either state a desirable one to a man disposed to be seriously religious? But you may think perhaps



that it would have another effect upon you ; that it will give great ease and satisfaction to your mind, to be secure as to your future condition, and enable you with great cheerfulness to bear all the hardships and discouragements to which virtue stands exposed. I am indeed persuaded that this effect would often follow ; that many righteous would be resolutely righteous, and act with views above this world, and as citizens of another country, upon certain assurance given them of future glory. But consider, the terms upon which we are to be happy in another world must be such as are consistent with our state and condition in this. It is impossible to imagine it to be reasonable for God to place us in this world, and then to give such hopes of another, as should render us unfit to support the several characters imposed on us here. And it is much to be doubted whether the best men would not be rendered useless to this world by such security given for their own future happiness as some seem to desire. They would probably be lost in the prospect of their own future happiness, and grow stupid to the world, and act as if they did, in the literal sense, hate father and mother, brother and sister : whereas now the sense of religion under which they live, the necessity they know themselves to be under to work out their own salvation, obliges them to discharge all the offices and duties of life regularly and honourably ; since there is no way of securing our happiness in another world, but by doing all the good we can in this.

And if this sort of knowledge would probably



render good men uselefs to the world, it would certainly render bad men exceedingly pernicious to it. Despair is the height of madness ; and were all bad men to be made mad and outrageous, it would perhaps be hard to find keepers to guard them, and to protect the rest of mankind from their fury. To live amongst men who knew themselves destined to eternal misery, what else would it be but living among the damned, and being exposed to all their malice and revenge, made ten times more malicious and revengeful by their despair ?

But if it can serve no good purpose to communicate to us this knowledge with respect to ourselves, and our own future state and condition, what purpose can it possibly serve to give us this knowledge with respect to others, and their future condition ? What is it to us to know the exact proportion between the good and bad, or to know how many or how few shall finally miscarry ? Would this knowledge alter our own condition in any respect ? Would it affect the terms of our obedience, or make it easier for us to work out our own salvation ? If not, to what purpose is it desired ? unless perhaps you secretly imagine that God means not to execute his threatenings against sinners, but will save all at the last ; and you want to be let into this secret, that you may sin without fear. If this be indeed your case, do you not see that your curiosity is irreligious, and springs from a corrupted heart, which wants to be freed from the fear of hell, only to enjoy the pleasure of sin ? And can you still wonder why God does not gratify such a curiosity as this, and reveal the secret mysteries of his provi-

dence, to encourage you in vice and immorality? It wants but little reflection in this case to see that the reason why this knowledge is desired, is a very good reason why it should not be granted.

In general, it is very absurd to expect that judgment should go before trial: and therefore, as this life is a state of trial, and is naturally to be followed by a day of judgment, it is unnatural to declare the final state of men before their trial is over; and with respect to any judgment, but the judgment of God, it is impossible; for no other just judge can tell what his sentence will be before the trial is over.

The scope which men give to their imaginations upon this subject, when they leave their only sure guide, the word of God, is always dangerous, and oftentimes fatal to them. If you are contented to take God's word for the method he intends to pursue in the judging of the world, you will soon see, that, in order to be happy, you must be good. If you want restraint, the threatenings of God are terrible: if you want comfort, the promises of the Gospel are the only proper cordial for penitent sinners. Thus will you find yourself equally guarded against presumption and despair, so long as you follow the light of God's word. But if you indulge your own conceit, and imagine that God will be either better or worse to you than he has declared, you expose yourself to manifest peril. If in the gaiety of your heart you imagine God means little by his threatenings, and made use of them only to deter men from vice, without ever intending a rigorous execution, it is very probable that you will

take advantage of your own discovery, and abate as much in your own goodness, as you do in God's severity. If you are of a colder constitution, and more inclined to melancholic thoughts, your imagination will shew you God clothed only with terrors ; and your heart, oppressed with fear, will sink, and leave you no courage to go on with the duties of religion, from which your fears will suffer you to have no hope or expectation.

If you extend your thoughts farther, and lay schemes for the general judgment of the world, it is well if this unnecessary concern for others does not prove prejudicial to yourself. If you confine the mercies of God to yourself and your own sect only, it is an opinion which not only ascribes great partiality to God, but it tends to introduce cruelty and inhumanity into the temper of every man so persuaded. We easily come to think it a virtue to hate those whom God hates : and then the consequence is, that there must be a stop to all intercourse of good offices with all men, the few only excepted who think as we think. And thus, by passing a rash judgment in a dark mysterious point, and which of all others does least concern us, we shall extinguish the noblest grace of the Gospel, the plainest duty of a Christian, and which of all others does most affect the peace and happiness of mankind.

If, in honour to the mercy of God, you open the doors of heaven to men of all professions in the world, who live well according to the measure of light bestowed on them ; though your opinion has in it much more humanity and more common sense

than that before mentioned, yet, by thus dealing to all indifferently graces and mercies which are not in your disposal, it is well if you do not hazard your own share. It is this opinion, if I am not deceived, that leads many into contempt of the Gospel of Christ Jesus: for, when they think all religions equally good, and all men equally secure who follow their religion, be it what it will, they raise unawares a question which they cannot answer, namely, To what purpose was the Gospel given? For, if all men are equally secure under all religions, what can be the advantage of one religion above another? When men are led into this intricate maze, by setting up themselves for judges of the world, they know not where to fix: they lose all regard to the best and purest religion, by doing such professed and undeserved honour to the worst.

You see then how useless, how dangerous a thing it is, to go out of our way to meddle with things so far above us. If you would resolve to take care of one, that resolution would furnish you with sufficient employment: for, be your advantages ever so great, yet all who have your advantages will not be saved; for of those who seek to enter, many will not be able; and many, of whom you little think, may perhaps go before you; for God has those whom he will own, in the east, and the west, and the north, and the south. Leave him to find out those whom he will honour, and look you to the point which is indeed your true, your only concern, the salvation of your own soul, and *strive to enter in at the strait gate.*

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. This ensures transparency and allows for easy verification of the data.

In the second section, the author outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze the data. This includes both primary and secondary data collection techniques. The primary data was gathered through direct observation and interviews with key stakeholders. Secondary data was obtained from existing reports and databases.

The analysis phase involved using statistical software to identify trends and correlations within the data. The results show a clear upward trend in the number of transactions over the period studied. This is likely due to increased market activity and improved infrastructure.

Finally, the document concludes with a series of recommendations for future research and implementation. It suggests that further studies should focus on the long-term sustainability of the current trends and the impact of external factors.



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## DISCOURSE XX.

LUKE xii. 48.

*Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

**T**HE equity of this general rule is so apparent to common sense, that it admits of no dispute, and calls for no explanation. A single mite offered by a poor widow is a present fit for the King of heaven, which from the hand of a rich man would hardly be a decent charity to a poor widow. And thus the case is in all instances to which the rule is applicable.

But plain as this general maxim is, yet we are very apt to mistake in the application of it to particular cases: for then self-love and self-interest will not permit us to discern that true proportion of one thing to another, from which the equity of the rule arises. If we have any claim to make in our own behalf, we think nothing too much, and are apt to overrate the ability of the person upon whom we have the demand, and to expect from him much more than he in reason ought to grant: if any claim be upon us, we are ready enough to excuse ourselves, to dissemble, or to undervalue our power, and consequently to do less than may in reason and jus-

tice be required from us. Hence it is that we are rarely pleased with those who are above us, and seldom able to satisfy those who are below us.

As this rule has place in the intercourse of all the offices of life, so ought it especially to influence the distribution of rewards and punishments: but the weakness and wickedness of men have almost totally excluded it from human judicatures. For as it is in every body's power to pretend ignorance of the law, or some other inability, in excuse for the crimes for which they are to answer; were the plea as easily admitted as it is pleaded, it would open a door to all kind of licentiousness, and take off the fear of punishment, which is so necessary a restraint upon the depraved inclinations of men: and since the wisest and ablest judges cannot discern, some few cases perhaps excepted, between real and affected ignorance; or so distinguish the powers and abilities of one man from another, as to proportion rewards and punishments according to this rule; therefore the law puts all, except those who are manifestly deficient in reason, upon the same level, and supposes every man to know the law of his country; and consequently, where a malicious act is proved, a malicious intention is implied, and the criminal is sentenced accordingly.

But how justifiable soever this proceeding is, upon the necessity there is for it in order to maintain some tolerable degree of peace and quiet in the world; yet it is evident that these general presumptions, upon which all human judicatures proceed, do not leave room for an exact distribution of justice; but it often happens, that men are made equal

in the punishment, whose crimes, could all circumstances be considered, were not equal.

But could you introduce a judge endowed with the perfect knowledge of men's hearts, there would be an end of all such general presumptions: he would do in every case what was exactly right and equitable; and the only standing rule of the court would be that of the text, *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.*

One such court there is in which he who knows the secrets of every heart will sit judge himself; before whose tribunal there will want no evidence to convict the guilty, no advocates to defend the innocent: there no pretended excuse will be admitted, no real one excluded: there every man with all his actions, with all his talents and abilities, and all his opportunities of knowing the will of God, will be weighed in the balance; and *unto whom much was given, of him shall much be required.*

Since then we are to be judged, and finally sentenced, by this rule, it concerns us to be careful in the application of it to ourselves; for if we mistake, we shall gain only a deceitful security, and which at the last will prove fatal: and there is the more reason for this care, considering how apt men are to make unreasonable allowances to themselves, where their own interest is concerned.

It is no uncommon thing for men who have no hopes of being justified by the terms of the Gospel, to take shelter in this general declaration, and to imagine that they see an equity in their own case, which shall stand between them and the rigorous execution of the Gospel law. When they read in

the New Testament, that all whoremongers and adulterers, all drunkards and riotous persons, all extortioners and fraudulent dealers, in a word, all who in any manner injure their neighbours and fellow creatures, shall without doubt perish everlastingly; they plainly perceive that the crimes and the punishment are so inseparably annexed, that, being conscious of the crimes, they have no way to ward off the punishment. But when they read, that *unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required*, and infer from thence, that unto whomsoever little is given, of him shall little be required; they immediately conclude, that all their errors and mistakes, of what kind soever, are well secured: for whoever is in error, be it through want of understanding, or of the external means of knowledge, or be it through passion and prejudices, does, so long as the error continues, want the light, and is so far to be considered as one to whom little is given. This is one step towards their justification: but still conscience remains, and proves that they had the light in many instances in which they have been offenders. But then they consider, that to render a man accountable for his actions, it is not enough that he knows the terms of his duty, he must also have power to put them in execution: for no man ought to be punished for not acting, who never had it in his power to act, or for doing what was not in his power to avoid doing. Being thus far advanced, they recollect all the temptations and incitements they met with, and how strongly their passions were moved to the commission of those iniquities of which their conscience accuses them; and, being

judges disposed to favour the criminal, they conclude, it was not in their power to do otherwise than they did; and since so little was given them, they shall be answerable but for little: and thus secured, they imagine they may safely appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and plead to him his own rule of equity against all the peremptory laws of his Gospel.

Allow this plea, and it will indeed justify all men, and leave no room for judgment; but it must reflect great dishonour and reproach on him who made them, and has declared to them a judgment to come, as well by the reason which he has given them, as by the revelation which he has published.

Few men are so essentially wicked as to choose wickedness for its own sake; either error or passion is pleaded in all cases. The Canaanites, who worshipped the work of men's hands, were greatly in error; and the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had strong unnatural passions: but these by fire from heaven, and those by the sword of Joshua, were rooted out. Which part now would you take? Were they sinners, or was the Judge of all the world unjust?

If men are really of such a make, that their passions are too strong for their reason, and reason of no use but to contrive means for the satisfaction of the passions and appetites; it is impossible to justify God in giving such creatures any notion of a judgment to come: for to what purpose does it serve but to plague and torment them unnecessarily? And how is it reconcileable with the goodness of God, to plant such seeds of misery in our very nature?



to arm the little reason we have against us, which is perpetually placing fears and terrors before us, which yet have, can have, no relation to us ?

In order to clear this matter, there are two things proper to be considered :

First, To what instances this rule of the text is extended by our blessed Saviour and his Apostles.

Secondly, How far we may extend and apply this rule by parity of reason to other cases.

That we may bring this inquiry within proper bounds, it is fit to observe, in the first place, that the rule of the text is never applied in Scripture to extenuate or excuse immoral actions upon account of the violence of the temptation from whence they proceed. So far from it, that even indulging the passion is imputed as sin, though the immoral wicked action does not ensue: *He that hateth his brother, says an Apostle, is a murderer ; and he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her, says our blessed Saviour, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.* If the case be so, if hatred has in it the guilt of murder, and lust has the guilt of adultery ; how shall murder be excused because it proceeds from violent hatred, or adultery because it proceeds from violent lust ? St. James has plainly condemned the profaneness of justifying our iniquities by accusing our constitutions, and consequently by accusing him who made us : *Let no man say when he is tempted I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finish-*

*ed, bringeth forth death*, James i. 13, 14, 15. All sin is here described to be the effect of violent and inordinate lust and passion: but this is so far from being considered as an excuse for sin, that it immediately follows, that sin so produced *bringeth forth death*. The Scripture has recorded to us the immoral actions of many persons; but is there any instance where such immoralities are pitied or excused because of the lust and passions from whence they proceeded? Nay, however apt men are to make such excuses for themselves, they are not apt to make them for others. When you read that Ahab slew Naboth, are you apt to say, Poor man, how could he help it, for he longed extremely for his vineyard? When you read that David slew Uriah and corrupted his wife, do you excuse his iniquity, because his passion was strong? If you do, it is more than he did for himself; for when he came to himself, he cried, *I have sinned against the Lord*: which one sorrowful confession of his iniquity was worth a thousand of the excuses which men usually make in like cases. In the verses before the text, our Saviour puts the case of those who have received much, and of those who have received less: of those who received least he says, *They shall be beaten for doing things worthy of stripes*: by which it appears, that all who have sense to distinguish between good and evil are subject to judgment; and no hope is given them of being saved by the strength of their passion, when they act against the light of their reason.

But there will be occasion to consider this particular again, in stating the case or cases to which the rule of the text is applied in Scripture.

Now the rule, as applied in Scripture, does chiefly concern those who enjoy the light of God's word, and have the advantages of the Gospel to enable them to work out their salvation: these are they who are said in the text *to have received much*: and the comparison lies between them, and the rest of the world who have the light of reason only to direct them; and these last mentioned, compared with the others, are they *who have received little*.

The case of these two sorts of people is very accurately stated in the verses before the text, which must therefore be considered. *That servant, says our blessed Saviour, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*

The case, you see, is put with respect to finners under the different circumstances of knowing, and not knowing, the will of their Lord. What we are to understand by the *will of their Lord* will appear, if we consider, that they who *knew not* the will of their Lord are yet supposed here to *do things worthy of stripes*; which supposes them to have the light of reason, and a knowledge of the difference between good and evil: for no man can in a moral sense be said to do things worthy of stripes, unless he has reason to distinguish between the things which are, and which are not, worthy of stripes. Since therefore they who have this light of reason are yet supposed *not to know their Lord's will*, it is evident that *to know the will of our Lord* implies something more

than having the light of reason to direct us; and consequently must mean our having the light of God's word for our direction.

Secondly, You see, that finners under all circumstances are condemned to punishment. They who knew their Lord's will are condemned for not doing *according to his will*: they who knew not his will are not condemned for not doing according to the rule of which they had no knowledge, but they are sentenced for committing things *worthy of stripes*, that is, such things as they, according to the light they had, knew to be sinful. And this agrees exactly with what St. Paul to the Romans has declared: *As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.*

But then, as the knowledge of God's will is a great advantage to those who know it, so will their punishment be in proportion greater, if they offend against this knowledge: they therefore *shall be beaten with many stripes*. Others, though their iniquities and offences against the light of reason, which God gave them, shall not go unpunished; yet shall their punishment be mitigated in respect to what others must endure, and *they shall be beaten but with few stripes*.

This general determination agrees with a more particular one to be found in the chapter before the text; *Wo unto thee, Chorazin! wo unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall*

*be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you, Luke x. 13, 14.*

Tyre and Sidon were cities distinguished in the Jewish prophets for their great abominations and iniquities ; and the Jews, it is likely, thought that it would fare worse with none at the day of judgment than with those cities. But our Saviour tells them it should fare worse with the cities which had seen his mighty wonders, and yet refused to repent at his call. Which judgment of his was far from justifying or excusing the iniquities of Tyre and Sidon, or giving any promise of impunity to their sins : it supposes them to be reserved to great judgments, and threatens still severer punishment to those, who under greater advantages were equal sinners.

Consider now the world as divided into two parts ; one whereof has had the oracles of God committed to them, and enjoyed the light and direction of his word ; and the other has been left to the guidance of mere reason and nature, and that knowledge of good and evil to which no rational creature can be an utter stranger ; and you may, from the maxim of the text, learn these general truths with respect to each sort and condition of men :

First, That no man shall be judged by a law of which he had no knowledge, but every man shall stand or fall by the light that was given him : it being true of every moral action, what St. Paul has affirmed of almsgiving, *It shall be accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*



Secondly, That immoral actions admit of no excuse, but will subject every man to the judgment of God. For morality not being founded primarily upon the authority of revelation, but upon that reason which is a common gift to mankind, every man must answer for the use of his own reason : and where reason shews him the difference of good and evil, if he chooses the evil he is without excuse. There is no justification, no excuse, to be offered for sin in this case : it is in vain to plead passion or temptation, for reason was given for this very purpose, to govern passion : and the submitting to passion and temptation against the light of reason is the very depravity and corruption of heart that calls for vengeance : and therefore to plead passion as an excuse for acting against your reason, is to plead your own iniquity as a reason why you should not be punished. This rule laid down by St. James is decisive in this point, *To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin.*

It may be said perhaps, that the notions of morality differ in different places ; and that, through the power and force of custom and education, the things which appear to some to be worthy of stripes, appear to others in another light, and to have nothing criminal in them. Be it so : for I mean not to contest this piece of history at present. But yet, I say, this avails not in the present argument, nor affords any advantage to them who seek to excuse iniquity by pleading passion and infirmity. Where there is no consciousness of sin, there is no room to look out for excuses : and therefore whatever allowance may be made to those,

who in such unhappy circumstances sin without knowledge; yet certain it is, that all who contrive excuses for themselves can have no advantage of this circumstance: for the very making an excuse shews the consciousness of sin, and is a conviction that you have in your own opinion committed things worthy of stripes. How foolish a thing then is it to lose the prospect of pardon, by deceiving yourself into an opinion that you do not want one? Such sins may be forgiven through repentance, but no art, no wit of man will ever justify them.

Thirdly, It appears from this determination made by our blessed Saviour, that all who know the will of God, and live under the light of his Gospel, shall, whether they like it or whether they like it not, be finally judged according to the Gospel. The rule is peremptory; *All who know the will of their Lord, and prepare not themselves, nor do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.* Men act sometimes as if they thought it were in their own power to choose what law they would be judged by. As soon as they profess natural religion, they look upon themselves to have no farther concern with the Gospel, but seem satisfied that they shall be judged by their own notions. But if the Gospel of Christ be indeed, as indeed it is, the will of God, it will not be so easily parted with. It is the law of our great Master, and obey it we must. The advice of a friend we may use or refuse, as we think fit; but the laws of our superiors must be obeyed. True, you will say, supposing it to be the law of our superior; but that is the very thing which you cannot admit. Look well to it, that this

persuasion be not your crime : the people of Chozazin and Bethsaida did not believe in Christ Jesus ; yet the evidence placed before their eyes was such, that their disbelief was the very circumstance which rendered their case more deplorable than that of Tyre and Sidon. The people of Jerusalem were also unbelievers ; yet such was their unbelief, that at last the things which made for their peace were hid from their eyes. Here then is your case ; you have the Gospel of Christ Jesus before you ; it claims your obedience upon no slight credentials ; it was introduced by greater works than ever man did ; it was sealed with the blood of its great author, and has been handed down to you by those who sacrificed all that was dear to them in the world in confirmation of its truth. Think not then that it can be an indifferent matter whether you receive or reject this law ; or that it matters not by what light you walk, since you expect so much equity from God that he will judge you according to the light you have : for if the Gospel be the law of God offered to you, as it certainly is, and you are in the number of those *unto whom much was given, of you therefore shall much be required.*

The mercy of God offered to you in the Gospel through Christ Jesus is a call to repentance from dead works : it is a summons to you, to turn to the living God in works of righteousness and holiness. When John the Baptist gave notice of the near approach of our blessed Lord, the sum of his doctrine was, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Our Saviour and his disciples introduce the Gospel with the same warning ; and St. Paul teaches,

that God, who winked at the times of ignorance, now, under the Gospel, *calleth all men every where to repentance ; and hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.* If then the great promises made through Christ Jesus belong only to penitents, who forsake sin, and turn to God in newness of heart, how sadly do men impose upon themselves, who trust to be saved by God's mercy, without doing the work of God, and continue in sin in hopes that grace may abound? Little do they consider, that those false presumptuous hopes will prove in the end great and real aggravations of their iniquity. To sin in hopes of mercy, is abusing the mercy of God, and making the goodness of our heavenly Father a reason for disobeying him. To plead the death or merits of Christ in excuse or in justification of iniquity, will so little avail, that it will amount to a condemnation out of our own mouths. *Christ died to destroy the works of the devil, to redeem us from sin, to sanctify an elect people to God:* every Christian knows this, or may know it, if he looks into his Bible. Consider now what the plea in excuse for sin amounts to: in the mouth of a Christian it must come to this; I know that Christ died to destroy sin, but I will keep my sins, and trust in his death: I know that the promises of God are made to those only who forsake their evil deeds; but I will depend on his promises for the pardon of my evil deeds, though I forsake them not. These are the persons, who, by abusing Christ and his redemption, do put him to open shame in the world, and, in the language of the Apostle, *do crucify to themselves afresh the Son of God.* Happy had it been

for such men, had they been born in the darkest corners of the earth, to which the glad tidings of the Gospel never came: then they might have pleaded ignorance, and weakness, and want of the knowledge of God's will; but now they live, and act, and reason like heathens in the noon-day light of the Gospel. And what can be the consequence of such a life, and such a knowledge, but this only, *that they shall be beaten with many stripes?*

As to ourselves, we have great reason to bless God daily, that by his good providence we have been born and educated in a Christian country; that we have been admitted into the church of his blessed Son, and have had betimes the means of knowledge and of grace communicated to us: but let us take heed that we do not turn these blessings into curses upon ourselves by our abusing them. These are great talents which our blessed Lord has entrusted us with, if we use them as we ought: if we improve them to the glory of God, and the good of them about us, happy will it be for us, and we shall one day hear that blessed sentence, *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* But if we neglect these great opportunities of salvation which God now affords, they will one day rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us. And it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in that day, than for wicked Christians who were redeemed by the cross of Christ, but who accounted the blood of the covenant a vain thing; who were sanctified by the Holy Ghost, but did despite to the Spirit of God; who were bought with a price to be the servants of God, but who sold themselves for slaves to iniquity.



Lay hold therefore, my brethren, of the mercy of God, while the day of mercy lasts ; for, if you neglect or despise the goodness of God, which calleth us to repentance, this will be your condemnation, that *light is come into the world, and you chose darkness rather than light.*

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## DISCOURSE XXI.

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LUKE iv. 1, 2.

*And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.*

AFTER our Saviour had washed his disciples' feet, and wiped them with a towel, *he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? None answering this question, he explained to them himself the meaning of what he had done: Ye call me, says he, Master, and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* Should you ask the like question concerning the history in the text, our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness, and say, What is this that has been done unto him? How came the Son of God to be thus insulted by the powers of darkness? Whence arose the tempter's confidence and power? or why were consummate virtue and innocence submitted to this proof and trial? You

might be answered in like manner also, *He hath given us an example, that we should do as he hath done.* Were you to hear the complaints, which even good men often make, that they are forced to struggle with many and with great temptations; that the paths of virtue are slippery and insecure, beset with many dangers; and that their prayers to be delivered from their trials come empty back, and bring no blessing with them; you might in our Saviour's name and in his words expostulate the case with them: *Ye call me Lord and Master: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have been perfected through trials, and in all things tempted even like unto you, whence come your complaints? whence is it that you expect to be exempted from that condition to which I willingly submitted? The servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. I have led the way, and shewn you how to conquer: and if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

Since these things therefore are written for our instruction and admonition, the properest use we can make of them is to consider them in that view, and to keep at a distance from such nice questions as no man enters into with discretion, or gets out of with advantage. There is room in all the parts of the Gospel dispensation to admire and adore the wisdom and the goodness of God, if that will content us, without prying into the secret methods of his providence. In this case now before us we want not matter of this kind: when the tempter allured our first parents to disobedience with the flattering hopes that they should be as gods, little did the

blind prophet think that the day should ever come when the Son of God would appear in the likeness of man, to take vengeance of his bold attempt, to destroy his works, and to redeem the captives into the glorious liberty even of the sons of God : little did he imagine that man, who fell by aspiring to be like God, should ever indeed be so like him, as to be superior to all his arts and temptations, and be able to drive him from the dominion he had usurped over the creation. And yet, behold the wisdom and the goodness of God ! By man came death, and by man came the plenteousness of redemption : the first fruits of which we see in this victory over the tempter.

Thus with respect to God does this temptation afford an ample subject of praise and glory : but, considered with respect to ourselves, it will yield us the greatest comfort and consolation to support us in our spiritual warfare, and the best instruction how to behave ourselves in it. There is no doubt to be made but that all the tempter's art was displayed against our Saviour : here then we may learn the worst we have to fear, and see the dangers we have to pass, in our way to happiness, and secure ourselves against the surprises which are often fatal to heedless unguarded innocence : here too we may learn from the best example how to make the best defence against the different temptations we stand exposed to ; how manfully to maintain the combat, and to resist the fiery darts of the devil.

These lessons of Christian prudence and fortitude are to be learnt from our Saviour's conduct and behaviour under the different trials the tempter made of him ; but I propose at this time to consider

the circumstances which attended this temptation, and are recorded by the Evangelist in my text: *And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.* Now this temptation, we see, succeeded immediately to his baptism, in which the Spirit visibly descended upon him; and God declared him, in a voice from heaven, to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. And accordingly the text expressly tells us, that he was led to be tempted *being full of the Holy Ghost.*

You see the power of baptism, and the blessings that are annexed to it, to which all are entitled who partake in the baptism of Christ: for himself he was neither born nor baptized, but for our sakes; that the blessings of both might descend on us, who through faith are heirs together with him of the promises of God.

By baptism the gates of heaven are set open to us, and the way paved for our return to our native country: by baptism we are declared to be such sons of God in whom he will delight, and whom he will appoint to be heirs of his kingdom: by baptism we receive the promise of the Spirit, by which we cry, *Abba, Father.*

Are not these great privileges? And is not here room for mighty expectations? And yet how unfuitable to these claims do the circumstances of a Christian's life often appear! He is upon the road to heaven, you say, and the gates stand open to receive him; but how does he stumble and fall like other men, and sometimes lose his way, and wander long, bewildered in night and darkness? or, if he keeps



the road, how lazily does he travel, as if he were unwilling to come to his journey's end, and afraid to see the country which he is going to possess? The Christian only of all men pretends to supernatural power and strength, and an intimate acquaintance with the Spirit of God: and yet how hardly does he escape the pollutions of the world, and how often look back with languishing eyes upon the pleasures, riches, and honours of this life? And though he boasts of more than human strength, yet how does he sometimes sink below the character and dignity even of a man? Ye sons of God, for such ye say ye are, how do you die like the children of men, and how like is your end to theirs?

And what must we say of these things? Is the promise of God become of none effect? Is baptism sunk into mere outward ceremony, and can no longer reach to the purifying the heart and mind? The fact must not be disputed: it is too evident, at least in these our days, that the lives of Christians do not answer to the manifold gifts and graces bestowed on them: and it is as true, that this has given great occasion to the enemies of the Gospel to blaspheme, to ridicule the grace of God, which seems to them to be no real, no useful gift or power. But then it is certain, on the other side, that these prejudices have arisen from the mistaken notions which men have entertained concerning the grace of God: their expectations have been groundless and unwarrantable: they have promised themselves more than ever God promised them; and then, finding that grace is not what they expected and

hoped it was, they rashly conclude that it is nothing ; and argue against the truth of God's promises merely from the vanity and delusion of their own. If you expect that the grace of God should ward off all temptations from you, or rescue you from the power and influence of them, notwithstanding your own remissness and want of care ; as well may you expect that swords and pistols should fight your battles, subdue your enemies, and conquer countries for you, whilst your soldiers lie dissolved in ease and luxury, and forget to use their arms. The graces of the Spirit are the arms of a Christian, with which he is to enter the lists against the powers of darkness ; and are a certain indication to us that God intends to call us to the proof and exercise of our virtue : why else does he give us this additional strength ? We had strength enough of our own to sit still and do nothing : had it been his intention to remove us out of the way of temptation, and to place us out of danger, our weakness and our security might well have stood together ; and having no enemy to fear, we should not have been in need of so powerful an ally as the Spirit of God. But since our dangers are great, and even necessary to the trial of our faith and patient continuance in well-doing, therefore are we supported and encouraged by the assistance of God, *to fight the good fight*, and *to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ*. To this we are called by the example of our Lord and Master, who being full of the *Holy Ghost* was led by the Spirit *to be tempted* : and this plainly intimates to us, that the more abundant grace we receive, the more reason we have to expect trials and tempta-

tions; and *that to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.*

And if this be the case, as most certainly it is, we may, I think, as necessary consequences deduce these two things:

First, That the temptations which good men are exposed to, and often are forced to struggle hard with, are no proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his favour and kindness are in any degree lessened toward them.

Secondly, That the sins which Christians fall into, and continue in, are no proof that they had not the Spirit, and grace sufficient to have preserved their innocence.

Let us consider these two cases. The temptations which good men are exposed to, and are forced often to struggle hard with, are no proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his favour and kindness are in any degree lessened toward them. And yet the dread of this is but too common an ingredient in the temptations which good men suffer under: it is that which always lies at bottom where there are any symptoms of despair; and when an honest soul is harassed with doubts and misgivings of mind, and persecuted with dismal thoughts and fears, both of what is present, and what is to come, it is from this bitter root, generally speaking, that all the misery springs. Men are apt to imagine, that had they the Spirit of God, the wicked one would either not dare to approach them, or, if he did, that they should soon be able to quench his fiery darts, and to command him with authority to get behind their backs. But when the temptation grows upon them, and

though often repulsed, yet as often with redoubled force renews the assault, then they begin to suspect themselves, to fear lest they are given up to destruction, and deserted by the Spirit of God. And when these fears possess the heart, like spies and traitors got within the town, they betray the strength of it to the enemy; they stifle all the generous thoughts of vigorous opposition, and leave the heart, thus bereaved of courage and constancy, and fidelity to itself, an easy prey to the invader.

The first thing then necessary in our spiritual warfare is rightly to apprehend our own condition, and the dangers and difficulties we are to meet with; that when they come, we may be under no surprise, but may be able to stand firm, and collected both in courage and in counsel, to make our just defence. And for this purpose did the Author and Captain of our salvation leave us his example, that it might serve equally for our instruction and imitation. And hence we may learn, that our temptations are so far from being a proof that we want the Spirit of God, that they are rather a proof of the contrary: *God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.* And therefore, if he suffers our temptations to be great, he will administer strength great in proportion. For the first part of our Saviour's life, we read of no temptations that befel him; but no sooner did he receive the Spirit, but he was led to be tempted. And how did it fare with him? He still conquered, and yet still was pursued. The tempter, though baffled, gave not over, but addressed to him with new art and cunning, in hopes still to prevail. Full

forty days was he under trial, sifted in every part, exposed to the horrors of the desert, to the necessity of hunger: but neither the necessity of hunger, nor the horrors of darkness, nor the forty days temptation, could move him from his steadfast confidence and trust in God. And who was it, I beseech you, that was left thus exposed to these cruel trials and temptations? Was it not he whom God but just before had by a voice from heaven declared *to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased?* And can you still think that your temptations are any signs that God has forsaken you, that he has at once withdrawn his Spirit and his love from you? Can you think the continuance of your temptations any just ground for despair, when Christ himself was tempted forty days? For forty days without intermission was he tempted: how soon the temptation was again renewed, how frequent or how long the returns of it were, we cannot tell: but that the tempter still pursued him, and watched all the seasons and opportunities of approaching him with advantage, is plainly intimated by the Evangelist, in the thirteenth verse of this chapter; *And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.* He departed, but, like an enemy that is rather enraged than subdued by his overthrow, he departed with resolutions to try his fortune again, and in his flight he meditated his return. Go, now, and complain, that your life is full of anxious care and trouble, that every day brings its trial with it, and every night its temptation; and much you fear that God has withdrawn his Holy Spirit from you, and no



longer regards you with the watchful eye of a tender father, but has given you up to uncertain fears, to anguish and despair in this world, and to ruin inevitable in the next: but when you remember that through all these dangers and difficulties Christ has led the way, that he, like you, nay more than you, was tempted and exposed, you must blush at your complaints, and with confusion of face confess, that you have charged God foolishly, and with the holy Psalmist say, *It is mine own infirmity.*

Whatever you may think, there is more reason to suspect yourself, and even to fear concerning the love of God, when all things are calm and serene about you, and when you stand as it were exempted from the common burden of life, your body free from pain, and your mind from care. One would be apt to suspect that the enemy of mankind thought himself secure of you, and that there wanted no trials and temptations to urge on your approaching ruin: else why should he neglect you only, whilst with the greatest diligence and application he is exercising with tortures both bodily and spiritual all the rest of the sons of God? The best and the only thing we can say to this, is, that prosperity itself is the greatest of temptations, and the severest trial of virtue and innocence; and that the tempter leaves men to sink under the charms of plenty and indolence, as the surest method he can make use of. And if this be so, I am sure our ease and our plenty call upon us for the utmost diligence and care, for the constant exercise of all those virtues that are proper to our station. If we see others led to virtue by hardships and poverty, let us reflect

that we want those tutors and guides, and that instead of them we have only charity and humility to follow: by the exercise of these we may reap the fruit of the others, and at last be found in the number of those who mourned with those who mourned.

If others struggle with temptations of divers kinds, and are perfected with trials, whilst we enjoy an inward peace and rest of soul, let us remember that we want the advantages they have. And since God has not called us to resist evil, as he has called others, he certainly expects that we should do more good: it is their business to defend their virtue against the assaults of vice; but we, who enjoy a free and unmolested virtue, must improve it in a constant exercise and discharge of all the duties of piety and religion, in keeping a strict hand over our passions, that prosperity be not our ruin. If others are forced to serve constantly upon the guard, and to watch against the encroachments of vice, and have work enough to secure an unblemished innocence; we, who are placed in the inmost and securest recesses of the Lord's vineyard, where no dangers can approach to molest and disturb our peace; we, I say, ought to labour the more zealously to till and improve the soil, that we may be able at the last to render a good account of the talent committed to our use.

Secondly, It appears from the circumstances of this history of our Lord's temptation, that trials and temptations may be great and severe, where the gifts and graces of the Spirit are administered in the largest proportion: and since those who are tempted

may fall, for otherwise temptations would be no trials, it appears that those who have the gifts of the Spirit, and grace sufficient, may nevertheless fall into sin through the power of temptations, and the want of care and diligence on their own part. It is a false comfort, therefore, which sinners administer to themselves, when they excuse their sins by laying all the blame upon their own natural infirmities, and the want of God's grace to enable them to do well. God is never wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves; and though he suffers all to be tempted, yet it is with this restriction upon the tempter, that he tempt them not above what they are able to bear. The instruction which I propose to you from this consideration is this, that whenever you are so unhappy as to offend, you do not try to palliate and excuse your offences, and charge God foolishly as if he had been wanting to your assistance; but that you rather consider your own iniquity as your own, and instead of excusing your sins, and administering thereby a false comfort to your soul, you labour through a timely repentance to correct and amend what is amiss, and endeavour to regain the true peace of mind, by reconciling yourselves to God, and by a speedy and resolute return to your duty.

In a word, it is no man's fault that he is tempted; it is the condition of our spiritual warfare; it is the combat to which God calls us for the proof and trial of our virtue. Then only are we guilty, when we give way to temptations, and forsake God to follow the pleasures or the gains of wickedness. And whenever this is the case, there is but one remedy,

repentance through faith in Christ Jesus, which will never be refused when it comes from a sincere heart, touched with a lively sense of God's goodness and its own unworthiness.





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## DISCOURSE XXII.

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2 COR. vii. 10.

*Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

**Y**OU have, in the words of the text, a character given you of religious sorrow, and the advantages of it set forth, and illustrated by a comparison between them and the evil effects of worldly sorrow. Sorrow in all cases arises from the conceit of misery either present or expected. When our sorrow grows from the consideration of our spiritual condition, from a sense of our own iniquity, and the pains of a guilty mind; from the fear of God's wrath and heavy judgments denounced against sinners; which are the proper objects of religious sorrow, and distinguish it from the grief of a worldly mind, which reaches only to the real or supposed evils of this life: in this case, sorrow is not only the consequence of the evil we suffer or apprehend, but likewise its very cure and remedy. But in worldly grief, where men lament the loss of riches and honours, and vex their souls with the various disappointments of life; which are perpetual springs of uneasiness to all

whose affections are wedded to the pleasures and enjoyment of the world ; there sorrow is a remedy worse than the disease, and adds weight to our misfortunes, which, could they be neglected, would not be felt.

It is the glory of philosophy to raise men above the misfortunes of life, to teach them to look with indifference upon the pleasures of the world, and to submit with manly courage and a steady mind to those calamities which no care can prevent, and which no concern can cure. Such are all the miseries which are brought on us by a change of fortune, or the necessity of human condition. And the considerations of philosophy not extending beyond these limits, it is no wonder to find wisdom placed in an absence of passion ; and grief and sorrow and all the tender motions of the mind exposed as certain marks of a slavish abject spirit. But when the reasons of philosophy are transferred to the cause of religion, they lose their name ; and the same conclusions, for want of the same principles to support them, are foolish and absurd. In natural evils, sorrow and grief of mind give us the quickest and sharpest sense of our afflictions, and divest us of the power of looking out for the proper comforts and supports : they increase and lengthen out our misery ; nor can the mind ever lose sight of its afflictions, till length of time sets it free from grief, or the very excess of sorrow so far stupifies the sense of feeling, that it destroys itself. And when it leaves us, often it carries off with it our strength and health, and bequeaths to us a weak body and a feeble mind, and entails upon the very

best days of our youth the very worst infirmities of age and sickness : *for the sorrow of the world worketh death.* But in spiritual evils, where sin and guilt threaten the life of the soul, and hasten to bring on us death eternal, sorrow is the best indication of life, and, like the pulse in the natural body, shews there is some heat and vigour still remaining : as it increases, it brings with it the symptoms of recovery ; sin and guilt fly before it ; life and immortality follow after it. And the mind thus purged by religious sorrow sends into the heart fresh streams of pleasure, and abounds with all the joys which the sense of the love of God, the present possession of peace, and the firm expectation of future glory can produce : *for godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.* From the consideration of these different effects of worldly and of religious sorrow, the Apostle with no less truth than art insinuates to the Corinthians, how truly he had acted the part of a friend towards them, in bringing them to a due sense of sorrow for the sins they had committed. It is the part of a friend to ease our minds of grief, to step in between us and sorrow, and to make us, as far as it is possible, forget our misfortunes : why then do the ministers of Christ perpetually suggest new fears to us, and still labour to awaken our souls to a sense of their misery, and to fill us with sorrow, by continually representing to us the greatness of our loss ? To this let the Apostle answer for himself, and for all : *I rejoice not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance.* If from worldly sorrow there can arise nothing but certain pain and misery,

if the anguish of mind produces feebleness of body, and the lamenting our past misfortunes renders us incapable of the enjoyments which are present, happy is the man who can bear up against afflictions, and with an undisturbed mind submit to those evils which no sorrow can either ease or prevent. But if in godly sorrow the effects are just contrary, if grief can blot out the guilt of sins past, and preserve us from the infection for the time to come; if it brings ease to a wounded spirit, and makes us to be at peace with ourselves, and with God; if it renders life comfortable, and death not terrible; if it rids us of fear for the present, and fills us with hope full of future glory: how happy then are they who go to the house of mourning, and by a wise choice escape the punishment of sin, by submitting to the sorrow of it?

How these blessed fruits grow out of godly sorrow, will appear to you from the Apostle's words in the text, in which the effects of godly and worldly sorrow are fully expressed in few words: *Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* In which words you may observe, first, that sorrow is distinguished from repentance; for *godly sorrow* is said to *work repentance*, and is therefore supposed to have the same relation to it that the cause has to its effect. Secondly, you may observe that *sorrow* is not said to *work salvation* immediately and of itself, but by the means of that repentance which it produceth. Thirdly, you may observe that *worldly sorrow* is said to produce *death* immediately: it brings forth nothing analogous to repentance, but

does indeed confirm and strengthen the evil disposition from which it grows. Fourthly, the death which is wrought by worldly sorrow is opposed to the salvation which follows repentance; and may therefore signify eternal death, as well as temporal; the truth of the proposition admitting either or both of these explications. As I explain and enlarge these observations, I shall take in what I judge necessary to give you a distinct conception of the nature of godly, and of worldly sorrow, and to shew the effects of both.

First, then, you may observe that sorrow is distinguished from repentance; for *godly sorrow* is said to *work repentance*, and is therefore supposed to bear the same relation to it as the cause does to its effect. In common speech we are apt to speak of sorrow for sin under the name of repentance, and to ascribe to it the effects belonging only to repentance: but the Apostle in the verse before us has plainly another notion of repentance, since the common notion would make an absurdity in the text; for if by repentance you understand sorrow for sin, the Apostle must then be understood to say that godly sorrow produces sorrow for sin; that is, that godly sorrow produces itself, since that only is godly sorrow which is upon the account of sin. Repentance therefore is distinct from sorrow, and is wrought by it, and properly denotes a change of mind: which is indeed the natural effect of godly sorrow, and the necessary condition of salvation; and must therefore be the true and genuine explication of that repentance which stands in the middle between godly sorrow and salvation, as proceeding



from one, and producing the other. And so distinct is this change of mind from sorrow, that of all its effects it is the happiest; ease and comfort attend on it, joy and hope flow from it. This is a change *not to be repented of*; it can never cause us any grief or pain, or give us reason to lament any effect proceeding from it.

Sorrow then is not repentance, though it be the cause of repentance in most cases. The alliance between them will be best explained by considering the nature of sorrow in general, and the impressions it makes upon every man's mind. Whatever is the cause of our sorrow must needs be the object of our aversion; since to take pleasure in the thing that grieves us, and causes us pain, is a contradiction in nature. Many things occasion us sorrow which are out of the reach of our power, which come without our seeking, and go without our bidding. In all these cases sorrow is an useless passion, for the aversion arising from it brings torment without security; for to what purpose can our love or our concern serve, where the objects are neither to be obtained or avoided by our utmost care? Should we afflict ourselves with the thoughts of death, and raise in our minds the utmost horror and dread, yet death will move with the same pace to us, not retarded by our fears, or stopped by our aversion. And this shews how ridiculous a passion sorrow is in all these cases.

But where good and evil are set before us, and we are left to choose for ourselves, if through weakness or folly, or the prevailing power of any passion, we have chosen amiss, the pain we suffer from these evils

of our own inviting is the best security for the future : we cannot lament the folly of our choice, without condemning ourselves for making it, and hating the thing which has brought so much sorrow along with it. This self-condemnation will teach us to correct our choice for the future, this aversion will turn the stream of our affections from the thing which brings so much misery with it. But this can extend but to very few instances of worldly concern, so little is there in our own power ; for which reason worldly sorrow can only make us feel our misfortunes, without enabling us to redress them. But in spiritual concerns the case is otherwise : virtue and vice are placed within our choice ; and we cannot do evil till we have first determined ourselves to do it : and, when we have done it, the sooner our minds recoil and grow sick of their unhappy choice, so much the better ; since the correction of folly is often the parent of wisdom, and the misery we suffer through vice the best guide to the paths of virtue. Sin cannot be the cause of our sorrow, but it must likewise be the object of our aversion : the natural consequence of which is repentance, or a change of mind, by which we shall hate the vices we once delighted in, and fly to the arms of virtue, to taste those pleasures which experience has taught us are there only to be found. And thus you see how naturally a change of mind arises from godly sorrow, or sorrow for sin : which is a farther confirmation of the interpretation we have given of the Apostle's words.

Secondly, *Godly sorrow* is not said to *work salvation* immediately and of itself, but by means of that *repentance*, or change of mind, which it produceth.

This shews you, that a change of mind, and consequently a change of life, is absolutely necessary towards the obtaining the mercy and forgiveness of God; and that it is to little purpose to lament your sins, unless you resolve to forsake them. So many are the sad effects of sin, with respect to our health, our reputation, and our fortune in the world, which always suffer, and often sink, under the oppression of vice, that the sinner who has no fear of God before his eyes has reason enough to be sorry for his sins. But sorrow arising from these motives is mere worldly sorrow: one laments the decay of his health, another the loss of his reputation, and a third the ruin of his fortune, and often one laments the loss of all: and equally they would have lamented these losses, had they come from any other cause besides sin. He that is sorry for his sin because it has destroyed his health, would have been as sorry had a fever destroyed it; he that grieves for the loss of his fortune, would have grieved in the same manner if fire or the rage of the sea had been his undoing. From whence it is plain, that in such sorrow as this no regard is had to God, whom we are principally to respect in our repentance, as being the person against whom we have offended, and whose mercy and pardon we labour to obtain.

In true sorrow that produces repentance, the sense of our guilt is a great ingredient, as well as the sense of our misery. The very hopes we have of obtaining pardon at the hand of God will fill our minds with indignation against ourselves for having offended so gracious a master. For if we can think him good to forgive us, we must needs think our-

felves wicked, and loft to all fenfe of gratitude and goodnefs, that we could offend fo kind and compaffionate a Lord. From this fenfe of guilt will arife indignation, and fear, and zeal; and every paffion will be roused to act its part in making us hate and abhor ourfelves and our iniquities, and will never let us be at peace with our own hearts, till we have purged them of every evil luft, and consecrated them anew to the fervice of our Maker. And this is that bleffed change which is true repentance *unto falvation never to be repented of.*

Fear may fometimes prevail againft the power of luft, and the wretch who hates to think of God may not be able to exclude the fear and dread of him: when the flames of hell play before the finner's eyes, and guilt, confcious of its own deserts, fills the imagination with all the horrors of damnation; in this cafe there will never want sorrow, though perhaps there be no figns of repentance. Thus Judas grieved, in his grief he died, and in his death he found the pains of hell.

In the Gospel there are no promifes made to grief and sorrow; the mercies of God are offered upon the condition of repentance: and though in the nature of the thing repentance muft arife from sorrow, and therefore sorrow may be eſteemed as a part of repentance; yet sorrow that produces not repentance, that is, a thorough change and reformation, is of no account in the fight of God. Such sorrow may be the finner's due; if he fuffers under it, he has but his reward; it is the juſt puniſhment of his iniquity, but can never be the condition of his pardon.

One would think this were too plain a caſe to be



mistaken; yet so commonly it is mistaken, that repentance is grown almost into a form and method, and, instead of reforming their sins, men set themselves so many days to be sorry for them. Alas! it is a fruitless grief they labour to affect themselves with; and they may assure themselves their hopes of pardon will be as empty and delusive as their sorrow. Were you truly sensible of your guilt, there would need no art to produce sorrow, you would want no rules to limit your grief by; nature would be your best instructor, and teach you to lament your misery and your guilt with unfought-for tears and groans: were you sincere, you would fly the viper that had stung you, and not cherish and caress the beast, whilst with false tears you bathe the wound you have received.

Godly sorrow is that which respects God. This sorrow will always produce repentance, and be followed by salvation, in virtue of the many promises of God, by which we are assured, that when the sinner is converted, and turns to the Lord, forsaking the evil of his ways, *he shall save his soul alive.*

Repentance unto life is the gift of God to a sinful world, and the greatest that heaven ever bestowed on it: for though nature is no stranger to the grief and sorrow of repentance, yet is repentance our title to life through the Gospel of Christ Jesus. And therefore, when the Gentiles were admitted to be partakers of the Gospel, and the news thereof was brought to the Apostles and brethren at Jerusalem, they bless God for his great goodness in having *granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life.*

The nature of this godly sorrow we shall still bet-



ter understand, by comparing it with worldly sorrow, and shewing the difference between them.

Thirdly, then, you may observe that *worldly sorrow* is said immediately to *work death*: it brings forth nothing analogous to repentance, but does confirm and strengthen the evil disposition from which it grows.

There is such a connection between the passions, that one cannot be powerfully set on work, but it must move and engage the others in their several spheres. Thus the Apostle, in the chapter of my text, tells us that the godly sorrow of the Corinthians produced fear and indignation, zeal and vehement desire, and revenge. And thus it must be: whatever afflicts us is the object of our hatred and fear; whatever we lament the loss of, that we must needs vehemently desire and long after; and our grief for the loss will rouse us to recover, if possible, the thing we lament for. This being agreed, you need only consider the causes from which worldly sorrow and godly arise, to see the workings of both, and the different effects which they must produce. The covetous man laments for the loss of his wealth, or regrets that his gains have been no larger: what must the consequence be? This grief will produce no change in him: covetous he was before, his sorrow for his wealth will make him still more so: his industry to grow rich will be inflamed by his sorrow, his concern not to part with what is left will increase by his anxiety, and he will be ten times more a slave to the world than ever he was before. Consider the ambitious man's disappointment, and his sorrow that flows from it; the case will be

still the same : how will his vexation urge him to repair his defeat, and make him perhaps divest himself entirely of all the regards to good and evil, virtue and vice, especially if he has once found them to stand in his way? Thus, you see, in all cases worldly sorrow confirms the evil habits from which it grows, and is therefore the most direct way to death.

For the like reason godly sorrow will lead to life; for sin being the cause of sorrow, all the passions will be moved to dispossess it: hope and fear, and zeal, and vehement desire, will unite their force to throw out sin, which stands in the way of all their views. From whence must proceed an entire change of the man, and he that is heartily sorry for his sins will most certainly forsake them.

In godly sorrow we grieve for having enjoyed too much of the world, to the hazard of losing the more valuable pleasures of immortality: in worldly sorrow we lament our having had too little of the world. It is evident then that sorrow in one case will make us fly the world and its allurements; in the other it will render us but the more eager to pursue and overtake them. In one case, sorrow does as it were new make the man, gives him new desires and dispositions of mind, teaches him to shun the pleasures he once embraced with eager appetite, and to seek new joys and comforts which before he was a stranger to. In the other case, grief confirms the old habits, quickens the old desires, and makes a man ten times more worldly-minded than he was before; so that his last state is even worse than his first. And this will appear by considering, in the last place,

Fourthly, That the death which is wrought by worldly sorrow is opposed to the salvation which follows repentance, and may therefore signify eternal death as well as temporal, the truth of the proposition admitting either or both of these explanations.

The natural effect of grief, considered as such, is to waste and impair the strength, to deaden the faculties of the mind, and to make a man useless to himself and his friends: so that where this passion inflamed to any degree has been long in possession, it leaves nothing of the man, but the outward form, and hardly that. This, I say, is the effect of sorrow in general: but then here lies the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow: the first, in every step, tends to peace and joy, and its most natural effect is to destroy itself, and leave the mind in perfect ease and tranquillity. The sinner's tears, though they spring from grief, are yet the most sovereign cordial to an afflicted heart, and like showers in summer portend a cooler and more refreshing air. But worldly sorrow knows no rest, it has no period; it still urges men to new pursuits after the world, and the world has new disappointments in reserve to baffle all their eager care. Every disappointment is a new occasion of grief; and the whole gain of this passion for the world, being fairly computed, amounts to this, *Vanity and vexation of spirit*. Thus the case stands if we regard only the comforts of this life. The sorrow for sin produces the pleasure of righteousness, which is a perpetual spring of joy and spiritual consolation: whilst the worldly man, pursuing false enjoyments, is ever reaping real tor-

ments. But if we change the scene, and look into the other world, the difference grows wider still: the time is coming when the tears of repentance shall be wiped away, when the sinner's grief shall stand between him and judgment, and the shame which he took to himself shall protect him from shame at the great appearance of the world. But worldly sorrow will then have an heavy account to pass; those guilty tears, which were shed for transitory pleasures of mortality, will stand in judgment against you, and exclude you from the joys of that life which is for evermore.

The confusion and distress of that time will be more than I can describe, or you imagine; they will exceed even the fears of guilt, and be more gloomy than even despair could ever paint them. The whole is comprised in the words of the text, *The sorrow of the world worketh death.*

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# DISCOURSE XXIII.

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## PART I.

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### I PETER ii. 11.

*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*

THE exhortations of Scripture to abstain from fleshly lusts, or lusts of the flesh, are so many, the expression itself is so familiar to Christians, and so well understood, that there is no need, I think, of many words to explain the subject matter of the advice now before us. Some sins are privileged by their impurity from being exposed as they deserve: a modest tongue cannot relate, nor a modest ear receive an account, without great pain, of the various kinds of lewdness practised in the world: for as the Apostle to the Ephesians remarks, *It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.* Had he lived in our times, he might perhaps have varied his phrase, and said, *which are done of them in public.* These impurities are, in one sense of the word, no longer *works of darkness*, they appear at noon-day. Since therefore they no longer affect to be disguised, they will



ſpeak for themſelves what they are: I have no mind to ſpeak for them.

The Apoſtle in the text has pointed out to us the common ſource from whence vices of this kind proceed; they ariſe from *fleſhly luſts*: words which carry a reaſon in them, to all who value their reaſon, not to give themſelves up to the dominion of appetites, made not to govern, but to ſerve the man. But reaſon, when it becomes a ſlave to vice, muſt do the drudgery of vice, and ſupport its cauſe: and therefore, upon this topic, vice has borrowed ſome aſſiſtance from reaſon, and made a ſhew of arguing in its own defence. Theſe *fleſhly luſts*, as the Scripture calls them, others are willing to call natural deſires: and then the queſtion is aſked, How it becomes ſo heinous an offence to comply with the deſires which God, for wiſe reaſons, has made to be part of the nature which he has given us? Were this queſtion aſked in behalf of the brute creatures, we would readily answer, We accuſe them not: but when man aſks it in his own behalf, he forgets that he has another queſtion to answer before he can be entitled to aſk this, For what purpoſe was reaſon and underſtanding given to man? Brutes have no higher rule to act by than theſe inſtincts and natural impreſſions; and therefore, in acting according to theſe, they act up to the dignity of the nature beſtowed on them, and are blameleſs. But can you ſay the ſame of man? Does he act up to the dignity of his nature, when he makes that his rule which is common to him and the beaſts; when he purſues the ſame inclinations, and with as little regard to virtue and morality? Why is man diſtin-

guished from the brute creatures by so superior a degree of reason and understanding, by a knowledge of moral good and evil, by a notion of God his creator and governor, by a certain expectation of judgment, arising from a sense of his being accountable, if after all there is but one rule of acting for him and for the beasts that perish? Let these desires be natural; yet tell me, Does the addition of reason make no difference? Is a creature endowed with knowledge at liberty to indulge his desires with the same freedom, as a creature that has no reason to restrain it? If this be absurd, it is to little purpose to plead that the desires are natural, since we have reason given us to direct them, and are not at liberty to do whatever appetite prompts us to do, but must in all things consider what is reasonable and fit for us to do: for surely there is no case in which a reasonable creature may renounce the direction of reason.

It will be farther urged, To what purpose were these desires given, which are apparently the cause of much mischief and iniquity in the world, and oftentimes a great disturbance to the best in a life of religion? In reply to this, it will be necessary to consider how far these desires are natural.

If we look into mankind, we shall find that the desires which are common, and therefore may be called natural, are such as are necessary to the preservation of individuals, and such as are necessary for the preservation of the species. At the same time that we find these natural desires, we discover the ends which nature has to serve by them; and reason from thence discerns the true rule for the

government and direction of them. Our bodies are so made, that they cannot be supported without constant nourishment : hunger and thirst therefore are natural appetites given us to be constant calls to us to administer to the body the necessary supports of the animal life. Ask any man of common sense now, how far these appetites ought to be indulged ; he cannot help seeing that nature calls for no more than is proper for the health and preservation of the body, and that reason prescribes the same bounds ; and that when these appetites are made occasions of intemperance, an offence is committed against as well the order of nature, as the rule of reason. The excess therefore of these appetites is not natural but vicious : the intemperate man is not called upon by his natural appetites, but he does, in truth, call upon them to assist his sensuality, and often loads them so hard that they recoil, and nauseate what is obtruded upon them. An habitual drunkard may have, and has, I suppose, an uncommon craving upon him ; but the excess of his craving is not natural : it is not of God's making, but of his own, the effect of a long practised intemperance : and such an appetite will be so far from being an excuse, that it is itself a crime.

In other instances of a like nature, they who have inflamed desires, commonly owe the excess of them to their own misconduct. There is a great deal of difference between men of the same temper, where one shuns, and where the other seeks the temptation ; where one employs his wit to minister to his appetite, and the other uses his reason to subdue it : the passions of one, by being used to subjection, are

taught to obey; the appetites of the other, knowing no restraint, take fire upon every occasion; and the corrupted mind, instead of opposing, endeavours to heighten as well the temptation as the sin: and often it is seen, that the relish for the sin outlasts the temptation: a plain evidence that there is a greater corruption in sensual men than can be charged upon natural inclination.

Since therefore the desires of nature are in themselves innocent, and ordained to serve good ends; since God has given us reason and understanding to moderate and direct our passions; it is in vain to plead our passion in defence or excuse of sensuality, unless at the same time we could plead that we were void of reason, and had no higher principle than passion to influence our actions: for if it be the work of reason to keep the passions within their proper bounds, the reasonable creature must be accountable for the work of his passion. And so the case is in human judicatures: anger and revenge, pride and ambition, are very headstrong passions, and the cause of great mischief in the world; but they cannot be alleged in excuse of the iniquity they produce, because the reason of the offender makes him liable to answer for the extravagance of his passion. Take away reason, and bring a madman or an idiot into judgment, and the magistrate has nothing to say to him, whatever his passions, or the effects of them, may be.

It is the work of reason then to preside over the passions: and seeing it is so, let us consider what great motives we have to guard against the irregularities of them. St. Peter is very earnest in the



exhortation of the text, *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.* Here are two things offered to our consideration as motives :

First, That we are *strangers and pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abstain from fleshly lusts.

Secondly, That *fleshly lusts war against the soul*, and therefore we ought to abstain from them. I shall consider them in their order.

First, We are *strangers and pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abstain from fleshly lusts.

St. Peter directs this Epistle to the *strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*; which has led some to think that he applies to them in the text under the same notion, and calls them *strangers and pilgrims* upon account of their dispersion upon the earth. But I see no force in the exhortation upon this view. With respect to religion and morality, there is no more reason to abstain from vice in a foreign country than in your own. There may possibly be sometimes prudential reasons for so doing : but this is too narrow, and too mean a consideration, for an Apostle of Christ to build so weighty an exhortation on it, as that of the text. We must look out therefore for a more proper meaning of these words, and more suitable to the occasion. And we need not look far for it : in the first chapter of this Epistle, verse 17, St. Peter thus exhorts, *If you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here with fear.* It is plain that St. Peter here calls the time of life the time of our sojourning here ; and consequently



reckons us to be strangers and pilgrims as long as we are in this world. In the same sense the author to the Hebrews speaks of the saints of old, *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*, Heb. xi. 13. This notion extends to all mankind, and shews that the Apostle looked upon them all as strangers and pilgrims on the earth: consequently the exhortation founded upon this notion extends to all alike, and reaches as far as the obligations of morality reach. And this consideration, placed in this view, has great weight in it, with respect to all who have faith enough to *desire a better, that is, an heavenly country*, and to know themselves to be but only passengers through this world, and on their way to *a city prepared for them*. This is putting all our hopes and fears, with respect to futurity, in balance against the solicitations of sensual pleasure: this is appealing to our reason, to shew us how absurd it is to give ourselves up to momentary enjoyments, in a place where we have no certain abode, at the hazard of forfeiting our right to that country where we have an inheritance which shall endure for ever. Wise travellers do not use so to entangle themselves in the affairs of foreign countries, as to cut off all hopes of a return to their own home: such especially as belong to a country in no respect to be rivalled by any other place, and are entitled to a large share of the wealth and honour of it; such, I say, will not suffer their thoughts and cares to be so engaged abroad as to forget their own inheritance, which waits to be enjoyed, and which, once enjoyed,

will recompense all the fatigues and hazards of the journey. But this comparison conveys to our minds but a faint image of the case before us : one country may differ from another, but no one differs so much from another as to represent to us the difference between heaven and earth. Many are entitled to great degrees of honour and riches in their own countries ; but no man is entitled to so much on earth as every man is entitled to in heaven, if he forfeits not his hopes by sacrificing them to the mean and low enjoyments of the world. Put the case, that a man was so framed by nature as to hold out a thousand years in his native air, and to be hourly in danger of death in foreign parts, and at best able to hold out but to sixty or eighty years at most : how eagerly would such a man press homewards, if ever he found himself in another country ! How would he despise the strongest temptations of pleasure that should pretend to stay him but a day ! How contemptible would all the honours and glories and riches of foreign kingdoms appear to him, when put in the balance against the secure and long life to be enjoyed at home ! Add to this supposition one circumstance more, that the man is by nature made for the enjoyments which his own country only can afford, that all the pleasures elsewhere to be found are attended with pain and uneasiness in the pursuit, liable to many vexations and disappointments ; the enjoyment of them turbulent and transient, the remembrance of them irksome and oftentimes tormenting : in this case what would a wise man do ? Would he not reject with disdain such enjoyments as these, and call up all the strength of his mind, summon all the powers of reason to

withstand temptations so destructive to his natural and real happiness?

But what need to dwell on suppositions, when the truth of our case, fairly represented, will appear in a stronger light than any supposition can place it?

If we have immortal souls, and that we have nature speaks within us, this place, we are sure, is not their native country: nothing immortal can belong to this globe, where all things tend to decay; which shall itself be one day consumed, and this beautiful order be succeeded by a new confusion and another chaos. Were this the only place to which we have relation, we might justly complain of nature for the sad provision she has made for man: he only, of all the creatures of this lower world, wants an happiness suited to his capacity. The rest of the creatures seem satisfied and happy, to the full measure of their capacities, by the provision made for them. Man alone finds no true enjoyment here, but is ever restless, and in pursuit of something more than this world can give. If something more is in reserve for him, his desires are well suited to his condition, and the wisdom of God is discernible in giving man desires fitted for nobler enjoyments than this life affords, since for man much nobler enjoyments are prepared. These desires are given to be a constant call to him to remember the dignity of his creation, and to look forward to the better hopes of a better world; and to govern and restrain the appetites which, too freely indulged, set him upon a level with the brutes, and disqualify him for the happiness proper to rational beings.

Taking this to be the case, what is it a wise man has to do, but to get as well through this world as he can ; I had almost said as fast as he can, that he may arrive at those enjoyments in reserve for him, which will yield a full as well as an endless satisfaction ? What can he think of the pleasures of this world, but that they are below the care of him who is born to so great expectations ? Thus he must think even of innocent delights : they are frail, transitory, and uncertain ; he is immortal : these therefore are but unworthy objects of his desires ; fit to be used, but too mean to be courted ; proper for his diversion, but never good enough to become his business, or to employ his thoughts in the pursuit of them. But guilty pleasures, the sensual enjoyments and pollutions of the world, appear to him in a more ugly form : he is upon the way, hastening to the place where his heart is fixed : sensual pleasures are robbers which frequent his road, and lie in wait to take away his life and his treasure : these he will fly, for they are dangerous, and he has all his wealth about him ; even his hopes and expectations of immortality, which die away if once he falls into the snares of sensuality.

Consider this case fairly, look to the glory and immortality which are placed before you, and the everlasting habitation prepared for those who serve their Maker in holiness, and keep themselves unspotted from the world : then view the temptations which surround you, which would fix you down to this world, and intercept all your hopes ; and tell me what more powerful argument there can be to abstain from fleshly lusts than this, that ye are



strangers and pilgrims on earth, and look for another, even an heavenly habitation.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, say the disciples of Epicurus: commendable in this, that their exhortation is suitable to their principle. There is no inconsistency in exhorting men to make the best of this world and the pleasures of it, when you teach them there is no other to be expected: but surely it is to the highest degree absurd to teach the same doctrine, without asserting the same principle. There is not common sense in saying, Let us eat and drink, for after this life we shall enter upon another without end. Yet this is the wise exhortation which every man makes, who pretends to believe a future state, and yet pleads for a liberty to indulge his appetites in this. Yes, say you: but God, who knows what he has prepared for us hereafter, has yet given these appetites: and how can it be so inconsistent with our future expectations to gratify our appetites at present, since our appetites as well as our expectations are natural, and both derived from the same original? This is the capitol of the cause, the darling argument of the sensual man. But suppose this world to be a state of trial, suppose these appetites to be given partly for the proof of our virtue, how will the consequence stand then? God has given us appetites for the trial of our virtue, therefore we may indulge our appetites without any regard to virtue: how? No man surely can reason thus: it can never follow that we are at liberty to sin, because God has thought fit to call us to a trial of our virtue. But if God has given us appetites, and made it part of our



trial to govern and restrain them within the bounds of temperance and justice, and you will nevertheless infer, that because God has given these appetites, we may therefore indulge them to the utmost; what is it but making that a license to sin, which God and nature intended for a trial of virtue?

But you will insist farther perhaps, and ask, How it is consistent with God's goodness to work such temptations as these into the very nature of mankind? A notable question! But if you attend to it, it comes to this: How is it consistent with God's goodness to make any thing that is not absolutely perfect, to make rational creatures, for instance, capable of doing amiss? The question, I say, comes to this, or else there is nothing in it: for if God may make creatures not absolutely perfect, but capable of sinning, there is no greater objection against putting the trial of their virtue upon their natural appetites, than upon any other weakness or infirmity: and some infirmity there must be in every creature capable of offending, and thereby capable of a trial. Had we no desires that could incline us to do amiss, we should be above a state of trial: and if it is lawful to indulge all our desires upon this pretence, that they are natural, it is evident we cannot do amiss in following our desires, and consequently we are not in a state of trial. What hitherto we have called temptations to sin, are in truth justifications of it; for temptations act upon our desires, and our desires cannot lead us wrong: and if so, every base action is justified by the temptation that produces it: and no man can sin but when he is forced to do something against

his inclination. This plea, drawn from natural desires, is, I know, made use of to justify one kind of wickedness particularly : but surely this is very partial dealing ; for I see no reason why pride, ambition, and avarice should be excluded the benefit of it. Have pride, ambition, and avarice no desires ; or are they all unnatural ? It would be well for the world if they were, but the case is otherwise : mankind are of a nature subject to these desires as well as others ; and upon the foot of this plea we may make faints, as well as heroes, of all the great disturbers of the world.

To conclude : the desires of nature are ordained to serve the ends of nature : reason is given to man to govern the lower appetites, and to keep them within their proper bounds : in this consists the virtue of man : this is the trial to which he is called ; and the prize contended for is nothing less than immortality. If we indulge ourselves to the utmost in this world, our enjoyments must be very short-lived, since we are ourselves but of a short continuance on earth ; but the next scene that opens will present us with a state that never changes, either happy or miserable, according as we behave here. In this world we have little interest, no abiding place ; and ought therefore to pass through it with the indifference of travellers, whose affections are placed on their native country. This is the view the Apostle had before him in giving the exhortation contained in the text, *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*

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## DISCOURSE XXIII.

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### PART II.

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THE Apostle in the text enforces his exhortation *to abstain from fleshly lusts* by two considerations, which yet are near allied to each other. He calls upon us to remember that we are strangers and pilgrims here on earth, and consequently that we have a better and a dearer interest in another country, which ought by no means to be neglected for the sake of the low and mean enjoyments which this world affords. Whoever allows the principle must needs allow the consequence. If we are related to two worlds, if this present be in all respects inconsiderable, compared to the other, no reason can justify or excuse us in sacrificing our interest in the other world to the allurements and temptations to be met with in this.

This being allowed leads us to an inquiry worthy of all the pains we can bestow on it, how far we may pursue the pleasures of this life, consistently with our hopes and expectations of a better. Some enjoyments there are not below the care of a wise and good man in this world, though he forgets not

that he is related to another: such are the pleasures of the mind, arising from the exercise of reason: such are, in a lower degree, the pleasures which our senses furnish, whilst used within the bounds of temperance, and so restrained as not to be prejudicial to ourselves and others. Whenever our appetites become so much too strong for our reason, as to carry us into offences in either of these respects, then it is that our *fleshly lusts do war against the soul*. If we violate the laws of justice and equity, to make way for the gratification of our passions; or if we render ourselves incapable of discharging the duties of religion and morality, arising from the relation we bear to God and man, we wound our own souls, and, for the sake of momentary pleasures, expose ourselves to death eternal.

It ought to be a sufficient argument to Christians, to shew them the express command of the Gospel against drunkenness, fornication, adultery, and vices of the like nature: for since the command comes from him who has power to execute his decrees, and the penalty of them, upon every offender; to transgress such injunctions so given must discover a want of faith, as well as a want of virtue. But the Apostle in the text goes farther, and exhorts us to *abstain from fleshly lusts*, by laying before us the reason in which the command to abstain is founded: was there no difference between abstaining and not abstaining; was the man who gives a loose to his passions, and indulges them to the utmost, in as fair a way to happiness as he who governs and restrains them, and bounds them on every side by the rules of justice and equity; the

command to abstain would be merely arbitrary, and void of any reason to support itself. But the case is not so : sensual enjoyments have a natural tendency to debase the mind, to render it incapable of discharging its proper functions, and unworthy of the happiness to which it is ordained ; for *fleshly lusts war against the soul* : for which reason we are commanded to abstain from them : for which reason we ought to abstain from them, though the command had not intervened.

If you consider wherein the dignity of man consists, and what are the means put into his hands to make himself happy, you will have a clear prospect of the ill effects of sensual lusts, and see how truly they war against the soul.

There is no occasion to carry you into any abstracted speculations upon this subject ; it will be sufficient to the purpose to make use of the observations which common sense will furnish.

There is no man so little acquainted with himself, but that he sometimes finds a difference between the dictates of his reason, and the cravings of appetite ; between the things which he would do, and the things which he knows he ought to do. This discord is the foundation of the difference to be observed among men with regard to their moral character and behaviour. When men give themselves up to follow their appetites, and have no higher aim than the gratification of their passions, all the use they have of their reason is to administer to their senses in contriving ways and means to satisfy them. Where this is the case, consider what a figure a man makes : he has appetites in common



with the brute creatures, and is led by them as much as they; only the reason he has enables him to be more brutish than they, and to run into greater excesses of sensuality, than mere natural appetites, without the help and assistance of reason to contrive for them, can arrive to.

If our passions are to govern us, and the office of reason is only to be subservient, and to furnish means and opportunities of gratifying the desires, it will be very hard to account for the wisdom of God in making such a creature as man. If we have no higher purposes to serve than the brute creatures, why have we more understanding than they? We see that they do not want more reason than they have to follow their appetites; they move regularly as they are moved, and pursue constantly the path marked out by nature. It would be well if we could say as much for some sensual men; but they are ten times more mischievous to the world, than they could possibly be, if they had only appetites, and no reason: for appetites, unassisted by a power of contriving, could be guilty of no treachery, no breach of trust; of no schemes to overreach, defraud, and undo multitudes, and a thousand other wickednesses, which sensual worldly men are daily guilty of, and will be guilty of, as long as their reason is employed to promote the ends of their passion. So that, considering the case with respect to this world only, the sensual man, who gives himself to be conducted by his appetites, is a more mischievous, a more odious creature, and a greater reproach to his Maker, than any of the brutes; which

he may perhaps despise, but ought indeed to envy; for being irrational.

From hence it is evident in what manner sensual lusts do war against the soul, considered as the seat of reason, and all the nobler faculties; in the due use and improvement of which the dignity of man consists. If we look into the ages past, or into the present, we shall want no instances of the pernicious effects of passion, assisted by a corrupt and depraved reason. The miseries which men bring upon themselves and others are derived from this fountain; and these miseries, which we provide for ourselves and others, will be found, upon a fair computation, to make nine parts out of ten of all the evil which the world feels and complains of. *From whence come wars and fightings among you? says St. James, come they not hence, even of your lusts, which war in your members?* He might have added to his catalogue many iniquities more, and repeated the same question and answer: for, Whence proceed jealousies, suspicions, the violations of friendship, the discord and ruin of private families? Whence comes murder, violence, and oppression? Are these the works of reason given us by God? No, they are the works of sensuality, and of a reason made the slave of sensuality. Were all who are given to such works as these to be deprived of their reason, the world about them would be much happier, themselves more harmless, and, I think too, not less honourable. So effectually do sensual lusts war against the soul, that it would be better for the world, and not worse for the sensualist, if he had no soul at all.

But to be more particular. Let us consider that the only part of man, capable of any improvement, is the soul: it is little or nothing we can do for the body; and if we could do more, it would be little worth. We cannot add to our stature; and if we could, where would be the advantage? The affections, which have their seat in the body, can yield us no honour: they are capable of no improvement; the higher they rise, the more despicable we grow: they can yield us neither profit nor credit, but only when we conquer and subdue them. If therefore we have any ambition of being better than we are in any respect, either in this world or in the next, we must cultivate the mind, the only part of us capable of any improvement.

The excellency of a rational creature consists in knowledge and virtue, one the foundation of the other: these are the things we ought to labour after: but sensual lusts are great impediments to our improvement in either of these, and do therefore properly war against the soul.

As to knowledge, the best and most useful part of it is the knowledge of ourselves, and of the relation we stand in to God and our fellow-creatures, and of the duties and obligations arising from these considerations. Now this knowledge is such an enemy to sensual lusts, that a sensual man will be very much indisposed to receive it. It is self-condemnation to him to admit the principles of this knowledge; and therefore his reason, as long as it continues in the service of his passion, will be employed to discredit such knowledge as this, and if possible to subvert and overthrow the principles upon which

it stands. Hence proceed the many prejudices to be met with in the world against the first principles of natural religion; the many laboured arguments to destroy the very distinction of soul and body, and all hopes of a future existence: such hard masters are the lusts of the flesh! They compel the soul to deny itself, to resign all its pretensions to present or future happiness, in condescension to the passions and appetites of the body. Take out of the composition of a man the inclinations to sensual pleasures, and he must needs rejoice to hear of another life in which he may be for ever happy. If he sees not so much reason as to be sure of living for ever, yet he will be willing to hope he may, and his mind will be always open to receive whatever may strengthen and support such hopes. But the sensual man sees nothing that such a future state can afford him but misery and destruction; therefore he shuts his eyes against the light, and places a guard over his mind, to secure it from such unwelcome thoughts. He hopes, he believes, at last he comes to demonstrate, that souls, and spirits, and future states, are mere idle dreams, the inventions either of fools or of politicians.

If the fear of God be in truth, as in truth it is, the beginning of wisdom, sensuality cuts us off from all hopes of improvement, considered as rational beings, by choking the spring from whence all wisdom flows. It ties us down to the world, it materializes the soul, and makes it incapable of any noble thoughts or conceptions worthy itself. And thus men, by following the sensual enjoyments of the world, become carnal in their minds, as well as in

their bodies; and instead of a reason qualifying them to be servants of God, the highest honour of which a rational being is capable, they get a low cunning to serve themselves and the worst of their own desires, which differs but little from the strong instincts to be found in creatures of a lower order; but little, I mean, in point of excellency, though in another respect it differs much. The creatures answer the ends of their nature, and are guiltless in pursuing their several instincts: but the sensual man is useless to himself, injurious to the world, and, as far as in him lies, brings a reproach upon the hand that made him. For,

Secondly, Virtue and morality are the distinguishing characters of rational beings; but these will always be lost where the appetites have dominion.

In all cases where our thoughts are confined to ourselves, and we aim at no other end than our own interest or pleasure, we act upon a principle destructive of morality. The ability we have of extending our views beyond ourselves, and considering what is fit and proper and reasonable with regard to others, is the foundation of morality. It is not perhaps a total want of reason that renders brutes incapable of morality; but whatever reason they have, it is confined to themselves, and exercised only with regard to their own wants and desires, and this renders them immoral agents. Now every degree of sensuality is an approach to this state: the sensual man labours in the gratification of his own passions, and has no other end than to serve himself, nay the worst part of himself, in all his actions. This makes him overlook what is due to others, and to



cast behind him all regards to justice, equity, and compassion, in the eagerness of obtaining the object of his desires. Hence it is that the covetous man is apt to defraud all he deals with, to betray the trust committed to him, and to make a prey of the widow and the orphan unhappily placed under his protection. Hence it is that the ambitious man lays all waste about him, and fills the world with blood, violence, and rapine; sacrificing his country, friends, and relations to his inordinate desire of power. Hence it is, that the lustful man breaks the bonds of friendship and hospitality, and entails dishonour and reproach upon the man who loves him best; hence it is that he lies in wait to betray unguarded innocence, and is content, for the sake of his passion, to bring shame, reproach, remorse of conscience, and all the evils of life, upon a fellow-creature. It is the essence of morality to bound the desires within the limits of reason, justice, and equity. It is not having or exercising great power that makes an ambitious man; a king may be as virtuous as any of his subjects; but it is getting and using it unjustly. It is not much wealth that denominates a man covetous, but it is the method of obtaining and dispensing riches that makes the difference. And for the other case mentioned, you shall have the resolution of it in the words of an Apostle, *Marriage is honourable in all men, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*

It is plain from these instances, that the virtue of a man consists in bounding his desires, and restraining them within the limits prescribed by reason and morality: these limits the lusts of the flesh are per-

petually transgressing; every such transgression is a wound to the soul, which weakens its natural faculties, and renders it less able to discharge its proper office: for reason will not always strive with a man; but if often subdued by corrupt affections, it will at last give over the contest, and grow hard, stupid, and void of feeling.

And this suggests another consideration, to shew how effectually sensual lusts do war against the soul, by extinguishing the force of natural conscience, and not leaving a man reason and religion enough to repent of his iniquities. The mind grows sensual by degrees, and loses all relish for serious thought and contemplation; it contracts an hardness by long acquaintance with sin, and is armed with a brutal courage which regards neither God nor man. Age and infirmities may free us from our sensual passions, the sinner may outlive his sins; but what is he the better, since his sins perhaps outlived his conscience, and left him without either will or power to turn to God? This is no uncommon case: and whenever it is the case, the circumstances which surround a man conspire to make it desperate. His mind, by being long immersed in sensuality, is unapt for serious reflection, and indisposed to receive the truths which reason offers: and besides this, the little glimmering lights of religion, which shine but faintly in his mind, yield no comfort or consolation to him, and he dreads the breaking in of more light upon him, lest, by knowing more, he should become more miserable: this makes him love the darkness in which he is, which helps to screen him from a sense of his own misery. And

thus the sensual man spends the poor remains of life with very little sense, and yet much fear of religion. And yet were this the worst, happy were his case, in comparison to what it really is : for sensual lusts war against the soul, against the very being itself, and will render it for ever unhappy and miserable.

The sensual man has but one hope with respect to futurity, and a sad one it is, that he may die like the beasts that perish : but nature, reason, religion, deny him even this comfort, and with one voice proclaim to us, *That God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world.* When that day comes, and he shall stand before the throne of God with all his sins about him, and every injured person ready to accuse and demand justice against him, it is much easier to imagine what his distress and misery will be, than for any words to describe it. Be the consequence of that day what it will, it must be fatal to sinners. Should the much talked-of, and the more wished-for annihilation be their doom, it is a sentence that destroys both body and soul ; a sentence shocking to nature, and terrible to all our apprehensions ; and to which nothing but a guilty conscience, and a fearful expectation of something worse, could possibly reconcile the sentiments of a man. But neither will this be the case : there is a fire that shall never go out prepared for the spirits of the wicked, a worm that never dies ready to torment them. It may be asked perhaps, Do you mean a material fire, and a material worm ? In good truth I am little concerned to answer this question : there is one who will answer it, even he who said it. There is nothing I think so weak as the disputes

about future punishments. Do you imagine that God wants means of punishing sinners effectually? or do you think that, when he comes to punish sin, you shall have a saving bargain, and that your present enjoyments will be worth all you can suffer for them hereafter? If you imagine this, you must think God a very weak being: but if you think him a wise governor, rest satisfied that there is nothing to be got by offending him; and that it is a foolish encouragement you give yourself, in imagining that the pains of hell will be less tormenting than they are represented to be, when you may be sure, from the power and wisdom of God, that the pleasures of sin will be too dearly purchased at the price of them.

But to return to the argument before us: let us look back, and take a short view of the sensual man's condition. In this world his passions find so much employment for his reason, that he is excluded from the improvements peculiar to a rational being, and which might recommend him to the favour of his Maker: with respect to his fellow-creatures he is void of morality: with respect to God he is void of religion: he has a body worn out by sin, and a mind hardened by it: in his youth he strives to forget God, in his old age he cannot remember him: he dies fuller of sins than of years, and goes down with heaviness to the grave, and his iniquities follow him, and will rise with him again when God calls him to appear and answer for himself: then will his lusts and appetites, and all the sins which attended on them, rise up in judgment against him, and sink his soul into everlasting mi-

fery. The sum then of his account is this : the sensual man has his portion of enjoyment in this world with the brutes, and in the next his punishment with wicked spirits. This is the war which the lusts of the flesh wage against the soul : from such enemies a wise man ought to fly, for they have power not only to destroy the body, but *to cast both body and soul into hell.*



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## DISCOURSE XXIV.

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MATTHEW xxvii. 38.

*Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

WHAT different effects the judgments of God have upon the minds of men, may be learned from these examples now before us. Here are two thieves crucified with our blessed Saviour; two, who were probably guilty of the same crimes, and now under the same condemnation; both brought by the providence of God to suffer in the company of his own Son, whose blood was shed for the sins of the whole world. But mark the end of these men: one died reproaching and blaspheming Christ, and breathed out his soul in the agonies of guilt and despair; the other saw, acknowledged, and openly confessed his Redeemer, and expired with the sound of those blessed words in his ears, *To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

How adorable is the wisdom of God, who has thus instructed us; and, by setting the examples of his justice and mercy so near together, has taught us to fear without despair, and to hope without presumption! Who would not tremble for himself,

when he sees the man perish in his sins who died by his Saviour's side; within reach of that blood which was poured out for his redemption, but wanting faith to stretch out his hand, and be saved?

What would the dying sinner give to have his Saviour so near him in his last moments, that he might pour out his soul before him, and seize by violence the hand which alone is able to save? Yet he who had all these advantages enjoyed none of them; but died in his sins, void of hope and of comfort.

Must the sinner then despair, and has God forgot to be merciful? No: cast your eyes on the other side of the cross, and there you may see the mercy of God displayed in the brightest colours. There hangs the penitent, surrounded with all the terrors of approaching death; yet in the midst of all calm and serene, confessing his sins, glorifying the justice of God in his own punishment, rebuking the blasphemy of his companion, justifying the innocence of his Saviour, and adoring him even in the lowest state of misery; and at last receiving the certain promise of a blessed immortality.

Thus the case stands with all the allowances made to it which seem most to favour a death-bed repentance: and yet, as if the Scripture had said nothing of the wretch who died blaspheming and reproaching Christ, nor given us any cause to fear that a wicked life may end in an hardened and obdurate death; the case of the penitent only is drawn into example, and such hopes are built on it, as are neither consistent with the laws of God, nor the terms of man's salvation; for even of this ex-

ample the most preposterous and absurd use is made. This penitent, as soon as he came to the knowledge of Christ, repented of his sins: if you are fond of the example, *Go and do likewise*: if you delay, and pursue the pleasures of sin, upon the encouragement which this instance affords you, it is plain, that you like nothing in the repentance, but only the lateness of it; and that your inclinations are to imitate the thief, rather than the penitent Christian. Once he lived by violence, in defiance of the laws of God and man: when he was penitent, he abhorred and detested his iniquities. Which part would you imitate? If both, if like him you propose to enjoy the pleasures of sin, and like him to repent and enjoy the pleasures of heaven, you mightily impose on yourself; his case can never be yours, and therefore his example cannot be your security. Besides, were the case indeed parallel to that of the dying Christian, yet still it can afford no certain hope; since the proof is as strong from the case of the impenitent thief, that you shall die in your sins; as it can be from the other case, that you shall repent of them.

It would take up too much of your time to consider this case distinctly in all its views: I shall therefore only briefly hint to you the circumstances which distinguish it from that of the dying Christian; and then proceed to shew what little hope this example affords, allowing the case to be what it is generally supposed to be.

First then; In all this perhaps there may be nothing resembling a death-bed repentance. It is no

uncommon thing for malefactors to lie in prison a long time, before they are brought to trial and execution; and if that is the present case, there is room enough for the conversion of this criminal before he came to suffer. The circumstances incline this way. How came he to be so well acquainted with the innocence of Christ, if he never heard of him till he met him on the cross? How came it into his head to address to him in the manner he does, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom?* What were the marks of royalty that were to be discovered on the cross? what the signs of dignity and power? What could lead him to think that his fellow-sufferer had a title to any kingdom? what to imagine, that he was Lord of the world that is to come? These circumstances make it probable that he had elsewhere learned the character and dignity of Christ, and came persuaded of the truth of his mission: and what is this to them, who have no desire to lie down Christians upon their death-bed, though they would willingly go off penitents?

Secondly, Suppose this great work were begun and finished on the cross; yet it cannot be drawn into example by Christian sinners: because the conversion of a Jew or an Heathen is one thing, and the repentance of a Christian is another. The promises of God, through Christ, are so far certain, that whenever an unbeliever repents and is converted, his sins shall be forgiven. This was the penitent's case; and therefore the pardon granted to him answers directly to baptismal regeneration; and

has nothing to do with a death-bed repentance ; nor can at all affect them who have fallen from grace once received. For,

Thirdly, The profligate life of this unconverted sinner was not attended with such aggravating circumstances as the sins of Christians are. He sinned against the light of nature, and the common rules of reason and morality : but it might at least be said for him, that he was the unhappy son of an unhappy father, conceived in the degenerate and corrupted state of nature ; that he wanted both the sense and knowledge, the hopes and fears, and the helps and assistances, which the Gospel affords for destroying the power and dominion of sin : and the greater his weakness was, the fitter object of mercy was he ; and because he had not been freed by grace from the power of sin, he had the better plea to be freed by mercy from punishment. But are there the same excuses, or the same hopes of pardon for Christians, who sin against knowledge, against the powerful motives of hope and fear, and in despite of the Holy Spirit, with which they were sealed ? To sin in hopes of pardon, and upon the prospect of future repentance, is itself a great aggravation of sin, and a sad abuse of the mercy of God.

If the Heathen sins, he sins under those infirmities of nature for which Christ died ; but the Christian sins under the use of all the remedies which the Gospel has provided, and which were purchased for him by his dying Saviour. The condition of mankind after the fall afforded, without doubt, many arguments of pity and compassion ; and such



arguments as moved the Son of God to undertake their redemption. The ignorant, the unenlightened finner has right to plead all these arguments in his own behalf: his is the common cause of mankind; and nature, with unutterable groans, cries for him and all her children before her great Creator.

If the penitent received the first knowledge of Christ upon the cross; yet how much more had he to say for himself, than the Christian, who comes to make his peace at the hour of death? He might thus plead his unhappy cause: "Lord, I am one  
" of those finners, for whom thy Son now expires  
" upon the cross; I was conceived in sin, and  
" brought forth in iniquity; I have wandered in  
" ignorance and darkness, without the light of thy  
" Gospel to direct me, without the help of thy  
" Spirit to protect me: why was all my life so  
" dark, and these few last minutes only blessed  
" with the knowledge of thy Son? Lord, accept  
" the poor remains of life, since it is all I have left  
" to offer: my latest breath shall confess my own  
" guilt, and my Saviour's innocence: and since thy  
" wisdom has united me to him in this cross, let  
" me never more part from him; but as I am  
" joined with him in his death, so let me be like-  
" wise in his life for evermore." But what shall the dying Christian say, after an hardened life of sin and impenitence? What words shall we put in his mouth to appease the anger of his injured Redeemer? You may spend your time in lamenting your past folly; but with what language will you approach to God? You have neither ignorance nor weakness to plead; you were enlightened with his

word ; and his Holy Spirit was ever ready to assist you, had you been ready to endeavour after holiness. What will you then say, when frightened and amazed you call for mercy at your last moments ? May not the Lord then say, “ How long “ have I waited in vain for these prayers, and these “ sighs ? how have I spoken to you by your conscience within, and by the ministry of my word “ from without ; and how have my calls been despised ? The gates of mercy were always open to “ you, but you shut them against yourself : but “ though you could fly from the mercy of God, “ yet his justice will overtake you.” Consider but this calmly with yourselves, and you will find that the wicked Christian’s case is so much worse than the penitent’s upon the cross, that there can be no reason for you to encourage yourselves upon this example ; or to hope for the same mercy, when your case will be greatly different. These are such circumstances as enter into the nature of the case, and will make it always unfit, and oftentimes impossible, to be imitated by a Christian. But there are other circumstances fit to be observed, which render a death-bed repentance very insecure and dangerous, though we should allow it all the hopes which have been raised from the case before us.

As, first ; He that sins in hopes of repenting at last, may sin so far, as to grow hardened and obdurate, and incapable of repentance when the time comes. This reflection is grounded upon the case of the impenitent thief ; who was crucified with our Saviour ; who, though he had certainly all the outward advantages which the penitent had, yet he

made no step towards repentance, but died reproaching Christ, and joining with those who crucified him, in that bitter jeer, *If thou be the Christ, come down from the cross.* Or, if you want more evidence, this example may be backed by many more in our own time; it being no uncommon thing to see malefactors die stupid and senseless, and go out of the world as wickedly as they have lived in it: and what can this be attributed to, but to the desertion of God's Holy Spirit, which will not always strive with sinners, but sometimes leaves them to perish in the hardness of their hearts? So that the man who sins in hopes of repenting, can never be sure of this last retreat; because by pursuing the first part of his design, that is, to enjoy the pleasure of sin, he may soon grow incapable of the last, which is repenting. I question not but that those who reserve themselves to these last hopes of repenting, mean sincerely to do it when the time comes; for hardly can I think that any man means to suffer for his sins: but then those who enter upon sin with these tender regards to their own souls, soon grow above such mean thoughts, and would scorn to own themselves in the number of those who are candidates for repentance: they contract a familiarity with sin, and, with Solomon's fools, learn to *make a mock of it*, till by degrees their consciences are hardened, and not to be touched by those soft impressions which at the first setting out they felt from the languishing remains of grace. And from hence it comes to pass, that when these sinners lie down upon a sick bed, they often want both the will and the power to ask forgiveness; and,

by an habitual neglect of all parts of religion, become unable to perform any, even that in which all their poor hopes are concluded, to repent of, and ask pardon for, their sins. Nor is it in your own power to sin to what degree you please, or to preserve a sense of religion, amidst the pleasures of iniquity: if it were, possibly the danger in this respect might be less: but habits grow insensibly; there is a kind of mechanism in it, as in the growth of the body; and he that gives himself up to sin can no more resolve how great a sinner he will be, than he that is born a man can resolve how tall, or how short, of stature he will be. To the truth of this experience daily witnesses: happy are those who want this fatal experience! With how much pain and uneasiness do men bring themselves to do the things which in a little time they glory and take pride in, or at least grow easy and contented under? And thus the man, who with great tremblings of heart, and misgivings of mind, brings himself to taste the pleasures of sin, with resolutions of an after repentance, comes at last to be so well reconciled to his sins, as not to think repentance necessary for them. The moment you give yourself up to sin, you give yourself out of your own power; you lay the chains upon the neck of reason, and set the passions free: conscience, which used to be your advance-guard, and give you early notice of every approaching evil, falls into the power of lust and affection: and when reason and conscience are destroyed, the triple cord is broken, and religion must soon follow after; and how, in this general rout, one poor resolution, to repent of all this ini-



quity, should escape, is more than can be easily conceived: and yet when you lose that, you lose yourself; it is your last, your only hope. Upon the whole, there is much more reason to fear, that sin, if once you indulge it, should get the better of and destroy your resolution of repentance, than that your resolution to repent should ever conquer and destroy the confirmed powers and habits of sin. And I wish those who have not yet put it out of their own power to reason calmly upon these things, would enter into this debate with their own hearts, and consider what danger they are in: a few moments cannot be too much to spend in so weighty an affair: and whenever you retire to these cool thoughts, may the Father of mercies influence those moments of your life, upon which all eternity depends!

But, secondly, could you preserve your resolutions of repentance, yet still it is not in your own power to secure an opportunity to execute them. The thief upon the cross died a violent death, by the hand of justice; happy in this at least, that he knew how long he had to live; and had no ground to flatter himself with the hopes of many years to come. He had no pretence to defer his repentance, in prospect of a farther opportunity; nor was his heart to be allured by the soft and entertaining pleasures of life, when life itself was so near expiring. From the like death God defend us all! and yet, without it, which of us can hope for such favourable circumstances for repentance? Whenever the sinner thinks of repentance, he will find that he has a work of great sorrow and trouble upon his hands; and this will make him unwilling



to set about it. No man is so old but that he thinks he may last out one year more : and then, why will not to-morrow serve for repentance as well as to-day ? And thus the great work is delayed, till sickness or natural infirmities render him incapable of it. It was the sight of this strange delusion in which men live, still promising themselves longer life, and upon those hopes deferring the necessary work of eternity, which made the holy Psalmist break forth into that moving petition : *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* The way that men generally number their days can produce nothing but folly and wickedness : the many years to come, which they rejoice in, serve only to make them careless and negligent, and thoughtless of the great concerns of immortality : and whether men are not deluded by these hopes, let any one judge. Do but suppose that you were in the thief's case, and certainly to die upon a fixed day : do you not think that you should have other thoughts, other concerns about you ? Could you then delay your repentance, and say, To-morrow will be time enough ? If you would not do it then, why will you do it now ? Only for this reason, that you think you have time enough in reserve to do this work hereafter. And so you may continue to think with as much reason as you do now, till death, or the sickness which leads to it, surpriseth you. And hence it comes to pass that very few, who sin with resolutions of repentance, ever think of it till they are confined to a sick bed ; because as long as they are in health, they have always this answer ready, It will be time enough hereafter. So that the un-

fortunate end, to which justice brought this penitent upon the cross, was, with respect to his conversion, an advantage that few Christians will give themselves: the certainty of his death made his repentance certain, permitted him no delays, no vain excuses, no flattering hopes of better opportunities hereafter.

Thirdly, Considering that Christians, who propose to themselves this example of the thief upon the cross, seldom repent till they are warned by sickness to prepare for death; they will evidently want another advantage, which this penitent had. His death not being the effect of any bodily pain or distemper, but of the judge's sentence, he brought with him to the cross, which, if you please, you may call his death-bed, a sound body and mind. He had his senses perfect, his reason fresh and undisturbed; and was capable of performing such acts of faith and devotion, as were necessary to his repentance and conversion. But how different often is the case of the sick and languishing sinner! Perhaps he labours under such acute pains, as will give him no respite for thought or reflection; or perhaps he dozes, and lies stupid, without knowing his friends and relations, or even himself; or perhaps the distemper seizes his head, and he raves and is distracted, loses his sense and reason, and every thing of the man, but the outward shape, before his death. And are not these hopeful circumstances for repentance? Is a man likely to know and find out his Saviour, when he knows not even his own brother who stands by his bed-side? These are very common circumstances, and such as render repent-

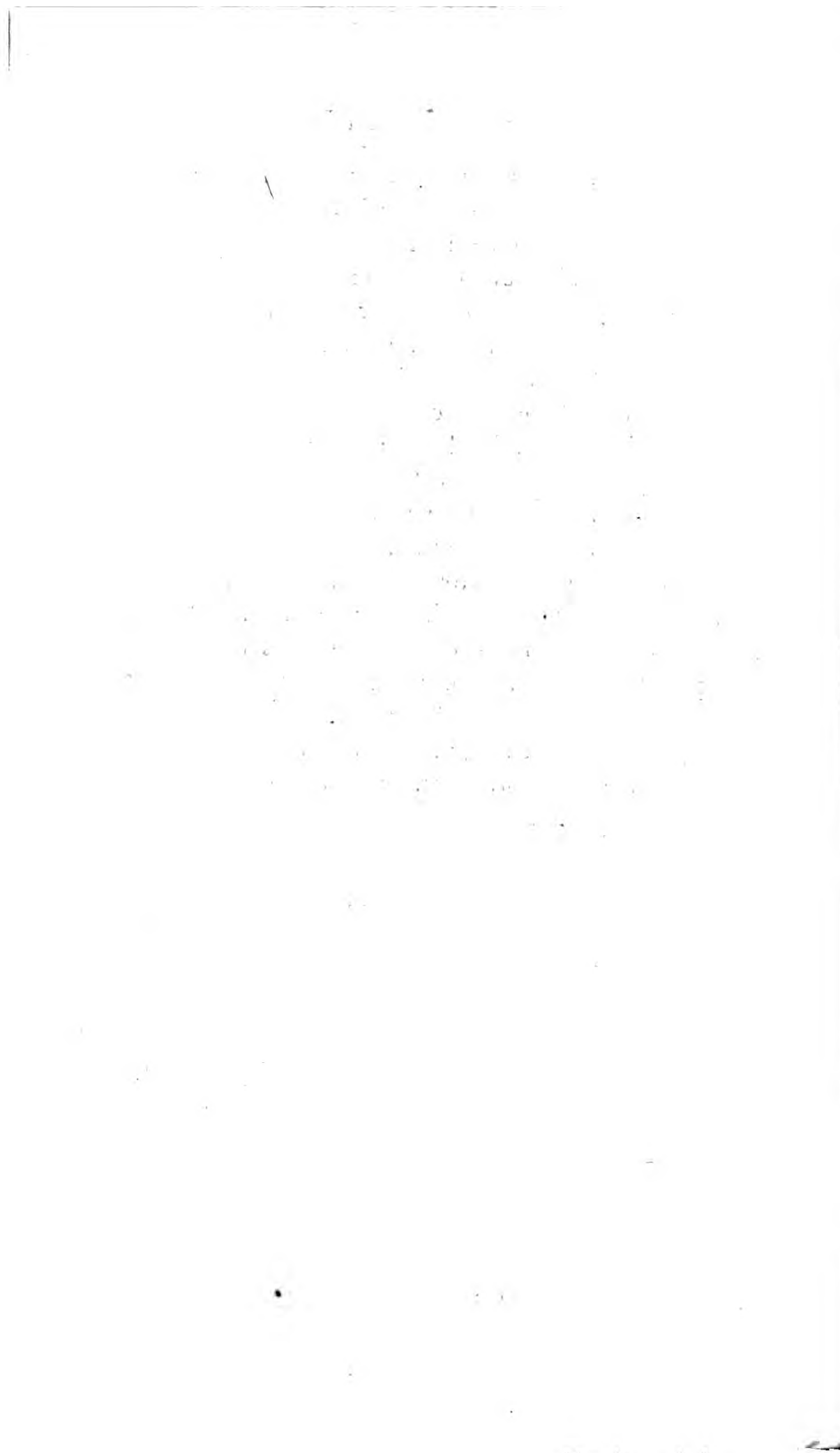
ance impracticable. But should the finner escape all these accidents, and go off gently without being forsaken by his sense or reason; yet still it may happen, and often it does, that his promised repentance produces nothing but horror and despair. In his life-time he flattered himself with unreasonable hopes of mercy, and now he begins to see how unreasonable they were: now he can think of nothing, but that he is going to appear before his Judge, to receive the just rewards of wickedness: he sees him already clothed with wrath and majesty; and forms within his own tormented breast the whole process of the last day. If he sleeps, he dreams of judgment and misery; and when he wakes, believes his dreams forebode his fate. Thus restless and uneasy, thus void of comfort and hope, without confidence to ask pardon, without faith to receive it, does the wretched finner expire, and has the misfortune to see his hopes die before him. In a word then, put all the favourable circumstances together that you can imagine; bring the finner by the gentlest decays of nature to his latter end; give him the fairest and the longest warning; yet still you give him no security: if he is not sensible of his sin and impenitence, he will die, like the wicked thief upon the cross, reproaching Christ, hardened and obdurate against the thoughts of judgment: or, if he comes to a sense, and sees his own unworthiness, how shall he be preserved from despair, and such a dread of his righteous Judge, as will make him neither fit to live, nor fit to die? Nothing but an extraordinary degree of grace can preserve him in a temper fit for repentance, free on one side from

confidence and presumption, on the other from slavish fear which casts out love, which may produce sorrow, but not repentance. And whether those who have lived under the continual calls of grace to virtue and holiness, who have rejected the counsel of God whilst they had health and strength to serve, shall be thought worthy of such extraordinary mercy at last, let any reasonable man judge. It cannot be supposed that God intends to save Christians in this way; which would be at once to evacuate all the rules and duties of the Gospel. Christ came to destroy sin and the works of the devil; but were men promised forgiveness upon the account of a few sighs and tears at last, this would effectually establish and confirm the kingdom of Satan. Though God has promised pardon to penitent sinners, yet his promise must be expounded so as to be consistent with his design in sending Christ into the world; and then it can never be extended to those, who use the Gospel as a protection to wickedness, and sin because God has promised to be merciful. In a word, you have the promises of the Gospel set before you, you have the mercies of God in Christ offered to you; if you will accept them, and do your part, happy are you: but if you are for finding out new ways to salvation, if you seek to reconcile the pleasures and profits of sin with the hopes of the Gospel, you do but deceive yourselves; for *God is not mocked*, nor will he regard those who make such perverse use of his mercy.

What then remains, but that all who love their own souls seek the Lord whilst happily he may be

found; and work for their salvation whilst they have the light; *for the night cometh, when no man can work.* The night cometh on apace, and brings with it a change which every mortal must undergo. Then shall we be forsaken of all our pleasures and enjoyments, and deserted by those gay thoughts which now support our foolish hearts against the fears of religion. The time cometh, and who, O Lord, may abide its coming! when we must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; when the highest and the lowest shall be placed on the same level, expecting a new distribution of honours and rewards. In that day the stoutest heart will tremble, and the countenance of the proudest man will fall in the presence of his injured Lord. I speak not to you the suggestion of superstition or fear, but the words of soberness and of truth. May they sink into your hearts, and yield you the fruits of spiritual joy and comfort here, and of glory and immortality hereafter!





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## DISCOURSE XXV.

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### PART I.

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PSALM lxxvii. 9, 10.

*Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?*

*And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.*

WHOEVER was the author of this psalm, he was manifestly under a great dejection of mind when he penned it: he speaks of himself as detested of God, and given up to be a prey to the sorrows of his own disturbed, tormented heart. *His soul refused comfort*, as he complains in the second verse: *When he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his spirit was overwhelmed*, as he laments in the third verse.

What the particular grief was, which gave rise to this mournful complaint, does not appear; but whatever it was, the sting of it lay in this, that the Psalmist apprehended himself to be forsaken of God: and without doubt this is of all afflictions the most afflicting, the most insupportable; a grief it is,

which no medicine can reach, which all the powers of reason can hardly assist, for *the soul refuses to be comforted.*

These fears, these sorrows, belong not to the vicious and profligate, who *have not God in all their thoughts*: they live without reflection, and therefore without concern; and can be extremely diverted with hearing or seeing what modest and humble sinners suffer from a sense of religion: but, bold and fearless as such men are, their day of fear is not far off, it draws near apace; and, when it comes, will convince them of the truth of the wise preacher's observation; *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*

There is a very great difference between the misgivings and misapprehensions of a religious mind, and the fear to which sinners are always exposed, and which oftentimes they experience. The fears of the religious are frequently ill-grounded, and arise from their not rightly considering and understanding their own case, or the methods of God's providence in relation to this world: but the sinner's fear is never ill-grounded, for if the profligate sinner has not reason to fear God, there can be no such thing as a reasonable fear in the world. The religious man may fear in the hours of his weakness and infirmity; the sinner can only fear when he comes to his right reason, and a due sense of his condition.

This observation will serve to distinguish between the fears to which the religious are subject, and which the text leads us to consider; and the fears

of guilt, which are foreign to our present purpose, and to be treated in quite a different manner.

That the Psalmist speaks of the sorrows of a religious well disposed heart, is manifest from the description he gives of his conduct and behaviour under his distress: he was sorely troubled, but *in the day of his trouble he sought the Lord*, (verse 2.) He was afflicted, but in his affliction he *remembered God*, (verse 3.) Whatever doubts he entertained as to his own condition, and the favour of God towards him, yet of the being, the power, and wisdom of God he never doubted. This faith, which in his utmost extremity he held fast, proved to be his sheet-anchor, and saved him from the shipwreck which the storms and tempests raised in his own breast seemed to threaten.

It is worth our while to observe the train of thought which this afflicted good man pursued, and what were the reflections in which he rested at last, as his best and only comfort and support.

Whether the calamities which afflicted him were private to himself, or public to his people and country; yet as long as his thoughts dwelt on them, and led him into expostulations with God for the severity of his judgments, he found no ease or relief. A weak man cannot rightly judge of the actions even of a man wiser than himself, of whose views and designs he is not master; much less can any man judge of the ways of God, to whose councils he is not admitted, and to whose secrets he is a stranger. And though it is but too natural for men, when they consider the sins of others, to complain for want of justice in the world, and when they consider

their own, of want of mercy; yet in both cases do they act weakly and inconsistently, pretending to judge where they want not only authority to decide, but even understanding sufficient to try, the cause. The Psalmist complained heavily, *Has God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* But what did he get by this complaint? was he not forced immediately to confess the impropriety and folly of it? *I said, This is my infirmity.* He said very rightly: in complaining, he followed the natural impressions of passion and impatience; in acknowledging the folly of his complaint, he spoke not only the language of grace, but of sense and reason.

What must we do then? since it is weakness to complain, and folly to judge, of the methods of God's providence, what is there left for us to do? and what part must we take? Must religion be senseless and stupid, and shut out all reflection on the ways of God? No: one way there is still left open to us; to trust, and to depend on God: and a way it is so far from being senseless and stupid, that in pursuit of it we shall see opening before us the noblest views that reason or religion can afford.

I am not prescribing to you a method of my own, it is the very method the Psalmist prescribed to himself. *God has not left himself without witness;* the great works of nature and of grace proclaim aloud his lovingkindness to the children of men. If we consider them attentively, we must admire his power and adore his goodness: and when we see such power united with so much goodness towards us, it is but a natural step to throw ourselves upon



his protection; to trust the hand that once made us, and has always saved us. When I complain, says the Psalmist, *It is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy works, and talk of all thy doings.* Here then was his comfort, here the cure of all his grief: the scene around him was dark and gloomy; but, dark as it was, it was under the guidance and direction of the hand that had never failed the faithful, to deliver him out of all his troubles.

The text, and the occasion of it, thus explained, lead us to consider these two propositions:

First, That all complaints against Providence proceed from weakness and the infirmity of human reason.

Secondly, That a settled peace of mind, with respect to God, must arise from a due contemplation of the great works of Providence, which God has laid open to our view for our consideration and instruction.

The first proposition is, That all complaints against Providence proceed from weakness and the infirmity of human reason. Under this head are included all the suspicions that are apt to rise in men's minds against Providence, as well as the formal complaints brought against it. And the first of this sort, which naturally presents itself to the mind, when we consider God and ourselves, is this, that God is too great and too excellent a being to humble himself to behold the things that are on earth. This one mistake seems to have been the

whole of Epicurus's divinity. He thought it would be endless for the gods to attend to every thing that passed on earth, and to concern themselves with the conduct and behaviour of every particular man in the world: he thought they could not do this without being moved sometimes to anger and resentment, and sometimes to the passion of joy; which he conceived to be equally inconsistent with an uniform settled state of happiness. To make therefore his gods happy, he removed them from all government of men, and left men to shift as they could, without God or Providence, in the world.

The same thought has in all times been the refuge of sinners; their language has ever been, *How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Most High?* Perhaps too this suspicion has entered into better minds, broken with grief and affliction, and tempted by their misfortunes to think that God regards not the things below.

But how different soever the grounds of this suspicion may be in one case, and in another, yet in every case it is manifestly weak and unreasonable.

To imagine that it is too much trouble, or any trouble, to God to govern the world, and all the beings in it, is a mere childish conceit; it is talking of God, as if God were a man, and as liable to be fatigued and tired with multiplicity of business as a man is. How do you know that there is any thing tiresome or disagreeable in much business, and in variety of employment? It is true, you find it is so in yourself, and you observe it is so in others: you may therefore very well conclude, that much business is tiresome to men like yourself: but by what

reason do you extend this conclusion to God? unless you think he is in this respect like you, and that he has no larger powers and abilities than you have.

As it is absurd to argue from the powers of men to the powers of God, so it is likewise to argue from the passions of men to the affections of the Deity. Men may be grieved and tormented with seeing affairs under their conduct go wrong, may be overjoyed at some unexpected success; but can this ever be the case of a being of infinite power and infinite wisdom? Nothing can happen but what he orders or permits, for his power is over all: nothing that he orders or permits can be wrong, for his wisdom is equal to his power. What disappointments then are there to grieve him? What unexpected success to transport him? You see now that this suspicion, which set out with supposing God to be so great and excellent a being, that the affairs of men were below his care, concludes with making him so like a man, as not to be able to bear the fatigue and vexation of so much business.

Epicurus and his followers, who denied God's government of the world, denied also that he made it. So far at least they were consistent; for if they thought it too much trouble for God to govern the world, they could not consistently put him to the trouble of making it. But if we turn the argument, and begin with considering the works of the creation, and, according to the instruction of the Psalmist, *call to remembrance those years of the right hand of the Most High*; we shall from these manifest and undeniable works of God be led to just conclusions with

respect to the methods of divine Providence, less obvious to our observation, in the government of the world. When we shall see the hand of God employed in forming the lowest, and, in our eyes, the most contemptible creatures on earth; ranging and adjusting all the parts of the world so, that there is not a particle of matter but what has its proper place in subserviency to the whole of the creation; it will be impossible for a reasonable man to think that God has no care of this world, which with so much care and wisdom he created; or that it should be below him to preserve those beings, which he did not think it below him to make. But this consideration belongs to the second proposition, and will meet us again in its proper place. To proceed then;

Another reason, which some have for suspecting that the affairs of the world are not under the conduct of Providence, is, that they cannot discern any certain marks of God's interposing: on the contrary, they think it evident, that all the inanimate and irrational parts of the world follow a certain course of nature invariably; and that men act with all the signs of being given up to follow their own devices, without being either directed or restrained by a superior power.

That many men talk and think in this way there is no doubt. The scoffers in St. Peter's time supported themselves upon this observation, *that all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*; concluding, that they would go on so for ever, and there was nothing beyond this present state of things for which they ought to be concerned.

But in this way of reasoning there are two great mistakes :

1. That the conclusion is not rightly drawn from the observation, supposing the observation to be true.

2. Supposing the conclusion to be true, it will not answer the purpose intended.

1. That the material world continues to answer the purposes for which it was created, is surely, when rightly considered, the strongest evidence that it was made, and is conducted, by the highest wisdom and power. Is it any praise to a workman, or any proof of his skill and ability, that the house of his building is running to ruin ? and that it wants reforming and supporting every year ? Surely every man would choose, if he could, to have his habitation secured against the injuries of time and accidents. And can we expect less of an house, whose builder is God, than that it should continue firm and stable, and without decay, during the time intended and limited for its continuance ? If all things therefore continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, it proves that they were extremely well made at first, and have been extremely well preserved ever since : and can this afford to a man of any thought or reflection an objection against Providence ?

It may be said, perhaps, that it is not merely the continuing of the world that is the objection, but its continuing always in one unwearied course. The sun rises and sets now, just as it did three or four thousand years ago : and what sign is there of wisdom or contrivance in doing the same thing over



and over again for ages together ? This observation can arise only from what we see among men ; and, with respect to men, there is foundation for it : but it is great weakness, and want of thought, to transfer this observation to the works of God. Men are improving daily in knowledge and experience, and may have good reason to alter this year what they did the last, the better to suit their pleasure or convenience : but can any man be so weak as to think this to be the case of the Almighty ? Do you imagine God was young and unexperienced when he made the world, and that he sees faults in it now which he did not see then ? If you do not think this, what reason can you give why the world should not go on now as it did from the beginning ? If God made it in the best manner at first, and without doubt he did, can there be any just cause for alteration ?

But farther ; supposing the observation true, that the world is now where it was at the beginning ; yet no conclusion can be drawn from thence as to the future continuance of the world. For though this system of things shall keep its appointed course, during the time determined by God for its continuance ; yet neither can the present nor the past state of things enable us in the least degree to judge when the end will be. And whoever reasons in this way, may just as well say, Such a man lived in good health the last twenty years, and therefore he shall live in good health for twenty more. The argument concludes alike in both cases, however the absurdity may appear shocking only in one.

But supposing we should allow even the conclusion

to be right, and that the material world may go on without end: what is it to the purpose? Whatever becomes of the world, you can last but a little time. Your condition hereafter will not depend upon the lasting of the sun or moon, or be in the least influenced by it. Let them move on for ever; yet if you in the mean time are to be miserable, and to suffer for your iniquities, what will you be the better for it? If this world should last for ever, may there not be other states for the reception of good and bad spirits, when separate from the body? If there may, how is religion, or the belief of God's government in the rational and moral world, at all concerned in this speculation? And how weak and how absurd a thing is it for men, who know they must die, and may die to-day or to-morrow, to harden their hearts against the belief of Providence, by speculating upon the durableness of things without themselves; when their only true concern is, and ought to be, to know what will become of themselves, being very sure that they cannot continue long here? Our Saviour has told us, that in his *Father's house are many mansions*: this mansion in which we now live may continue, and yet we may be transferred to other mansions to be happy or miserable, according as we have behaved ourselves in this.

Let us consider now, whether the other part of the objection, pointed against God's moral government of the world, has any better foundation in reason to support it.

The great irregularity observable in human actions, and the mischiefs and iniquities which abound

in the world, have tempted some to think that God concerns not himself with the actions of men, but has given them up entirely to follow their own devices.

It is truly and justly observed, that there is this difference between the material and rational parts of the world; that the material world, and the several parts of it, act regularly and uniformly, pursuing constantly the ends and appointments of nature; whilst moral agents act variously, and often inconsistently with the great ends to which they are ordained. But I wonder any man, capable of making this observation, should not at the same time see the true reason of it, supposing both parts to be under God's government.

Matter, being capable of no action of itself, must necessarily follow the impressions it receives: supposing God to govern the world, the material parts of it must follow the immediate impressions of his hand; and where God is the mover, can you expect any thing less than order and regularity, and a constant subserviency to the great ends of the creation? To suppose therefore the material world to move irregularly and inconsistently with the end to be served, would be supposing God to act irregularly and inconsistently with the end of his own creation.

But in the moral world the case is otherwise: men have a power of acting and choosing for themselves; and, were it otherwise, they could not be rational or moral agents. Were God, therefore, to determine the actions of men as absolutely and uncontrollably as he directs the motions of the mate-

rial world, men would be, to all intents and purposes, as much parts of the material world as the trees and plants which grow in it. And such a method of government would destroy and overthrow the very end for which rational agents were created: for, to what purpose was reason and understanding given to men, but to guide and direct them, and to make them capable of discharging the duties of religion and morality? But if the powers of reason and understanding were to be perpetually overruled, to prevent the irregularities and mischiefs which proceed from the free use of them; what would it be but making men rational and moral agents by the law of their creation, and then putting them under a government which leaves no room for reason or morality? Which is such a part as no wise man would act, and which no reasonable man would ascribe to God.

Indeed, this very difference observable in the conducting the material and the moral world, is the strongest presumption that the whole is under the direction of the all-wise Being. Upon supposition that God governs the world, would you not expect to see all things directed in a way suitable to their nature, and the end for which they were made? Material beings require to be absolutely and uncontrollably directed, for they have no power to direct themselves; consequently their motions must be just and regular, or otherwise, according to the wisdom and ability of the director: and if God be that director, they must ever be just and regular.

Moral agents cannot be so directed; for it is

essential to the nature of a moral being to act and choose for itself: and the actions of such beings will be wise and regular, in proportion to the wisdom of such beings; where they are weak and infirm, they will oftentimes be very irregular and blameworthy. That men are weak and infirm wants no proof; consequently, there must be great signs of weakness and imperfection in their moral behaviour.

Since then it is evident, *a priori*, that the government of the world, supposing it to be under the government of God, must be what it now appears to be; it can be only want of thought and reflection which furnishes objections, from the present state of things, against a divine Providence.

But farther; though it is necessary to leave men, considered as moral agents, to choose and act freely; yet this is far from excluding the providence of God from interposing in human affairs: the reason is, because this may be done many ways consistently with the freedom of men; and wicked men may be punished, and good men rewarded, even in this world, without overruling the wills or actions of either. A little reflection will clear this up to every man's mind; and therefore I shall say no more than is necessary to explain my meaning.

The power of life and death, which is in the hand of God, is alone sufficient for conducting the great affairs of the world. It is natural for men to die; and when they do die, nobody is surprised at so common an event; and yet it is evident, that the wellbeing of whole nations often depends upon the life or death of a few men: let



them live, or let them die, nobody's liberty or freedom of action is affected by it; yet the peace and security of whole countries, or the utter ruin and destruction of them, may depend entirely on the event.

With respect to private men, and their happiness or misery here; if we consider how much every man's good or ill fortune in the world depends upon variety of accidents, which may happen one way or other, but must happen as God shall think proper; it will be easy to conceive, that men may be effectually punished for their iniquities, or rewarded for their virtue, by a train of things appearing to be natural and common, without the visible interposition of Providence.

These secret methods do not indeed justify the righteousness of God in the eyes of men; nor is it pretended that they are made use of for an exact administration of justice in every case; but it is sufficient if they are or may be used to all the necessary purposes of government over moral beings in a state of probation; which is a very different thing from the final administration of justice. And whatever inequalities may appear to us in the distribution of good or evil in this life, they cannot stand as objections to God's government over the world, unless you can prove that there will be no day of reckoning hereafter: for, supposing a future state, it is quite consistent with divine justice to permit things to be as we see they are now; since justice does not sleep, but waits with patience to see the full proof of the righteousness or unrighteousness of men.

When the appointed time shall come for dissolving this frame of things, the material world will have done its office, and may lie by, till called out by the Creator to serve other uses : but for the moral world there is another scene prepared, in which they must account for their conduct and behaviour in this ; and answer for the use they made of those great and excellent gifts of reason and understanding, with which God endowed them.

Lay all these things together, and consider in one view the whole scheme of divine Providence : then try over again the misgivings of mind, and the suspicions you have entertained against God's government of the world, and you will perhaps see reason to confess your own weakness, and say with the Psalmist, *It is mine own infirmity.*

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## DISCOURSE XXV.

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PART II.  
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**T**HE suspicions which incline men to doubt whether God does at all concern himself in human affairs, have been considered: I shall proceed now to consider the suspicions which, consistently with admitting a general care of Providence over the world, lead men to fear, that they themselves are either neglected or unkindly treated by God. This seems to have been the Psalmist's own case, and these the fears which possessed his mind. Of God's government of the world he entertained no doubt; he applied to him in his trouble and distress; but his grief was, that he found no return to his prayers; his sorrows continued and increased: *when he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his spirit was overwhelmed.*

But this good man, being well grounded in religion, was able so far to get the better of his doubts and fears, as to pass a right judgment in his own case, and to pronounce of all his suspicions, *This is my infirmity*: and to call to his assistance the proper reflections which the great works of Providence

administered for the support and confirmation of his hope and confidence towards God, *I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.*

Now it being admitted that God is not regardless of the world, but that his providence is watchful for the preservation of the whole, it may be doubted whether this care descends to particulars, and regards the actions and the well-being of individuals; which, singly considered, make but a small part of the whole, and whose fortunes, be they good or bad, have very little influence upon the well-being of the whole.

If we consider this suspicion with respect to the material world, a little reflection will help us to discern that it is entirely groundless, and built upon the weak conceit, that it will be too troublesome to Providence to attend to the very minute things of the world. For the minutest parts of matter follow the laws of God and nature as constantly and as regularly as the great constituent parts of the world, and work in their proper sphere as strongly for the good and preservation of the whole. The warmth and comfort which you receive from the fire in your chamber, is as much owing to the laws and constitutions appointed and maintained by God, as the warmth and comfort you receive from the sun: and the light of a candle is as truly the work of God, and as much depending upon his preservation and execution of the laws of nature, as the light of the heavenly bodies. If any man thinks otherwise, let him try to account for these lesser phænomena of nature, and he will find himself under the same necessity of recurring to the influence of a superior

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overruling power, as when he attempts to account for the motions of the great bodies in the firmament.

With respect to moral agents and God's government over them, the case is not quite so plain: and there is a plain reason why it is not; because moral agents would not be moral agents, if they were as regularly moved by an overruling power as material beings are, and must be; since they can only act as they are acted, which is the reason why all their actions are regular and uniform, because the immediate agent is God.

But with respect to particular men, and the care of Providence over them, we may consider that every man consists of two parts; one material, which is the body; another rational, which is the mind. With respect to the material part, every single man manifestly depends upon the preservation and care of Providence, as manifestly as the great bodies of the world depend on the same care. The motion of the heart in a man no more depends upon his will, or upon his own wisdom, than the motion of the moon does. The same may be said of all the animal functions which depend upon involuntary motions, not under the influence or direction of the will. The life then of every particular man, which depends upon these animal functions, depends upon the preservation of Providence. And thus far we see, that by the same way of reasoning, that we conclude God's government to extend to the whole of the creation, his care and government extends to individual men. This being allowed; can we possibly suppose that God, who shews so much care for



men, as they are material animal beings, should entirely neglect them, considered as moral agents? This is the very question which our Saviour asks in a like case, Matt. vi. 26. *Behold, says he, the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?* In like manner we say, Behold yourselves as ye are material beings; do not all the motions of the body, on which life depends, discover to you the hand of God supporting and maintaining your life and being here? Consider once more; Are you not, as rational beings, and moral agents, much more worthy of his care? And can he, whose care descends to you as animals, be supposed to neglect you as moral agents?

But as strong as this proof is, by way of inference and conclusion, we do not want more direct proofs of God's care for men, as moral agents. Of this sort are all the impressions and intimations which we receive from nature, that is, from the hand of our Creator, for our government and direction as moral agents: the knowledge of the difference of good and evil, the power of conscience, the passions of hope and fear, the sense of honour and of shame, which are natural to all men, and may be said to be born with them, are so many proofs of the care of God for us, considered as moral agents: and they are not the less so, for being common to all men; though possibly they have, for that reason, been less considered in this light.

Was God to speak directly to every man, and teach him his duty, was he visibly to rebuke every

finer, you would not doubt of his care for particular moral agents; but you might doubt, perhaps with good reason, how consistent such methods would be with the freedom which is necessary to the morality of human actions. But now, the same care is taken, the same instructions, the same admonitions given; with this only difference, that they are conveyed in a manner, and a method, which do not interfere with the freedom of moral agents. Consider a little: When you find that you have a natural notion of the difference of good and evil, and consequently of the great duties of morality, who then is your teacher and instructor? What you have from nature, you have from the Author of nature; and if your sense of moral good and evil be indeed natural, you learnt it from God, and from him only. If the power of conscience be natural to a rational mind, who is it that admonishes you when conscience flies in your face? Must it not be he, who placed the power of conscience in every rational mind, to act there as his deputy, in restraining, rebuking, and correcting every iniquity? When you are moved by a sense of honour to do things that are virtuous and praiseworthy, and encouraged and supported by hope of reward; when you are restrained from evil by the sense of shame, or deterred by the fear of punishment; whence have you these great assistances and encouragements to virtue, these guards and defences against vice? If these are natural passions, and undoubtedly they are, it is God who calls you daily by these his messengers into the ways of honour and virtue, and warns you to flee from vice and iniquity.

These are undeniable proofs of God's care for moral agents; and they reach to every particular man's case, who has not extinguished the powers of conscience, and the natural sense of honour and shame.

That the providence of God over particular men extends still farther, and often interposes to bless and prosper the righteous, to punish and confound the wicked, there can be no doubt in general, though it is always difficult, and generally presumptuous, to pretend to judge in particular instances: for the appearances of things will not answer to the observation; the wicked being sometimes suffered to triumph in this world, and virtue left to struggle with many hardships and distresses: which is the case of the Psalmist in the text, complaining that *God had forgotten to be gracious*; and has been, and, in the reason of the thing, must be the case of many righteous men in every age.

But this is not the only difficulty in the case: for when the wicked suffer here as they deserve, and the righteous prosper in their undertakings; yet the blessings on one side, and the punishments on the other, seem to be conveyed by such natural means, and so much to be expected from the common course of things, that men seldom think of an immediate interposition of Providence, and there are hardly grounds upon which to prove it. But, to balance this difficulty, let it be considered,

First, That an immediate and visible interposition of Providence in behalf of the righteous, and for the punishment of the wicked, would interfere with the freedom of moral agents, and not leave room for

their trial: and this is a sufficient reason for not using this method.

Secondly, That this reason excludes only such methods of rewarding virtue and punishing vice here, as are inconsistent with freedom of actions; but does by no means exclude any methods not liable to this objection.

Thirdly, That the natural course of things being under the direction of God, it is reasonable to believe that they are oftentimes disposed for the benefit of the righteous, and for the punishment of the wicked; though such disposition of things cannot fall under our observation, every thing appearing to happen according to a natural and ordinary course.

The first proposition has been already considered; and the second is but the immediate consequence of it: of the third there can remain no doubt with any man, who believes that the providence of God has any concern at all in the affairs of the world. That whole nations may suffer by unseasonable weather, by storms and tempests, by lightning or by earthquakes, is manifest in experience: that all these things, whenever they happen, are looked upon as natural events, is allowed: admitting then, that these things are under the government of God, and happen as he thinks fit to direct, the consequence is manifest, that God can, whenever he pleases, punish wicked nations, or reward good ones, by a secret disposition of the course of nature, without any such interposition as is inconsistent with the method of his government over rational and moral beings.

And if this can be done, it is highly reasonable to think it is done ; it being in all its views agreeable to the goodness and justice of God, and not inconsistent with the government of moral agents. The truth of this observation is not confined to the case of nations only ; it is the same with respect to particular persons : there are a thousand accidents in life (so we call them) upon which the fortunes of men depend : as these things happen one way or other, a man is made or undone ; and how easy must it be for the power that presides over all these accidents, to determine the fate of men, and at the same time to escape their observation ! Though it be unreasonable, because inconsistent with the methods of the divine government over men, to expect from God, that he should openly appear in the support of good men ; yet it is rational to expect, from his providence, *that all things shall work together* (which is the language of Scripture) for the *good* of those who *love him*.

And this leads to another, and indeed the great difficulty of the case, which relates to the sufferings of good men, and the suspicion they are apt to entertain of God's kindness towards them, whilst they suffer under the weight of his afflicting hand.

The complaints of this sort to be met with in Scripture are of two sorts : one regards the national calamities of the Jews ; the other, the sufferings of particular men.

The first made the subject of the Psalmist's complaint in the text ; as is probable from the conclusion of the Psalm, in which he reckons up the great things formerly done by God for the deliver-



ance of his people ; and concludes with one of the greatest, *Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.* His seeking comfort, from a remembrance of God's great kindneses to Israel, intimates, that his sorrow was on account of their sufferings.

But however the Psalmist might be affected by the calamities of the people, to whom he was so nearly related ; yet whoever reads the history of this people in their own books, will hardly think their sufferings, as a nation, stand as an objection to Providence : they were under the highest obligations to obedience, and the most forward to disobey of any other : and it appears, that as often as they repented of their iniquity, they were saved from such destructions as seemed to leave no hope for their restoration. But the case of suffering nations in general, without considering the merit of any particular nation, is so intricated by a great variety of circumstances, that it is hard to form a distinct judgment. The iniquity of a nation is made up of the iniquities of many ; and, it may be presumed, no nation was ever so bad, but that there were some good people in it : these, be they many or few, are involved in the general ruin, and their case makes a distinct difficulty. Now, though it be scarce possible for us, who can with no certainty judge of each other, to estimate the virtue and vice of nations, so as to say when they are ripe for destruction, yet there are some general observations, which lie within our reach, that will help to justify the providence of God in this part of divine government, and silence complaints on this head.

First, There is a natural tendency in vice and immorality to weaken and destroy nations and governments; and, that it should be so, is agreeable, in general, to the notion we have of God's justice and goodness.

Secondly, It is also agreeable to our sense of justice and goodness, that nations, quite degenerate and corrupted, should not be suffered to continue and prosper, and to spread their vice and iniquity by means of their power and authority.

Thirdly, These principles allowed, the whole difficulty lies in the application of them to particular cases; which application to particular cases depending upon circumstances which we cannot possibly know, the objection arises, not from the reason of the case, but merely from our ignorance of it: and where is the wonder, that there should be many things in the administration of divine government, the reasons of which we cannot comprehend? The general method of Providence, in exalting virtuous and sober nations, in humbling the proud and profligate, is confessedly agreeable to justice; and no man can complain of it. There is no room therefore for any complaint at all, but when these rules of justice are misapplied; and it is not only weakness, but great presumption, to say these rules are in any case transgressed, because it is a point in which human reason cannot judge. Whoever therefore enters into this complaint, may certainly say with the Psalmist, *It is my infirmity.*

The miseries of which good men have a share in all public calamities will fall under the next

head, which relates to the private and particular sufferings of good men.

These complaints must be considered as made by others, in behalf of those who suffer; or, as made by the sufferers themselves. When others make this complaint in behalf of the sufferers, they evidently assume a fact for which they can have no proof, that the sufferers are innocent righteous persons: and, therefore, it is great weakness and infirmity in them to complain against Providence, upon supposition of a fact, of which they cannot possibly judge.

The characters of men, in the eye of the world, depend upon their outward behaviour; and when men behave so as to deserve a good character, it is great want of candour and charity to suspect them of evil: to treat them as deserving ill, would be a direct violation of common justice: for since we have no way of judging men but by their outward conduct, to treat those ill who appear to us to deserve well, is acting against the only rule we have to direct us in the administration of justice. But when we judge of God's dealing with men, and call him to account for his justice, this rule, by which we are bound to judge and direct ourselves, is a very unsafe one to follow, and may easily misguide us: the reason is, because, though we must take men's characters from the only rule we have to go by, their external behaviour, yet their true and real character, as to virtue and vice, is determinable only by their inward principles and sentiments, which are known to God alone, *who searcheth the heart and reins*. To judge men to be wicked, be-

cause we see they are miserable, would be acting without charity towards men: to judge them to be innocent, and therefore unjustly treated when they suffer, would be acting with great presumption towards God. From which two considerations, the rule of our duty in these cases must appear to be this, to treat men as they appear to us to deserve, whether they are fortunate or unfortunate in the world; and forbear all censures upon divine Providence, which acts by rules of the highest justice, though undiscoverable by us in particular cases.

But farther, the man who suffers may be what you take him to be, a very good man; and yet his sufferings no just occasion for any complaint on his behalf. One good man saw this, and confessed it in his own case, *It is good for me that I was afflicted: before I was in trouble I went astray.* Even good men in this life want sometimes admonitions to awaken their care, sometimes trials to perfect their faith. And unless you can judge certainly (which most certainly you cannot do) of the end and purposes of Providence in permitting a good man to suffer, you can never, with any pretence of reason, pass judgment upon the ways of God.

As this is true with respect to the temporary sufferings of the righteous; so is it likewise true, even when the righteous are given up to destruction in this world, and perish, in the eyes of the world, miserably. Consider the case of all the martyrs who have died for the testimony of God's truth: do you esteem them as good men given up by God, without mercy, to sundry kinds of cruel death? If you do not, it is evident, that good men

may suffer, even to death, without any just reflection upon the goodness of God.

The truth of the case is this ; since all men must die, in the time and manner of death the difference cannot be great : and how hard soever it may be to reconcile ourselves to death, to unnatural and violent death especially ; yet, upon the strictest scrutiny of reason, it can be no loss to a good man, if there be any truth in religion, to be removed at any time out of this world into a better. And this will account for the case of the righteous, supposed to suffer in the destruction of a wicked nation : they fall indeed like other men ; but they fall into the hands of God, who knows how to distinguish their case, and to compensate all their miseries. I am not recommending these kind of sufferings to your liking, or trying to reconcile your natural sentiments to them : this only I contend for, that, upon principles of reason and religion, no objection can lie against divine Providence on their account. But to proceed :

When the sufferer complains in his own behalf, where is the man who will venture to put his complaint into this form, that a righteous man is suffering unjustly ? We pray daily to God *not to enter into judgment with us* ; and, I think, no man will care to begin, and enter into judgment with God : before he does, he must satisfy himself in these particulars ; that he has been guilty of no offence to deserve the punishment of sufferings ; that he is so perfect, as not to want the admonition of them ; that he is so approved, as to want no trial.

Whoever can come to think of himself in this



manner, will not say of his own complaint, *It is my infirmity*; but if the rest of the world say no worse of him, they will deal very tenderly by him.

I have now gone through the general cases which fall under my subject: as to the suspicions about Providence, and the care of God over us, which have in them a mixture of religious melancholy, they are of another consideration. They are indeed great infirmities, often they are great bodily infirmities, and deserve all the compassion and assistance that can be given. But these disorders do not usually break out into objections against Providence, but rather turn upon the sufferers themselves, who are apter to judge hardly of themselves than of God; and if they despair of mercy, it is because they think themselves unworthy of it. They belong not therefore to the present subject.

To conclude: You see how dangerous it is to sit in judgment upon God, and to censure the methods of his government: in every government particular cases have their particular reasons: those who know the reasons and circumstances of each case, may know whether the general rules of justice and equity are properly applied in the judgment and determination of the case. Others cannot possibly judge, though perhaps in the general rules of justice they may be well skilled. If this be true in human government, it must needs hold more strongly in the government of God. One man may see what another man can see, and therefore may be capable of judging when he does right or wrong: but no man can see all that God sees, and therefore no man is qualified to pass judgment on particular

acts of Providence, which depend on circumstances out of the reach of human eyes. The great works of God which are before us, if duly attended to, declare his wisdom, goodness, and power; and the voice of nature, in all her works, speaks in the language of the wise king, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.* Happy are they who listen to this still voice! they will act not only the safest, but the most rational part; whilst others, full of themselves and their own wisdom, are daily condemning what they do not understand: and if ever they recover their right reason, the first step must be to see their weakness, and to join with the Psalmist in his humble confession, *It is my own infirmity.*

END OF VOL. I.

