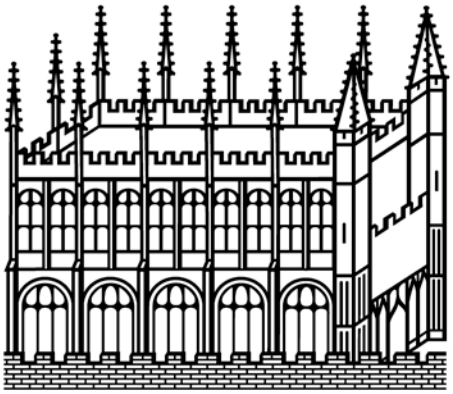

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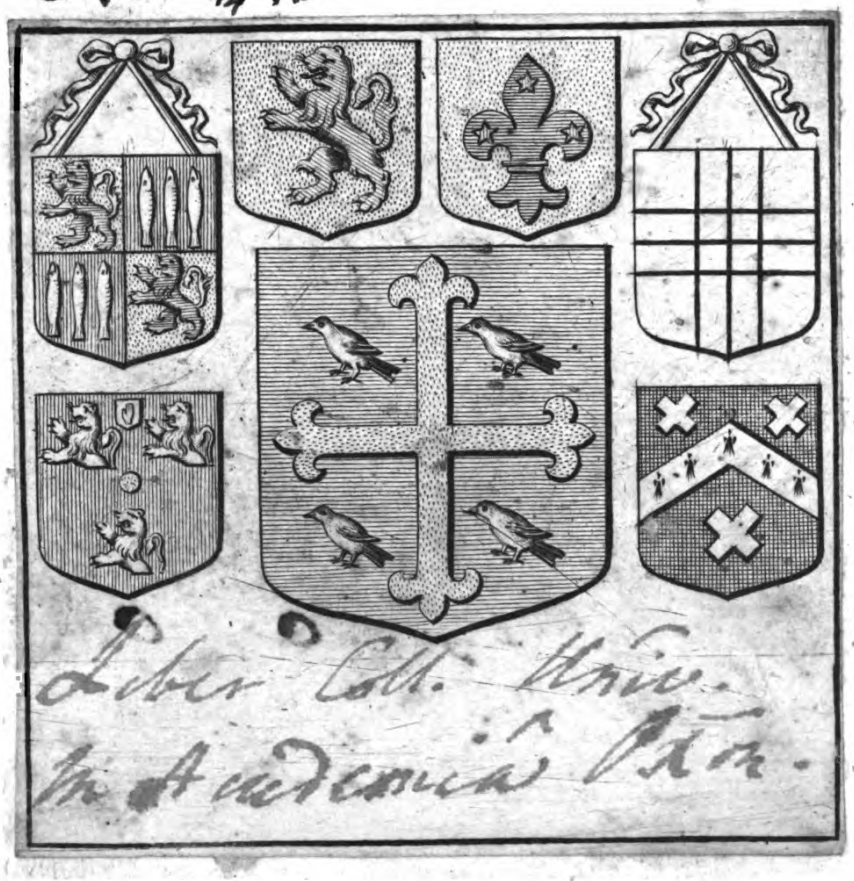

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SEVERAL

DISCOURSES

PREACHED AT THE

TEMPLE CHURCH.

BY

THO. SHERLOCK, D. D.

Late LORD BISHOP of LONDON, and
MASTER of the TEMPLE.

VOL. III.

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AND

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DISCOURSE I.

PROVERBS XIX. 27.

Ceaſe, my Son, to hear the Inſtruction that cauſeth to err from the Words of Knowledge.

THAT by *the Words of Knowledge* in the Text we are to underſtand the Principles and Dictates of Virtue and Religion, is ſo well known to all who are in the leaſt acquainted with the Language of Scripture, eſpecially of the Book of *Pſalms*, the *Proverbs*, and other Writings of the like Kind, that there is no need to inſiſt upon the Proof of it. This being admitted, the Wiſe Man's Advice in the Text amounts to this; That we ſhould be careful to guard againſt the Arts and Inſinuations of ſuch as ſet up for Teachers of Infidelity and Irreligion.

Theſe Teachers are not here conſidered under the Character of vicious and profligate Men, given up to the Exceſſes of Lewdneſs, or to be diſtinguiſhed by any Marks of deſperate or notorious Wickedneſs: They are ſpoken of only as Inſtructors, as Diſputers, and as Reaſoners againſt *the Words of Knowledge*. Such the Wiſe King forewarns us of, adviſing us to keep at a Diſtance from Danger, and to ſtop our Ears againſt their pernicious Enchantments. He had often before ſpoken of the Danger of aſſociating with wicked Men, *who ſleep not, except they do Miſchief; who eat the Bread of Wickedneſs, and drink the Wine of Violence:* But here he points out to us another Sort; Men who have arrived to a Pitch of being gravely and ſeriouſly irreligious; who ſpend their cooleſt Hours and their calmeſt Thoughts in the Service of Infidelity, and are maliciouſly diligent to pervert Men from the Acknowledgment of the Truth, and by the very Arms of Heaven, Reaſon and Underſtanding, to enlarge the Bounds of the Kingdom of Darkneſs.

There are two Things, which, in ſpeaking to this Subject, I would beg leave to recommend to your ſerious Conſideration:

Firſt,

Firſt, The ſeveral Temptations which Men lie under to liſten to ſuch Inſtructors as the Text refers to.

Secondly, The great Danger there is in liſtening to them.

It is one Step towards Security to ſee the Dangers we are expoſed to: For, when we know the weak Places, which are leaſt able to ſupport themſelves againſt the Enemy's Strength, we ſhall double our Diligence to guard againſt any Surprize from thoſe Parts. It will be of great Service to us therefore to know the Weakneſſes of our own Minds, to underſtand the Prejudices and Paſſions which conſpire together to deliver us up as a Prey to thoſe who lie in wait for our Ruin. This, if any thing, will enable us to reſcue ourſelves, by arming us with Reſolution to withſtand the Temptations which we are acquainted with beforehand. Infidelity has no Rewards or Puniſhments to beſtow: It affords at beſt but a very hopeleſs and comfortleſs Proſpect: Which would make a conſidering Man wonder whence the Temptations to it ſhould ariſe, and what ſhould give that Keenneſs which appears in the Paſſion with which ſome Men maintain and propagate it. Wicked and profligate

Men indeed are under ſome Temptation from Self-Intereſt to wiſh well to the Cauſe of Infidelity, in oppoſition to both Natural and Revealed Religion; becauſe it ſets them free from the Fears of Futurity, and delivers them from the many uneaſy Thoughts that attend them in all their vicious Pleaſures and Enjoyments. To live at once under the Dominion of our Paſſions and the Rebuke of our Minds, to be perpetually doing what we are perpetually condemning, is of all others the moſt wretched Condition: And it is no Wonder that any Man ſhould ſtrive to be delivered from it, or that thoſe, who reſolve to enjoy the Pleaſure of Sin here, ſhould wiſh to be delivered from the Fear of Puniſhment hereafter. This then is a very great Temptation to Men to hope that all their Fears are falſe and ill-grounded; and that Religion, from whence they flow, is nothing but the Cunning of wiſe Men, and the Simplicity of weak ones. Since therefore the Fears and Apprehenſions of Guilt are ſuch ſtrong Motives to Infidelity, the Innocence of the Heart is abſolutely neceſſary to preſerve the Freedom of the Mind: Which, if duly weighed, is a good Reaſon why a Man, as long as he finds himſelf

himſelf ſwayed by Appetite and the Pleaſures of Vice, ſhould ſuſpect his own Judgment in a Matter where his Reaſon is ſo abſolutely chained down by Paſſion and Intereſt, and diſabled from exerting itſelf to do its proper Work and Office.

Conſider too; In the moſt unhappy Circumſtances of Sin and Guilt, Religion opens to us a much ſafer and more certain Retreat, than Infidelity can poſſibly afford, and will more effectually extinguiſh the Fears and Torments we labour under, and reſtore the long-forgotten Peace and Tranquillity of the Mind: For, after all the Pains we can take with ourſelves to cloſe up our Minds, and to ſhut out the Belief of a ſuperior overruling Power, and of a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, we cannot be ſecure of enjoying long even the Comfort we propoſe to ourſelves from it in this Life. We may not always have Strength enough to ſubdue natural Senſe and Reaſon. Any ſudden Shock, either in our Health or in our Fortune, will diſperſe our animal Spirits, and all the gay Imaginations which attend them, and give us up once again to the cruel Torments of cool Thought and Reflection. Then will our Fears rally their Forces, and

return upon us with double Strength: Hell and Damnation will conſtantly play before our Eyes, and not ſuffer the leaſt Glimpſe of Comfort to enter, nor leave us Courage to repent of our Sins, or to fly to our laſt and only Hope, the Mercy of God. To the Truth of what I ſay, witneſs the lateſt and the bittereſt Hours of dying Sinners! Hours of Woe and Deſpair! in which the Soul, conſcious of its own Deſerts, anticipates the Pains of Hell, and ſuffers the very Torments of the Damned! in which it feels the Worm which never dies beginning to gnaw, and lies expiring amidſt the Terrors of Guilt, without Power either to think of God, or to forget Him! So that all that Sinners get by forming to themſelves Reſolutions of Unbelief (for that I take to be the true Caſe of ſuch Unbelievers as we are now ſpeaking of) is to render their Caſe more deſperate; to cut off all Retreat to the Mercy of God, when the Day of their Diſtreſs overtakes them; and to lay up in ſtore for themſelves a double Portion of Miſery, both in this Life and that which is to come.

Since then even the Hopes which Sinners conceive from Unbelief in this World, that they ſhall undiſturbedly enjoy the Pleaſures

of

of Vice without ſuffering under the Rebukes of their own Minds, are ſo very uncertain, ſo liable to be diſſipated by every croſs Accident of Life; ſince they cannot alter their Condition, except for the worſe, in the Life to come; it muſt needs be allowed that Sinners make a very ill Choice for themſelves, when they ſacrifice the Powers of the Mind to the Paſſions of the Heart. As long as Men retain a Senſe of God and Religion upon their Minds, there is great Hope that ſome Time or other Reaſon will prevail, and extricate the Man from the Miſery of Sin. Good Principles are the Seeds of good Actions: And, though the Seed may be buried under much Rubbiſh, yet, as long as there is Life in it, there is a reaſonable Expectation of ſeeing Fruit from it ſome time or other: But, when Reaſon and Underſtanding are depraved, and as far corrupted as the very Paſſions of the Heart; when thus *the Blind leads the Blind*, what elſe can we expect, but that *both fall into the Ditch?*

But Vice is not the only Root from which Infidelity ſprings; nor are all, who profeſs themſelves Unbelievers, to be charged with uncommon Degrees of Wickedneſs. Happy

were it for Mankind, were there but one Temptation to one Vice! Common Diligence might then ſecure the ſingle Paſs againſt the Enemy; whereas now, whilſt we guard the moſt ſuſpected Place, the ſtrongeſt often falls into his Hands: And thus it ſometimes happens in the Caſe before us, that, whilſt we act with a Superiority to all the Vanities of the World, to all the Allurements and Temptations of bodily Pleaſure, Reaſon itſelf is betrayed by the Vanity of our Hearts, and ſinks under the Pride and Affectation of Knowledge. To know all that can be attained to by our utmoſt Diligence and Sagacity, to ſearch into the hidden Cauſes of Things, to examine the Truth and Reality of our Knowledge, is an Ambition worthy of a rational Soul. But all Kinds of laudable Ambition grow to be vicious and deſpicable, when, inſtead of purſuing the real Good, which is the true Object, they ſeek only to make a Shew and an Appearance of it. Thus it is that Ambition for Virtue produces Hypocriſy; Ambition for Courage, empty Boaſtings and unreaſonable Reſentments; and, by the ſame Rule, Ambition for Learning and Knowledge produces Pedantry and Paradoxes: For he who would deſire to

appear

appear to know more than other Men, is ready to contradict the Senſe and Reaſon of all Men; for the ſame Cauſe that he who is deſirous to be thought to have more Courage than others is ready to quarrel with every Man he meets. And this is a Temptation to which many daily ſacrifice the Innocence and Integrity of their Minds, whilſt they mean little elſe by the Singularity of their Opinions, than to recommend themſelves to the World as Perſons of more than ordinary Diſcernment. That this is no unfair Account of the Conduct of ſome Unbelievers, will appear by obſerving the very different, but equally natural, Workings of the Mind in theſe two different States of it; whilſt it ſeeks real Knowledge and Truth, and whilſt it aims only at the Credit and Reputation of Wiſdom: And this will help us likewiſe in examining ourſelves, and in judging whether we act with thoſe impartial Views and Regards to Truth, that all rational Men ought to do.

He who ſits down to examine Truth, and ſearch after real Knowledge, will equally ſift all his Opinions; will reject none, that he has been long poſſeſſed of, without good Reaſon; will admit no new ones without ſufficient

ſufficient Authority and Weight of Argument to ſupport them. Wherever he diſcovers Truth, he gains the Satisfaction he aimed at: His Mind acquieſces in it: Nor is he diſappointed in the Event of his Labour and Study, when he finds himſelf at laſt in the ſame Opinion with the reſt of the World; with this only Difference, that his Perſuaſion is the Effect of Reaſon, theirs perhaps of Prejudice and Cuſtom; which is a Difference that affords much inward Satisfaction and Peace of Mind, but little or no outward Glory, or Credit of Wiſdom and Underſtanding.

In the other Caſe, when Men aim at being thought wiſer and more knowing than others, and labour only to poſſeſs the World with an Opinion of their Sagacity, they can have no Satisfaction in diſcovering the Truth and Reaſonableneſs of any Opinion that is commonly received in the World: For how will they appear wiſer than other Men by profeſſing to believe what other Men believe as well as they? They can no otherwiſe ſatisfy their Ambition, than by differing from the common Senſe and Reaſon of Mankind; and the whole Bent of their Mind is to ſupport

ſuch

ſuch their Difference with plauſible Reaſon and Argument. This indeed carries with it a great Appearance of Wiſdom; for to ſhew all the World to be in an Error is not the Work of every Day, or of every Man. And how can you expect that ſuch vain Creatures ſhould ſo far loſe ſight of the End they propoſe, as to give their Conſent to any well-received Truth, when the very Paſſion which has Poſſeſſion of their Soul makes it neceſſary for them to treat all ſuch Truths with Diſdain and Contempt? Why would you have them ſo abſurd, as to examine the Reaſonableneſs of any known Opinion, when to find it reaſonable would be the Ruin and Deſtruction of all their Glory, and ſet them only upon a Level with the reſt of Mankind? Give them any thing that looks like a new Diſcovery, and they will ſtruggle hard with their Reaſon, but they will find ſomething to ſay in defence of it: But threadbare Truth they hate to be ſeen in; it is a Dreſs their Vanity cannot ſubmit to. This ſort of Vanity it is, which has furniſhed the World with Sceptics in every Science, and in Religion above all others. Other Sciences are the Attainments of but a ſmall Part of Mankind; and to triumph

over their Errors is at beſt but a limited Glory: Whereas, Religion being the general Perſuaſion of the World, to conquer in this Cauſe looks like univerſal Monarchy, and ſeems to be the very Empire of Wiſdom and Knowledge, riſing out of the Ruins of univerſal Ignorance and Superſtition. And thus it comes to paſs, that weak and vain Men often make profeſſion of greater Infidelity than in truth they are guilty of, and are content to give the lye to their own Reaſon, as well as that of all Mankind, rather than to loſe the Credit of differing from the reſt of the World.

Conſider this Caſe well, and judge of it from your own Experience and Obſervation. If the Inſtances which meet you every Day do not bear witneſs to the Truth of what I ſay, believe me not: But, if they do, let the Folly of others teach you ſo much Wiſdom, as not to give up your Reaſon and Underſtanding, your Hopes here and for ever, to a ſenſeleſs, unprofitable Vanity. Try your own Heart by this Rule; and, if ever you have offended againſt the Majeſty of Heaven by endeavouring to expoſe his ſacred Truths, aſk yourſelf this ſerious Queſtion, Whether you did not betray your Religion

in compliment to yourſelf, to gain the Credit of being a very diſcerning Man, or ſet forth your own Ability? If you did, remember, before it is too late, that for all theſe Things your offended God will call you into Judgment.

There is one Sort of Temptation more which I ſhall mention, and that but briefly: It is a kind of falſe Shame, which often, in young People eſpecially, prevails over the Fear of God and the Senſe of Religion. When they find what Honour is often done to Unbelievers, and how well they are received, whilſt Religion ſuffers under the hard Names of Ignorance and Superſtition, they grow aſhamed of their Profeſſion; and, if not really, yet affectedly they put on the faſhionable Air of Diſregard to every thing that is ſerious. By degrees they harden, till, from being aſhamed to own God, they grow bold enough to deny him, encouraged by Example and by Precept to brave his utmoſt Vengeance.

Theſe are the moſt common Temptations which betray Men into the Company and Friendſhip of Unbelievers, *thoſe Inſtructors which cauſe to err from the Words of Knowledge*. How much it concerns you to guard againſt

againſt theſe Temptations will appear, in the Second Place, when we conſider the Danger there is in liſtening to theſe Inſtructors.

And here I can only ſpeak to ſuch as have not yet made ſhipwreck of Reaſon and Conſcience: For, though the hardened Unbelievers are in the greateſt Danger, yet they are fartheſt removed from the Power of Conviction: Nor will they perceive what Miſeries they lay up in ſtore for themſelves, till they come to take poſſeſſion of their ſad Inheritance; and then they will have but too much Time, and too many Calls, to reflect upon the wretched Choice they made. But, as for you, who have not yet renounced your God and your Redeemer; you eſpecially, whoſe eaſy Fortunes, or flouriſhing Years, expoſe you to the Temptations of crafty Sinners; give me leave to expoſtulate this Caſe with all the Seriouſneſs the Subject requires: And ſurely this is a ſerious Matter, and deſerves your cooleſt Thoughts and Reflections. It is an unpardonable Folly and inexcuſable Perverſeneſs for Men to forſake Religion out of Vanity and Oſtentation; as if Irreligion were a Mark of Honour, and a noble Diſtinction from the reſt of Mankind. To fear, where there is

true

true Cauſe of Fear, where our Souls and our eternal Happineſs are at ſtake, is not below the Dignity of a Man. To out-brave God and his Juſtice is a ſad Inſtance of Courage: And Men, who ſin through ſuch ridiculous Vanity, may value themſelves for their Bravery in deſpiſing the Fears, and their Wiſdom in deriding the Weakneſs of Religion, and expoſing the Faith and Credulity of Men; but perhaps a little Time, a very little Time, may ſhew them what learned Pains they take to diſpute themſelves into Hell. We muſt anſwer for the Vanity of our Reaſoning, as well as for the Vanity of our Actions: And, if we take Pains to invent vain Reaſoning to oppoſe to the plain Evidences that God has afforded us of his Being and Power, and to undermine the Proofs and Authorities upon which Religion ſtands, we may be ſure we ſhall not go unpuniſhed for ſo notable an Abuſe of ſo rich a Talent entruſted with us by God: Much more, if we debaſe Reaſon, which was given us to be the governing Principle of our Lives, and force it to ſubmit and follow our unruly Paſſions and Affections, much more ſhall we be liable to the Vengeance of Heaven.

How

How far Men of irreligious Lives and Principles are chargeable with theſe Abuſes, they can beſt inform themſelves: And ſurely the Hopes of Immortality, and Fears of Hell, ſhould compoſe them to ſo much Seriouſneſs, as to aſk themſelves that Queſtion. But, after all, if, upon a View of the whole Matter, and of the Evidences that Reaſon and Revelation afford us of a future State, they will not ſubmit to the Doctrines and Precepts of Religion, they muſt be left to the Event for a fuller Demonſtration of their Folly. If there be really a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, both the Puniſhments and the Rewards muſt be very inconſiderable indeed not to make it worth a Man's while to live up to the Conditions of being happy. So that, when the Diſpute is concerning the Folly of Irreligion, we may remit a great deal of the Truth in allowing the Puniſhment to be leſs than really it is, and the Argument will ſtill have Force enough to convince Irreligion of Folly. The Puniſhment in all Caſes muſt exceed the Advantage the Offender will reap by tranſgreſſing the Law; or elſe, as much as the Gain to be reaped by breaking the Law exceeds the Puniſhment annexed to

the

the Breach, ſo much Encouragement there will be for Men to offend. Therefore we may be ſure that God, who is the wiſeſt of Lawgivers, has taken ſuch Care to guard his Laws and Statutes, that there ſhall be no Encouragement for Offenders. Upon which Account we may aſſure ourſelves, that, let the Pleaſures and Advantages of Sin and Irreligion be ever ſo numerous or great, the Puniſhment ſhall ſtill be greater: So that Men ſhall ſay, when they are to pay the Price of their Sins, they have ſinned exceeding fooliſhly. Wicked Men ſpend their Time to no purpoſe in diſputing againſt the Puniſhments of Sin, which are revealed to us; I mean, againſt the Nature of them: For, if they once allow that Sin and Wickedneſs ſhall be puniſhed, their own Reaſon will inform them that the Puniſhment muſt at leaſt be ſo great, as to make it worth a Man's while to abſtain from Sin. So that all Sinners muſt be guilty of Folly in chuſing the Sin with the Puniſhment, when the Puniſhment muſt of Neceſſity exceed the Advantage of ſinning.

Theſe are the eaſieſt Terms that Sinners can flatter themſelves with; and yet, even upon this View, the Pleaſures of Sin will

prove a dear Bargain. But ſhould the Puniſhments of another Life be, what we have but too much Reaſon to fear they will be, what Words can then expreſs the Folly of Sin? Short are your Days in this World, and ſoon they ſhall expire: And ſhould Religion at laſt prove a mere Deceit, we know the worſt of it; it is an Error for which we cannot ſuffer after Death: Nor will the Infidels there have the Pleaſure to reproach us with our Miſtake; they and we, in equal Reſt, ſhall ſleep the Sleep of Death. But ſhould our Hopes, and their Fears, prove true; ſhould they be ſo unhappy, as not to die for ever; which miſerable Hope is the only Comfort that Infidelity affords; what Pains and Torments muſt they then undergo? Could I repreſent to you the different States of good and bad Men: Could I give you the Proſpect which the bleſſed Martyr St. *Stephen* had, and ſhew you the bleſſed Jeſus at the right Hand of God, ſurrounded with Angels, and *the Spirits of juſt Men made perfect:* Could I open your Ears to hear the never-ceaſing Hymns of Praiſe, which the Bleſſed above *ſing to Him that was, and is, and is to come; to the Lamb that was ſlain, but liveth for ever:*

Could

Could I lead you through the unbounded Regions of eternal Day, and ſhew the mutual and ever-blooming Joys of Saints who are at reſt from their Labour, and live for ever in the Preſence of God! Or, could I change the Scene, and unbar the iron Gates of Hell, and carry you, through ſolid Darkneſs, to *the Fire that never goes out*, and to *the Worm that never dies:* Could I ſhew you the apoſtate Angels faſt bound in eternal Chains, or the Souls of wicked Men overwhelmed with Torment and Deſpair: Could I open your Ears to hear the Deep itſelf groan with the continual Cries of Miſery; Cries which can never reach the Throne of Mercy, but return in ſad Echoes, and add even to the very Horrors of Hell! Could I thus ſet before you the different Ends of Religion and Infidelity, you would want no other Proof to convince you that nothing can recompenſe the Hazard Men run of being for ever miſerable through Unbelief. But, though neither the Tongues of Men nor of Angels can expreſs the Joys of Heaven, or deſcribe the Pains of Hell; yet, if there be any Truth in Religion, theſe Things are certain, and near at hand.

Conſider therefore with yourſelves, that when you judge of Religion, ſomething more depends upon your Choice, than the Credit of your Judgment, or the Opinion of the World. For God's ſake! think Religion at leaſt ſo ſerious a Thing, as to deſerve your cooleſt Thoughts, and not fit to be determined in your Hours of Gaiety and Leiſure, or in the accidental Converſation of public Places. Truſt yourſelf with yourſelf; retreat from the Influence of diſſolute Companions; and take the Advice of the holy Pſalmiſt: *Stand in awe, and ſin not: Commune with your own Heart, and in your Chamber, and be ſtill.*

DISCOURSE II.

LUKE xvi. 31.

And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the Dead.

IT ſometimes happens in Matters of Reaſon, as it often does in Objects of Senſe: That which at firſt Appearance makes a fair Shew, upon Examination proves to be worthleſs, and of no Eſteem. Some Fruits, which allure the Eye moſt, can the leaſt bear the Teſt of the Palate: They may be admired by the Traveller, who rides haſtily by, and only ſees them at a diſtance; but, when they are ſerved up at the Table, the Taſte ſoon rectifies the Miſtake of the Eyes. So likewiſe, in Matters of Reaſon:

Some Arguments ſtrike the Fancy immediately, and take the Judgment captive, before it has Time fairly to examine the Merits of the Cauſe; and yet, when the Vigour of the firſt Onſet is over, and Time is given for Reflection, the Demonſtration dwindles into nothing, and leaves a Man admiring that he was ſo eaſily deceived by ſo palpable a Cheat. And this ſeems to be the Caſe of the Argument in which the Text is concerned: Who would not think that the Coming of one from the Dead would effectually convince an Unbeliever? Or, were we for ourſelves to deſire the laſt Evidence for a future State, what more ſhould we deſire, than to ſee one come from the Dead; one of our old Acquaintance; and to hear from him the Relation of what happened to him after Death, and of what he had ſeen and experienced in the other World? And yet this Evidence, our Saviour tells us, would have no Effect upon an Unbeliever: He, who can hold out againſt the Evidence that God has already given that he will one Day judge the World in Righteouſneſs, *would not be perſuaded, though one roſe from the Dead.*

Our

Our Saviour does not deny the Coming of one from the Dead to be an Evidence of a future State; nor yet, allowing it to be an Evidence, does he determine of what Weight and Authority it is, or ought to be. This only he affirms; That, let the Authority of it be what it will, they who will not ſubmit to the Authority of a divine Revelation, will not ſubmit to this: The Reaſon of which Judgment may appear from the following Conſiderations:

Firſt, If the Evidence of Revelation be in itſelf greater and more convincing than the Evidence given by one from the Dead can poſſibly be, then there is no Reaſon to expect that he who rejects the greater ſhould ſubmit to the leſs Authority.

Secondly, If the Objections which the Unbeliever makes uſe of againſt the Authority of Revelation, lie ſtronger againſt the Authority of one coming from the Dead, it is not to be ſuppoſed, that he will paſs over that in one Caſe, which he ſo mightily ſtumbles at in the other. Or,

Thirdly, If Unbelief be the Effect of a vitiated and corrupted Mind, which hates to be reformed; which rejects the Evidence, becauſe it will not admit the Doctrine, not the

Doctrine, becauſe it cannot admit the Evidence; in this Caſe all Proofs will be alike, and it will be loſt Labour to ply ſuch a Man with Reaſon or new Evidence, ſince it is not want of Reaſon or Evidence that makes him an Unbeliever. And it is upon this Caſe chiefly that our Saviour grounds his Judgment in the Text.

Firſt then, Let us conſider, whether the Evidence upon which Revelation ſtands be in itſelf greater or more convincing, than the Evidence of one coming from the Dead can be: If it is, we muſt ſubſcribe to our Saviour's Judgment; That he *who will not hear Moſes and the Prophets*, or Chriſt and his Apoſtles, *would not be perſuaded, though one roſe from the Dead.* Whatever a dead Man, who appears to you, may tell you concerning another World, all the Reaſon you can have to believe him is, becauſe you ſuppoſe him to come from the other World, and to relate Things which he has ſeen and known: So that his Authority is no more than barely the Authority of a Traveller, who relates Things of the Countries through which he has paſſed. And how will it appear to you, that one from the Dead cannot poſſibly deceive you? As he is a Man, I

am ſure you have Reaſon to miſtruſt him; and what Reaſon you have to rely on him as a dead Man, I know not. Poſſibly you may think that the very Seeing of one come from the Dead will of itſelf prove the great Point of all, the Reality of a future State. But are you ſure it is impoſſible for any Being of the other World to perſonate a dead Man, and to appear to you in the Shape and Figure of one you formerly knew? Surely, it is one Thing to prove that there is another World, and Beings belonging to it; and another to prove a future State, that is, a World in which dead Men ſhall live.

Our Saviour's Reſurrection was ſomething more than merely the Apparition of a dead Man: He foretold the Time and Circumſtances of his Reſurrection, and put the Proof of his Miſſion and Doctrine upon the Performance of this great Wonder: So that by this means his Reſurrection became a direct Proof of this, That the Doctrine he taught was the Doctrine of Him who has Power to raiſe the Dead: And ſince Part of his Doctrine is, That the Dead ſhall be raiſed; we are thus far certain, that He, who has Power to raiſe the Dead, has

aſſured

aſſured us that the Dead ſhall be raiſed: For no one can foretell the Time and Circumſtances of a dead Man's riſing to Life, who has not the Power, or is not commiſſioned by Him who has the Power, of Life and Death. So that the Authority of our Saviour's Word after his Reſurrection was not barely the Authority of one coming from the Dead, but it was the Authority of Him who has Power to raiſe the Dead; which Authority we know belongs not to Man, and therefore is greater than the Authority of any Man either from the Dead or the Living. So that our Saviour's Reſurrection proves a Commiſſion from the Higheſt Power to teach the World; which cannot be proved merely from the Appearance of one from the Dead. And here lies the true Difference between the Reſurrection of Chriſt, and the Reſurrection of thoſe whom our Saviour himſelf raiſed from the Dead. We have been aſked, why *Lazarus* and the reſt did not publiſh their Knowledge of the other World? One plain Anſwer is, they were not commiſſioned ſo to do: Their Reſurrection was a Proof of his Power and Commiſſion, who raiſed them to Life, but of their own Power and Commiſſion

miſſion it was no Proof: They were merely paſſive in their Reſurrection, and brought no more Authority from the Grave, than they carried to it; and therefore had no Right to ſet up for Teachers.

Then, as to the Reality of our Saviour's Reſurrection, there was Warning given to expect it; which of itſelf is a great Evidence of ſincere Dealing. Men do not uſe to give public Notice of the Cheats they intend to play; or, if ever they have, the Succeſs has been anſwerable to the Management, and yielded nothing but Shame and Confuſion to the Contrivers. And, after his Reſurrection, his Stay upon Earth was ſo long, as to give full Satisfaction, to all concerned, of the Truth and Reality of what they ſaw. At his firſt Appearance, the Diſciples were in the ſame Caſe with others who think they ſee Spectres and Apparitions; that is, they were confounded and amazed, and did not know well what they ſaw: And, had not the Frequency of our Saviour's Appearances made them familiar to them, ſo that they bore the Sight of him with the ſame Sedateneſs of Mind as they did in his Life-time, and conſequently had all the neceſſary Qualifications to judge rightly concerning what they heard

or

or ſaw; had it not been for this, I ſay, their Evidence in this Caſe would not have been equal to the Weight of thoſe Truths it is to ſupport. And farther, ſince this Appearance was in conſequence of the Prediction he made of his own Reſurrection, there is no room to doubt that it was a true and proper Reſurrection of his Body: For it is much eaſier to imagine that he ſhould come to Life, and fulfil his Prediction, than that he ſhould, being really dead, contrive and execute any thing that ſhould ſeem to fulfil it.

Poſſibly this may be allowed, and yet not give Satisfaction in this Matter: For it is not, you will ſay, that the Reſurrection of our Saviour is ſuch a Work as is not proper to ſatisfy all Doubts, that makes you deſire to ſee one from the Dead; but it is, that you would willingly be ſatisfied by your own Eyes, and not depend upon the Credit of another for a Thing of this Nature: Had you been in the Place of the Apoſtles, and ſeen our Lord come from the Grave, that then you would not have deſired to have ſeen any body elſe; but now you think you might find that Conviction in ſeeing one come from the Dead yourſelf, which you

cannot

cannot find in the Reports of thoſe who pretend to have ſeen one.

Let us conſider this Caſe then; Whether he who believes upon the Credit of a private Apparition to himſelf, believes upon a ſurer Evidence, than he who receives the Goſpel Account upon that Evidence on which it at preſent ſtands. I will not deny but that a Man's Fancy may be more powerfully wrought on, not only by ſeeing, but even by ſuppoſing that he ſees, one from the Dead: But this is ſo far from being an Advantage, that in truth it is quite otherwiſe; for, the more Work Things of this Nature find for the Imagination, the leſs Room do they leave for the Judgment to exerciſe itſelf in. Our Senſes at all times are liable to be impoſed on, but never more than when we are in a Fright or Surprize. In ſuch Caſes it is common to overlook our Friends, and not to know who was with us, or who not: And the very Surprize, that would neceſſarily attend upon ſeeing one come from the Dead, would be a great Reaſon for us to ſuſpect afterwards the Report our Senſes made of what they had ſeen. And this was indeed the Caſe of thoſe who ſaw our Saviour upon his

his firſt Appearance: Nor could any thing have cured this, but his ſtaying with them ſo long as he did; ſo that at laſt they were able to ſee him without being diſturbed, or ſuffering any Alteration in their uſual Temper: And this qualified them to judge for themſelves, and report to others with Authority what they ſaw. So that the Circumſtances of our Saviour's Reſurrection were ſuch as admitted a due Teſtimony; whereas it is very much to be doubted, whether he who ſees one come from the Dead be capable to give himſelf Satisfaction afterwards, either as to what he ſaw, or what he heard. And judge you, whether you would chuſe to believe the concurring Teſtimony of many Perſons in their right Senſes, ſo well qualified to judge, or rely upon yourſelf, at a Time when you are hardly Maſter of your Senſes.

But farther; Suppoſe you could converſe with a Man from the Dead with the ſame Temper and Calmneſs, that you do with one of your Friends or Acquaintance; what would be the Conſequence? You would probably reſt aſſured that you had ſeen a Man from the Dead, and perhaps be more ſatisfied of this, than at preſent you are that

the Diſciples ſaw Chriſt after his Death. Allowing this, what follows? The Queſtion is not, whether he that ſees a Man come from the Dead, may be ſure he ſees a Man come from the Dead; but whether he has a better Foundation for Faith and Religion, than the preſent Revelation affords? This is what our Saviour affirms: *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the Dead.* The ſame Reaſons, that move you to reject the Authority of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, would move you to reject the Authority of your new Acquaintance from the Dead: Which will appear by conſidering,

Secondly, That the Objections which Unbelievers urge againſt the Authority of Revelation, will lie ſtronger againſt the Authority of one coming from the Dead: For, firſt, as to the Nature of this Sort of Evidence, if it be any Evidence at all, it is a Revelation: And therefore whatever has been ſaid againſt the Authority of Revelation will be applicable to this Kind of it: And, conſequently, thoſe who, upon the foot of Natural Religion, ſtand out againſt the Doctrine of the Goſpel, would much more

more ſtand out againſt the Authority of one coming from the Dead. And whether it would weigh more with the Atheiſt, let any one conſider: For no Revelation can weigh with him; for the Being of God, which he diſbelieves, is ſupported with greater Arguments, and greater Works, than any Revelation can be: And therefore, ſtanding out againſt the Evidence of all Nature, ſpeaking in the wonderful Works of the Creation, he can never reaſonably ſubmit to a leſs Evidence. Let then one from the Dead appear to him; and he will, and certainly may, as eaſily account for one dead Man's recovering Life and Motion, as he does for the Life and Motion of ſo many Men, whom he ſees every Day. Is it not as hard, do you think, to make a Man at firſt, and breathe into him the Breath of Life, as it is to make him up again, after he has once been dead? And therefore he that can ſatisfy himſelf as to the firſt, need not be troubled about the laſt. For I am ſure the Appearance of a dead Man could never teach the Atheiſt, upon his own Principles, to reaſon himſelf into the Belief of a Deity, though poſſibly it might ſcare him into it: Which is too low a

Deſign

Deſign for the Providence of God to be concerned in, and therefore can never be a Reaſon for his giving this ſort of Evidence to Mankind.

But farther; Let us ſuppoſe a Man free from all theſe Prejudices, and then ſee what we can make of this Evidence. If a dead Man ſhould come to you, you muſt ſuppoſe either that he ſpeaks from himſelf, and that his Errand to you is the Effect of his own private Affection for you, or that he comes by Commiſſion and Authority from God. As to the firſt Caſe, you have but the Word of a Man for all you hear: And how will you prove that a dead Man is incapable of practiſing a Cheat upon you? Or, allowing the Appearance to be real, and the Deſign honeſt, do you think every dead Man knows the Counſels of God, and his Will with reſpect to his Creatures here on Earth? If you do not think this, and I cannot ſee poſſibly how you ſhould think it, what Uſe will you make of this kind of Revelation? Should he tell you that the Chriſtian Faith is the true Faith, the Way to Heaven and Happineſs, and that God will reward all true Believers; you would have much leſs Reaſon to believe him,

than now you have to believe Chriſt and his Apoſtles: And therefore, if you reject Chriſt and his Apoſtles, neither can this new Evidence prevail with you: For, ſuppoſe that a Man from the Dead ſhould preſume to teach you a new Religion, to inſtruct you in new Rites and Ceremonies, to inſtitute new Sacrifices and Oblations; would you think yourſelf warranted by a ſufficient Authority to do and practiſe as he taught you? Would you not require better Evidence of his knowing the Will of God, than merely ſeeing him come from the Dead? And yet this is the Caſe: Should an Unbeliever receive the Goſpel upon ſuch Evidence, he receives a new Religion; for to an Unbeliever it is new, and the whole Weight of his Faith muſt reſt upon the Credit and Authority of this Man from the Dead; and it would be as reaſonable for an Unbeliever to receive a perfectly new Doctrine upon this Authority, as to receive an old one, which he before diſbelieved. But, on the other ſide, ſhould you ſuppoſe this Man to come by the particular Order and Appointment of God, and conſequently that what he ſays is the Word and Command of God; you muſt then be prepared

pared to anſwer ſuch Objections, as you are now ready to make againſt the Miſſion and Authority of Chriſt and his Apoſtles. Firſt then we aſk, how this Commiſſion appears? If you ſay, becauſe he comes from the Dead, we cannot reſt here; becauſe it is not ſelf-evident, that all who come from the Dead are inſpired: And yet farther than this you cannot go; for it is not ſuppoſed that your Man from the Dead works Miracles. The Miſſion of Chriſt we prove by Prophecies, and their Completion; by the Signs and Wonders he wrought by the Hand of God; by his Reſurrection, which includes both Kinds, being in itſelf a great Miracle, and likewiſe the Completion of a Prophecy: Which Circumſtance, as was before obſerved, adds great Weight to his Authority. Beſides, we are often urged to ſhew, that the Authors of our Religion were free from Intereſt and Deſign, and that our Faith is not founded in the Politics of cunning and artificial Men; and we muſt deſire you to do the ſame good Office for the Prophet who comes from the Dead. As for ourſelves, we appeal to the known Hiſtory of thoſe who were Founders of our Religion: There you may find them *perſecuted, afflicted, and tor-*

mented: Their Gain was Miſery; their Recompence, Hatred from the World; and their End, in the Eyes of Men, was Deſtruction. Theſe are the Proofs of their worldly Cunning and Policy, and the Reſults of their deep-laid Deſigns. But how will you ſupport the ſuſpected Credit of one from the Dead? He comes, and tells his Story, goes off, and there is an end of him: And unleſs you can prove there are no evil Spirits, or no evil Men dead, you cannot clear him from the Suſpicion, nor fathom the Depth of his Deſign: He appears to you like the Wind, the Sound of which you hear; but whence it comes, or whither it goes, you know not. If you will liſten to the Evidences of the Goſpel, we will ſhew you in whom we have believed; we will ſhew you Men like ourſelves, armed with the Power of God, with Innocence of Life, with Patience in all manner of Affliction, and at laſt ſealing with their Blood the Truth of their Miſſion. But, if you cannot digeſt this Evidence, in vain do you call out for Help from the other World; for neither *would you be perſuaded, though one roſe from the Dead.* And this will farther appear,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, By conſidering the Temper of Infidelity: For where Unbelief proceeds, as generally it does, from a vitiated and corrupted Mind, which hates to be reformed; which rejects the Evidence, becauſe it will not admit the Doctrine, not the Doctrine, becauſe it cannot admit the Evidence; in this Caſe all Proofs will be alike, and it will be loſt Labour to ply ſuch a Man with Reaſon or new Evidence, ſince it is not Want of Reaſon or Evidence that makes him an Unbeliever. And this Caſe chiefly our Saviour ſeems to have in his View; for the Requeſt to *Abraham* to ſend one from the Dead was made in behalf of Men who lived wantonly and luxuriouſly; who, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, *had not God in all their Thoughts.* The rich Man in Torment could think of no better Expedient to reſcue his Brethren from the Danger they were in of coming into the ſame Condition with himſelf, than ſending one from the Dead to admoniſh them, and to give them a faithful Account how Matters ſtood there, and how it fared with him. To which *Abraham* anſwers, that they had already ſufficient Evidence of theſe Things; that they wanted no Means of Knowledge, if they would make uſe of thoſe they had:

They have Moſes and the Prophets, let them hear them. But ſtill he inſiſts, *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.* Then follows the Text, which is the laſt Reſolution of this Caſe, *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the Dead.* And indeed where Infidelity is the Effect of ſuch profligate Wickedneſs, it deſerves not ſo much Regard from God, as that he ſhould condeſcend to make particular Applications to it by new Lights and Evidences: And ſhould he do it, there is Reaſon to ſuſpect it would be ineffectual. We ſee, in the ordinary Courſe of Providence, many Judgments beſtowed upon Sinners to reclaim and amend them; but they harden themſelves againſt them; ſo that their laſt State is worſe than their firſt. I will not anſwer for the Courage of Sinners, how well they would bear the Sight of one from the Dead; nay, I am apt to imagine it would ſtrangely terrify and amaze them. But to be frightened and to be perſuaded are two things: Nature would recover the Fright, and Sin would recover Strength, and the great Fright might come to be matter of Ridicule. How eaſy would it be, when the Fright was over,

to

to compare this Event with the many ridiculous Stories we have of Apparitions, and to come at length to miſtruſt our own Senſes, and to conclude that we were miſled, like a Man in a dark Night who follows an *Ignis fatuus?* And, what is worſe, when the Infidel had once conquered his own Fears, and got looſe again from the Thoughts of Religion, he would then conclude, that all Religion is made up of that Fear which he felt himſelf, which others cannot get rid of, though he ſo manfully and happily ſubdued it. You may think it perhaps impoſſible, that a Man ſhould not be convinced by ſuch an Appearance: The ſame I believe you would think of the Judgments which befel *Pharaoh*, that it is hardly poſſible any Man ſhould withſtand them; and yet you ſee he did: Nay, did not the Guards, who were Eye-witneſſes of our Saviour's Reſurrection; who ſaw the Angel that rolled away the Stone from the Mouth of the Sepulchre; who ſhook and trembled with Fear, and became as dead Men; did not they, after all this, receive Money to deny all they ſaw, and to give falſe Evidence againſt the Perſon they beheld coming from the Grave? So, you ſee, it is in the Nature of Man to with-

ſtand ſuch Evidences, where the Power of Sin is prevalent.

Beſides, there are many Sinners, who are not Infidels: They may believe *Moſes* and the Prophets, though they will not hear them, that is, obey them. Now ſhould one come from the Dead to theſe Men, the moſt they could do would be to believe him: But that does not imply their obeying him; for they believe *Moſes* and the Prophets, Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and yet obey not them; and why ſhould Obedience be the Conſequence of Belief in one Caſe more than another? There can be no greater Arguments for Obedience than the Goſpel affords; and therefore he who believes the Goſpel, and diſobeys it, is out of hope to be reformed by any other Evidence. So that, conſidering this Caſe with reſpect to all manner of Infidels or Sinners, there is Reaſon in our Saviour's Judgment; *If they will not hear Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the Dead.*

And hence perhaps we may learn the Reaſon, why this ſort of Intercourſe between the other World and this is ſo very rare and uncommon, becauſe it could ſerve no good End and Purpoſe; for God having already given

given a ſufficient Evidence of all Things which we are concerned to know, there is no room to expect or hope for ſuch kinds of Admonition. He ſent the greateſt Perſon of the other World to us, his own Son, and ſent him too from the Dead: He has come himſelf down to us in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works; And why he ſhould ſend a Man from the Dead to tell you, what is legible in the Book of Nature, what He, his Son, his Apoſtles and Prophets have already told you, you that can give the Reaſon, give it.

DISCOURSE III.

PSALM XIX. 12.

Who can underſtand his Errors? Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults.

THE only Method of coming to the diſtinct Knowledge of our Sins, and to a due Senſe of them, is Self-examination; and therefore it is, that you are ſo frequently exhorted to enter into yourſelves, to converſe with your own Hearts, and to ſearch out the Evil which is in them. But often it happens that this Method, after the ſincereſt and moſt laborious Inquiry, leaves Men under great Diſſatisfaction of Mind, and ſubject to the frequent Returns of Doubts and Miſgivings of Heart; leſt ſomething very bad may have eſcaped their Search, and,

for want of being expiated by Sorrow and Repentance, ſhould remain a Debt upon their Souls at the great Day of Account. As in temporal Concerns, Men often know, that by a long Courſe of Prodigality, and many expenſive Vanities, they have contracted a great Debt upon their Eſtates, and have brought themſelves to the very Brink of Poverty and Diſtreſs, and yet, when they try to think and conſider of their Condition, find themſelves utterly unable to ſtate their Accounts, or to ſet forth the Particulars of the Debt they labour under; but the more they endeavour to recollect, the more they are convinced that they are mere Strangers at home, and ignorant of their own Affairs: So in ſpiritual Concerns likewiſe, Men who have been long acquainted with Vice, and long Strangers to Thought and Reflection, when they come to be ſenſible of the Danger of their Condition, and to ſet themſelves ſeriouſly to repent, know in general that they have a heavy Weight of Sin and Guilt upon their Souls; but yet the Particulars, though many and heinous, which they are able to recollect and charge themſelves with diſtinctly, fall very ſhort of the Senſe they have of their Condition, and do by no means fill up

that which they know to be the Meaſure of their Iniquities. And hence it is, that after the moſt careful Examination of themſelves, and the moſt ſolemn Repentance for all their known Sins, they do not always enjoy that Peace and Tranquillity of Soul which they expected, and had promiſed themſelves, as the bleſſed Fruits of Contrition; but ſuffer extremely under uncertain Hopes and Fears, not being able to ſatisfy themſelves that their Repentance was perfect, which they know was formed upon a Knowledge of their Sins that was very imperfect.

The holy Pſalmiſt had this Senſe of his Condition, and felt how unable he was ſufficiently to acknowledge his own Guilt before God, when he broke forth into the Complaint with which the Text begins, *Who can underſtand his Errors?* or, as it runs in the Tranſlation which is more familiar to us, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth?* In this Diſtreſs his only Refuge was to the Mercy of God, confeſſing, with the greateſt Humility of Heart, that his Tranſgreſſions were not only more than he could bear, but even more than he could underſtand: *Cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults.* Whenever Men entertain Doubts of their own Sincerity and due Performance of religious

gious Acts, it is extremely difficult to reaſon with their Fears and Scruples, and to diſpoſſeſs them of the Miſapprehenſions they have of their own State and Condition. Such Suggeſtions as bring Eaſe and Comfort to their Minds come ſuſpected, as proceeding from their own or their Friends Partiality; and they are afraid to hope, leſt even to hope, in their deplorable Condition, ſhould prove to be Preſumption, and aſſuming to themſelves more than in Reaſon or Juſtice belongs to them. But when we can ſhew them Men of approved Virtue and Holineſs, whoſe Praiſe is in the Book of Life, who have ſtruggled with the ſame Fears, and waded through even the worſt of their Apprehenſions to the peaceful Fruits of Righteouſneſs; it helps to quicken both their Spirits and their Underſtanding, and at once to adminiſter Knowledge and Conſolation. And for this Reaſon we can never ſufficiently admire the Wiſdom of God, in ſetting before us the Examples of good Men in their loweſt and moſt imperfect State. Had they been ſhewn to us only in the brighteſt Part of their Character, Deſpair of attaining to their Perfection might incline us to give over the Purſuit, by throwing a Damp upon our beſt Reſolutions: But when

when we ſee them riſing to Virtue and Holineſs from the ſame wretched Condition which we are in, and labouring under the ſame Difficulties, the ſame Anxieties and Torments of Mind; when we ſee their very Souls convulſed with the Pangs of Repentance, and their Faith almoſt ſinking under the Doubtfulneſs of their Condition; when we hear them cry to God in the Words of Anguiſh, not knowing how to pray, or in what Terms to lament their Sins; when we ſee this Nakedneſs of their Souls, and find that they are like one of us, what ſecret Comfort muſt it give to an afflicted Spirit, what Support to a Mind oppreſſed with the Senſe of Guilt, to find in theſe great Examples, what heavenly Joy and Peace often ſpring from the loweſt Depths of Sorrow and Woe!

And there is indeed, with reſpect to the Comfort and Security of a Sinner, a great Difference between Arguments drawn from general Reaſonings and Reflections, and thoſe which are ſuggeſted from the Experience and Practice of holy Men. In the Caſe before us, if we conſider the Words of the Text without Regard had to the Perſon who ſpoke them, we may raiſe many Reflections from

from the great Variety of human Actions, and the complicated Nature of them, from the Short-ſightedneſs of the Underſtanding, and the Weakneſs and Imperfection of the Faculties, to ſhew how very hard it is, and almoſt impoſſible, for any one perfectly to underſtand his Errors: Whence might be deduced the Reaſonableneſs of the Petition, *Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults*; becauſe where we cannot in particular recollect, we can only in general lament, our Iniquities: Beyond this Probability we cannot go to determine the Method in which God will deal with Sinners. But take the Words as ſpoken by *David*, of the Sincerity of whoſe Repentance, and the Acceptance of it with God, we nothing doubt, and the Concluſions will be much fuller, and ſuch as cannot fail to refreſh the Soul of every languiſhing Penitent; for in this View the Words fairly afford us theſe two Propoſitions:

Firſt, That the Security and Efficacy of Repentance do not depend upon a particular Recollection of all our Errors.

Secondly, That for ſuch Errors as we cannot recollect, a general Confeſſion and Repentance are full and ſufficient.

Theſe

Theſe two Propoſitions contain the plain Doctrine of the Text; ſo plain, that I need not ſpend your Time in enlarging upon it. But that we may not miſtake in the Application of it to ourſelves, and hope for Forgiveneſs whilſt we are willingly ignorant of our Sins, and, to ſave the Trouble and Pain of Recollection, endeavour to cover them all under general Ejaculations and Petitions for Mercy; I beg your Patience, whilſt I ſet before you of what kind and nature the Sins are, which we may juſtly call our ſecret Sins, and for the Expiation of which a general Confeſſion and Repentance will be accepted.

And, firſt, we may reckon among our ſecret Sins thoſe which our Liturgy has taught us to aſk Repentance and Forgiveneſs for, under the general Names of Negligences and Ignorances. For Neglect of our Duty, and Negligence in diſcharging it, are two things; the one ariſing from a Diſlike and Averſion to the Work, and attended with a Conſciouſneſs and Conſent of Mind; the other proceeding commonly from want of Thought, or want of Diſpoſition, two Infirmities which we care not to accuſe ourſelves of, and yet from which we are ſeldom free: Inſomuch

that, when we think ourſelves moſt ſecure of a good Diſpoſition and firm Reſolution to go through the Buſineſs of our Duty, they often forſake us in the midſt of our Work, and we find ourſelves on a ſudden becalmed, our Inclinations grown faint and languid, and too ſick of the Employment to ſupport us in the Proſecution of it.

Such Surprizes good Men have frequently complained of in their Devotions: They ſet out with Zeal and Fervency of Spirit, with Eyes and Hearts up-lifted to God, till ſome chance Object diverts the Eyes, ſome favourite Care ſteals into the Heart, and they both wander and are loſt in the Multiplicity of Objects and Imaginations which ſucceed each other; and when their Thoughts return to the proper Object, they are as one that awaketh from a Dream. Offences of this kind are ſecret to us even whilſt they are committing, the Mind not being conſcious to the Deluſion; and yet they are ſo frequent in every Part of our Duty, that when we call ourſelves to the ſtricteſt Account, it is impoſſible to find their Number, or to bring every ſingle Act to our Remembrance.

Secondly, Sins of Ignorance are ſecret Sins likewiſe, as the very Name they are diſtinguiſhed

guiſhed by imports. *Where there is no Law,* ſays the Apoſtle, *there is no Tranſgreſſion*; and therefore unavoidable Ignorance ſeems to be rather a Misfortune than a Crime; and though it be dumb, and cannot ſpeak in its own Defence, yet its very Silence will be a ſtronger Plea in the Preſence of the Almighty, than all the laboured Excuſes which the Wit of knowing Sinners has invented. In all Caſes where Men may be ſaid to offend through Ignorance, they muſt be equally inſenſible of the Crimes they commit, and the Ignorance they labour under; and therefore equally incapable of repenting particularly of their Sins, and of their Ignorance. For when Men venture boldly upon Actions, being conſcious to themſelves that they know not whether they are going right or wrong, their Sin is Preſumption, and not Ignorance; and ſhould they chance to blunder into the right Way, it is much to be doubted, whether the Happineſs of their Miſtake will excuſe the Raſhneſs of their Attempts. Such Repentance therefore as this muſt be numbered, not with our ſecret Faults, but with ſuch Sins, as being acted with Conſciouſneſs and Conſent, carry in them an avowed Contempt of the Majeſty and Authority of God:

For if a Man thinks Virtue and Vice ſo indifferent, that he may venture to chuſe blindfold which to follow, there wants no better Evidence, that his Heart is not right with God, who can with ſo much Coolneſs and Temper affront his Honour.

But though the Ignorance itſelf be preſumptuous, and is ſuch as, being conſcious to, we muſt certainly be accountable for; yet the Miſtakes, the Follies, the Sins it leads us to, may be unknown to us, both at the Time of our offending, and of our repenting: And whatever Aggravation they receive from the obſtinate Ignorance they proceed from; how much ſoever the Heinouſneſs of them may deſerve to be diſtinguiſhed in our Sorrow and Contrition; yet, ſince the Mind cannot reach the Knowledge of them, they can only be lamented under the general Character of ſecret Sins. Nor is this the only Caſe in which our Sins partake of the Malice of the Will, and yet eſcape the Notice of the Underſtanding: For,

Thirdly, Nothing ſhews more the Corruption of the Will, or Diſinclination of the Heart to Virtue, than confirmed Cuſtoms and Habits of ſinning; and yet in this Perfection of Vice we loſe the very Senſe and Feeling

Feeling of Sin. Habits grow from often repeated Actions; and, though at firſt they require diſtinct Acts of the Will to give them Being, yet at laſt we grow ſo perfect, ſo ready at the Work, as not to want the Authority and Conſent of the Mind: As Servants, who, by being often told their Maſters Work, at laſt fall into the Road of their Buſineſs without being called on, and yet act as much under the Direction of their Maſters Will, as when they were under their daily or hourly Inſtruction. And ſo it is in Habits: The Mind, which is the governing Principle, lies by, and the Work goes on without being attended to. Of many Inſtances give me leave only to mention one, which ſhall be that of common Swearers, and Blaſphemers of the Holy Name: A Vice in itſelf ſo prodigious, that no Aggravation can heighten it, no Excuſe can leſſen it! And yet thoſe who are moſt guilty of this Sin are leaſt ſenſible of it: It is ſo familiar to them, that they are not conſcious when they offend: Blaſpheming is their Idiom, a Turn in their way of ſpeaking, and Oaths the mere Expletives of their Language. And when every ſober Heart trembles to hear what they utter, they only are unconcerned, as only being

ignorant of the accurſed Malice with which they defy the living God. For all theſe Things God will call Sinners into Judgment; in his Book they are noted down: But yet when Sinners call themſelves to Judgment, they only can tell that they have grievouſly offended; the Meaſure of their Iniquity they know not, nor the many Aggravations of it: And therefore the utmoſt that the ſincereſt Penitent can do, is to lament the Offences of his Heart and Tongue, which he is not able to remember, and to pray to God that he likewiſe will be pleaſed to blot out the Remembrance of his Iniquities.

Fourthly, The Apoſtle has adviſed us *not to be Partakers of other Men's Sins*; which ſhews, that when others ſin, being led to it by our Influence, Example, or Encouragement, we ſhare with them in the Guilt of their Iniquity. How far our Influence ſpreads, to what Inſtances, and what Degrees of Vice, how many we ſeduced by our Example, or hardened by our Encouragement, is more than we can tell, and yet not more than we ſhall anſwer for. Thoſe who are thus entered in our Service, and ſin under our Conduct, are but our Factors: They trade for us, as well as for themſelves; and whatever their

Earnings

Earnings are, we ſhall receive our due Proportion out of the Wages of their Sin. This is a Guilt which ſteals upon us without being perceived; it grows whilſt we ſleep, and is loading our Account even when our Bodies are in the Poſſeſſion of the Grave. The higher our Station, and the greater our Authority, the more Reaſon have we to fear being involved in this kind of Guilt; becauſe in proportion to our Authority will the Infection of our Example ſpread; and, as our Power is great, our Encouragement will be the more effectual; and ſome perhaps there may be, who ſhall appear not only for their own Sins, but for the Wickedneſs of the Age they lived in. But then, on the other ſide, (pardon me a ſmall Digreſſion) Power, and Honour, and Riches, are great Means of Salvation in the Hands of a wiſe Man, who knows how to uſe them to the Glory of God, and the Good of Mankind. To him ſhall be added the Virtue and Religion which grow up under his Influence and Protection: And how tranſporting will the Surprize be to ſuch happy Souls, when they ſhall find the Improvement of this and future Ages in religious Holineſs placed to their Account at the great Day, as being the genuine Off-

ſpring of their Care and Solicitude, and unſhaken Fidelity in the Cauſe of God, and of his Chriſt!

Fifthly, The great Meaſure of Folly and Vanity and Self-love there is in the beſt of our Actions is what ſeldom falls under our Notice; and yet from ſuch ſecret Errors who is free? We hardly know our own Hearts well enough to anſwer at all Times for the Integrity of our Intentions. How much of our Virtue and Religion is mere Reſpect to common Decency, and ariſes from no higher Spring than a Regard to our own Credit and Reputation, is more than we can certainly tell. When we are moſt eager in purſuit of ſome good End, could we ſtop ſhort, and examine ourſelves fairly, we ſhould find perhaps that we were only gratifying ſome private Paſſion, and that none of the beſt, perhaps Malice and Revenge, or ſome other inordinate Deſire.

To this Account we may add the many vain Imaginations which are conceived in the Heart, though never brought to Life by Action, but die in the Womb, and are out of Remembrance. Such are the ambitious Man's imaginary Scenes of Honour and Glory, formed and wrought up to a kind of

Life

Life in a mere Deluſion of Thought; which, fantaſtical as they are in themſelves, do ariſe from real Pride and Vanity. Such the viſionary Enjoyment of ſenſual Men, when the Thoughts traverſe all the forbidden Paths of Luxury and Wantonneſs; where, though the Phantom be airy and bodileſs, yet does this Dream of Senſuality derive itſelf from no imaginary Corruption, but from a real Diſtemper in the Mind, from inordinate Deſires and Affections. Such is the ſecret Anger, ſuch the Malice of the Heart, which ſits brooding over envious or revengeful Deſigns, which it contrives within itſelf, and ſeems to execute upon its Enemies; and, for want of Power or Opportunity for real Revenge, feeds itſelf with viewing the Execution of its Wrath, though only expreſſed in the Images of Fancy. Harmleſs and innocent as this Revenge may ſeem, which ſpends itſelf in imaginary Miſchief only, yet it ſprings from the Root of Bitterneſs, and is too plain an Evidence that we hate one another.

Laſtly, When we come to repent of our Sins, many of them may be ſecret to us merely through the Weakneſs and Imperfection of the Memory, which cannot recollect all the various Paſſages of a vicious Life.

Theſe

Theſe Sins, however conſcious we have been of them heretofore, with reſpect to our Repentance are as ſecret as if we had never known them, and can only be confeſſed and bewailed in general Terms.

Thus have I ſet before you the ſeveral Kinds of our ſecret Sins. One general Character there is which belongs to them all, namely, that they are ſuch as we cannot, not ſuch as we will not remember: For though the Mercy of God will cover our Defects, when they are unavoidable, and ſuch as ariſe from our natural Weakneſs and Infirmity; yet we have no Reaſon to expect any Allowance, where we are wanting to ourſelves through Lazineſs and Indiſpoſition; where, to avoid the Trouble or the Anguiſh of Repentance, we cover our own Sins deceitfully. Such Hypocriſy will be no Plea in His Preſence, *who trieth the Heart and Reins, and ſpieth out all our Ways.* But,

Secondly, We are to conſider what Guilt we contract by our ſecret Sins, leſt it ſhould be thought that the Sins which eſcape our Knowledge ought not to burden our Conſcience. Where there is no Guilt, there needs no Remiſſion; and if we cannot in Juſtice be charged with our ſecret Sins, there

is

is no Senſe in the Pſalmiſt's Petition, *Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults.* In another place he has told us, *That God ſets our Iniquities before him, and our ſecret Sins in the Light of his Countenance:* And the Day approaches, when *for all theſe things he will call us into Judgment.*

In the Inſtances already ſet before you, you may obſerve, that our moſt ſecret Sins are ſometimes the moſt heinous. Thus it is in the Caſe of habitual Sins; we are too well acquainted with them to take particular Notice of them; they are the involuntary Motions of a ſecond Nature, and we are as little concerned to count their Number, as we are the Beatings of our Pulſe. But ſhall this plead their Excuſe? Shall only fearful Sinners and modeſt Beginners be puniſhed? and ſhall the Height of Iniquity, becauſe it takes away all Shame and Senſe of Sin, take away likewiſe all Danger of Judgment? This can agree with no Rule of Juſtice or Equity; for by this means the ſame Man will ſtand chargeable with the Guilt of his early Sins, ſuch as he committed before his Conſcience was quite hardened, and yet not accountable for the more enormous Crimes of ſinful

Wickedneſs: As if the only Sin we could commit, were to be ſenſible of our Faults.

The ſame might be made appear in the other Inſtances: For every *idle Word*, how ſoon ſoever it ſlips out of our Memory, for every vain Imagination of the Heart, how ſoon ſoever it vaniſhes away, we ſhall *give an Account at the Day of Judgment*. For the Guilt of Sin does not ariſe from the Power of our Memory, nor is it extinguiſhed by the Weakneſs of it: If it were, Forgetfulneſs would be the ſureſt Repentance; and want of Thought and Reflection, which is ſo often repreſented in Scripture as the Aggravation of Sin, would be the Sinner's beſt Security. But, alas! though we forget, there is One who cannot, before whom our Iniquities are ever preſent; who will enter into Judgment with us, as well for the Sins which we cannot remember, as for thoſe we cannot forget.

The Conſequence from the whole is this: That ſince many of our Sins are ſecret to us, they can only be repented of in general; and ſince many of our ſecret Sins are very heinous, they muſt ſeriouſly and ſolemnly be repented of. By general Repentance you are not to underſtand then a ſlight or ſuper-

ficial Repentance only. The Petition of the Pſalmiſt, *Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults*, proceeded from a Heart deeply affected with the Senſe of its Guilt, and does not expreſs the Sentiments of one who was excuſing or leſſening his Faults; for he remembered, and ſo muſt we, that ſecret as our Faults are, yet God has placed them *in the Light of his Countenance.*

DISCOURSE IV.

PART I.

MATTHEW xii. 36.

But I ſay unto you, that every idle Word that Men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgment.

IT is very evident from the Context, that our Saviour's Intention was to diſtinguiſh between the heinous Offences of Blaſphemy, Perjury, and the like, and the idle Words mentioned in the Text, as I ſhall have Occaſion to obſerve. We muſt therefore look among the more common and leſs crying Sins of Speech, to know what kind of Words they are, which our Saviour

Saviour threatens with an Account at the Day of Judgment. Of theſe there are many ſorts:

Firſt, Idle Words may denote Words which proceed either from the Vanity or the Deceitfulneſs of Men's Minds; and this Senſe will take in all the empty Boaſtings and great Pretences of Vanity and Pride, and all the ſly Inſinuations of Craft and Hypocriſy; and there is no Doubt to be made, but that Men ſhall be accountable for Words of this kind at the Day of Judgment.

Secondly, Idle Words may comprehend the Reports which proceed oftentimes from mere Curioſity, and a Deſire of hearing and telling News, by which our Neighbour ſuffers in his Credit or Reputation; and queſtionleſs theſe Words will be alſo remembered in the Day of the Lord.

Thirdly, Idle Words may imply ſuch Words as are the impure Conceptions of a polluted Mind, which often paſs for Wit and Entertainment among thoſe who have learned *to make a Mock of Sin*. Under this Head will be comprehended *the Filthineſs and fooliſh Talking and Jeſting*, which the Apoſtle to the *Epheſians* would not have *ſo much as once named* among Chriſtians.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, Idle Words may ſignify uſeleſs and inſignificant Words. This Senſe will comprehend a great Part of the Converſation of the World, which aims at nothing but preſent Amuſements; as if it were the Buſineſs of a rational Creature to divert his Mind from Thought and Reflection. How far Words of this kind, when attended with no other Evil, may expoſe a Man to Guilt, is not eaſily diſcerned; though I think it is evident at leaſt, that a Man may ſpend ſo much of his Time in *idle* or unprofitable *Words*, as to render himſelf obnoxious to an Account for the Miſuſe and Miſapplication of the Reaſon and Speech with which his Maker has endowed him.

Theſe are the common Sins of Speech, which are comprehended under the general Term of *idle Words*, which, if perſiſted in, may prove of dangerous Conſequence to our Souls; *for of every idle Word we ſpeak we muſt give Account thereof in the Day of Judgment*.

What theſe Sins are, I ſhall endeavour to repreſent to you in the following Diſcourſe, under the ſeveral Heads already mentioned.

And, Firſt, By *idle Words* we may underſtand ſuch Words as proceed generally from

Vanity or Deceit, which will comprehend the Pretences and plauſible Speeches of the Cunning, and the empty Boaſtings of the vain-glorious Man. In both theſe Caſes there is a want of Truth, upon which we ought to build whatever we ſay one to another. Truth and Falſhood have the Relation to each other of Good and Evil; and this is an eſſential Difference, as we may learn from hence, that Truth is the Attribute of God, and conſequently an eſſential Good, and its Oppoſite, Falſhood, muſt be likewiſe an eſſential Evil, ſo that there always is Evil where there is not Truth. Truth likewiſe is a Part of natural Juſtice which we owe to one another; for whenever we lye to our Neighbour, we lead him into wrong Notions either of Perſons or Things; and Miſtakes in either kind may prove prejudicial to him: So that to ſpeak Truth to our Neighbour is a Branch of that Juſtice by which we are obliged to do no Man any Wrong.

I know many nice Caſes have been put upon this Queſtion, Whether we are always obliged to ſpeak Truth? And though ſome have maintained, that Truth may be diſpenſed with, when it is evidently for our Friend's or Neighbour's Benefit, that he ſhould be

kept

kept in Ignorance; yet it never was pretended, that Vanity or Cunning were ſufficient Excuſes for the want of Truth.

Our Saviour tells us, that evil things proceed from an evil Heart. Now the Evil that lies at the Heart of the vain-glorious Man is Pride: He would fain appear to be ſomething conſiderable, and make a Figure; and therefore Truth ſhall never ſtop him from ſetting himſelf out, and aſcribing to himſelf ſuch Honours or Riches, ſuch Wit or Courage, as he thinks may merit Worſhip and Reſpect in the World.

There is no Attempt that Men are more generally unſucceſsful in, than in this of praiſing and extolling themſelves. It is an headſtrong Vanity, that will not be confined to the prudent Methods of Hypocriſy and Diſſimulation; but ſhews itſelf ſo openly, as hardly ever to eſcape being diſcovered, and conſequently ſeldom fails of reaping the Fruit it juſtly deſerves, which is Scorn and Contempt. And yet, in ſpite of the Sin and Folly and Diſappointment that attend upon it, Pride will have its Work; and where-ever this Evil has rooted in the Heart, it will produce Sin and Folly in the Mouth, ſuch Sin and Folly as ſhall be remembered at

the Day of Judgment. For the Romances that Pride and Vain-glory lead Men to are capable of no Excuſe; and therefore Offenders of this kind muſt ſtand liable to all the Threatnings, which are denounced againſt thoſe who take Pleaſure in a Lye.

But Vanity may ſometimes be the Vice of Men otherwiſe good and virtuous; and tho' they will not lye to gratify their Humour, yet they will be very ready to do themſelves Juſtice upon all Occaſions, and ſet forth the Good they are conſcious of in themſelves to the beſt Advantage. But even theſe are *idle Words*, and Men muſt anſwer for the Praiſe and Glory they aſſume to themſelves. Beſides, it is almoſt impoſſible to ſpeak of ourſelves and our own Works with Pleaſure, and to keep within the Bounds of Modeſty and Diſcretion, and not to expoſe the Good we have done to be ridiculed and evil-ſpoken of by thoſe who obſerve our Vanity and Weakneſs.

It is dangerous at all times to ſpeak of ourſelves: If we have done ill, either to excuſe or deny it inflames the Account; if we have done well, our Saviour tells us that we muſt nevertheleſs call ourſelves *unprofitable Servants:* And whether this Rule be obſerved by

by thoſe who boaſt, and are always talking of the Good they do, let any Man judge. Our Saviour's Advice about Charity holds in all other Caſes of the like Nature; *our left Hand muſt not know the Charity our right Hand does*; and whatever elſe we do that may ſeem good in our own Eyes ſhould at leaſt be kept from our Tongue's End, for fear we ſhould be found in the Number of thoſe who take to themſelves the Praiſe that is due to God alone.

One aukward Way that ſome Men have of letting others know what Good they have done, is by perpetually leſſening and diſcommending in themſelves what, in their private Thoughts, they think others ought to admire. But there is little Difference between Pride and affected Humility; and whenever Men delight to talk of themſelves, it is to be ſuſpected that Pride and Vanity direct them to the Choice of the Subject, though it may appear perhaps in the Diſguiſe of Meekneſs and Humility. If you think that you have done nothing worthy of Praiſe or Admiration, whence ariſes your Jealouſy that the World ſhould overvalue you? And why all this Care to leſſen and debaſe yourſelf, unleſs you are conſcious to yourſelf of

ſomething that in Reaſon you judge ought to exalt you? If you labour to ſhun the Praiſe of Men, it is plain you think you have deſerved it, and your pretended Humility is the genuine Offspring of Pride and Vain-glory: For Humility will no more make a Shew of itſelf than of other Virtues; and, where Men are truly humble, they will not tell all the World of it; and therefore where they take Delight in induſtriouſly undervaluing themſelves, it can proceed from nothing but their Deſire of being thought humble: But to affect even the Praiſe of Humility is Pride and Vanity. So then, in reſpect to this Subject, the Rule of Prudence and the Rule of Virtue are coincident, that the leſs we talk of ourſelves the better: It is a nice Theme, and few enter upon it, who come off clear either of Folly or Sin.

In the next Degree we place Cunning and Artifice, which make Men very forgetful of the Reſpect that is due to Truth, whilſt they direct their Speech to ſerve and ſupport ſome End or Deſign of their own. There are many Degrees of this Cunning: That which is ſo groſs as to aim at making a Prize of the Ignorance of others needs not to be mentioned here. Men of this Principle proceed

ceed farther generally than *idle Words*, and are out of the preſent Subject through an Exceſs of Lying, and falſifying their Words and Oaths, as may beſt ſerve their Purpoſe.

But the Charge of *idle Words* lies againſt a Cunning, which is leſs deſperate and malicious, and is the diſtinguiſhing Mark of ſuch Men, who deceive you by a Shew of Kindneſs which is not real. Now the Man who courts and careſſes all that come near him muſt allow himſelf a great Latitude, ſince he muſt often beſtow his Smiles on the Perſon he does not love, and his Compliments on the Perſon he deſpiſes: In both which Caſes he ſtands charged with Falſehood and Hypocriſy.

This Man of general Civility and Addreſs deſtroys the Credit of Language; for his Words have no Meaning; none at leaſt that you can underſtand: He that ſays the ſame Things to every body, muſt be ſuppoſed to mean them of no body. But the Advantage theſe Men have is from the Folly and Self-love of Mankind; for moſt People are ſo well opinionated of themſelves, that they cannot think a Man inſincere, who commends and extols them: From whence it comes to paſs, that a Man will ſwallow the

Compliments, when applied to himſelf, though they come from a Mouth which he knows makes no Diſtinctions.

But what Account ſhall a Man give of himſelf for living perpetually in a Diſguiſe; for deceiving all about him, and uſing the Speech, which God gave him for better Purpoſes, to impoſe on the Weakneſs and Folly of Mankind? An Account he muſt give, unleſs he can ſhew the Uſe and Benefit of his fair Speeches. Say, which is yet more than you can ſay, that theſe Words are innocent and harmleſs: They are at the beſt then uſeleſs and inſignificant; and think how your Excuſe will ſound, when the utmoſt you will have to ſay for yourſelf will be, that you employed the Talent God gave you to no good End or Purpoſe, only you hope you did no Harm. But add to this, that you deceived the World; that by your ſervile Compliance you puffed up the Vanity of the Proud, betrayed and expoſed the Credulity of the Weak, and poſſibly too have made a Gain of this Ungodlineſs; and then I think you need not be told what Sentence a God of Truth, of Righteouſneſs and Juſtice, will paſs againſt ſuch Deceivers and Liers in wait for Men.

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But, Secondly, *Idle Words* may comprehend the Reports of Envy and Malice, by which our Neighbour ſuffers in his Credit or Reputation.

I would diſtinguiſh under this Head between thoſe who invent and contrive wicked Stories and Reports to the Scandal and Defamation of their Neighbour, and thoſe who credulouſly take up with the Invention, and report and ſpread them. To contrive malicious and wicked Stories, and wilfully to defame our Brother, is a Vice that the Text has no Name for; it exceeds all that can be meant by *idle Words*, and muſt be regiſtered with the other black Crimes, which ſtand in oppoſition to the lighter Offences of the Tongue. But even to believe without ſufficient Ground, or to report, when we do believe the Ill we hear of others, cannot be excuſed of Malice and Envy. It is an old Saying, *Facile credimus quæ volumus*; and if ſo, to believe the evil Things ſpoken of our Brother willingly, is a great Mark of an evil Diſpoſition, and ſhews at leaſt that we ſhould be pleaſed if they were true: And the Reſtleſſneſs that ſome Minds are under, when they have picked up an ill Report, to diſburthen themſelves, and ſpread the Story in the Neighbourhood,

Neighbourhood, diſcovers with what a ready Mind they do this Work and Drudgery of the Devil. But where Men ſpread Stories of ill Report with Pleaſure, and rejoice in the Scandal, they have ſucked in with the Story ſo much of the Contriver's Malice and Envy, that they ought to be ranked with him, and not included under this Subject.

But there are others, who, out of an Itch of talking, and knowing other People's Concerns, have their Heads and Tongues perpetually running upon the Affairs and Buſineſs of their Neigbours. Theſe People are like the Hawkers in the Street, they diſperſe whatever comes to their Hand, good or bad; if it be but News, it is all one to them: By which Means they often do a great deal of Miſchief without being chargeable with any formed Malice or Deſign to injure. But in the Multitude of Words there wanteth not Sin; and when Men's Curioſity leads them beyond their proper Sphere and Buſineſs, they muſt anſwer for the Miſchief they do. He who is always talking of what does not concern him, muſt needs be guilty of many *idle Words* for which he muſt anſwer; and for which he will be leſs able to anſwer, if his Words have been prejudicial to the Cha-

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racter or Credit of an innocent Man. You may well be aſked, what you had to do to be ſo very inquiſitive and talkative of what no ways belonged to you? The Apoſtle's Rule is, *that you ſtudy to be quiet, and mind your own Buſineſs.* But you may farther be aſked, how came you to launch ſo far out of your Knowledge, as to be in danger of hurting the Intereſt or good Name of your Brother? It is not enough that you meant no Ill, it ought to be your Care, and Concern, and Study, to do no Ill; and to do what proved ill inadvertently, ſhews that you were not ſo ſtudious to avoid the Occaſions of Evil; if you had, you would not have ventured where there was ſuch evident Danger of doing Harm, as there always is where Men will talk much of the Affairs and Characters of others. Were it not for ſuch buſy, talking Creatures, who liſten after all News, it would not be worth a malicious Man's while to invent a Story of his Enemy. A Man cannot carry a Story far himſelf, nor would he poſſibly find many openly to abet his Malice in defaming an innocent Man; but there are always inquiſitive Buſy-bodies, who catch at News, and ſpread it immediately like Wild-fire; And therefore by being talka-

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tive and inquiſitive in theſe Matters, though we acquit you of Malice or ill Deſign, yet you become the Inſtrument of Malice; you pull the Trigger, though the other levels the Piece at the innocent Head; and ſince your Curioſity and Impertinence are unjuſtifiable, you can no ways excuſe the Conſequences of them. God has provided every Man with Buſineſs proper for him to employ his Time in. What you can ſpare from the neceſſary Cares of Life, and from the Refreſhments and Diverſions which Nature requires, is little enough to lay out upon Eternity, upon the Thoughts of another and better Life; nor are there ever wanting Opportunities of doing good, in which all active Spirits might be uſefully employed. How much more innocent and diverting is it to adviſe and inſtruct the Ignorant, to rejoice with your Friends in their Good, to comfort and to mourn with them in their Evil; or at leaſt to paſs the Time in ſuch Diſcourſes as are adminiſtered by innocent Mirth and friendly Society: How much better, I ſay, is this, than to ſit trying and condemning your Acquaintance, and fetching in all you know by Turns to receive at your Hands their Sentence, not for the Good or Evil which

which they have done, but for the Good or Evil which you have heard of them? How entertaining ſoever you may think this Diverſion, yet you muſt remember the Concluſion of the Wiſe Man's Advice to the Men of Pleaſure, *Know, that for all theſe Things God will bring you into Judgment.*

Thirdly, *Idle Words* may imply ſuch Words as are the Product of a looſe and idle Mind, ſuch as repreſent the impure Conceptions of a Mind polluted with Luſt and Laſciviouſneſs. This Notion includes *the Filthineſs and fooliſh Talking and Jeſting*, which the Apoſtle forbids *even to be named* among Chriſtians.

There is nothing more directly contrary to Morality and good Manners, than the Liberty which ſome Men take of entertaining Company upon Subjects, which are unfit for the Mouth or Ears of a Chriſtian. A greater Affront cannot be offered to civil Company than to break in upon their innocent Mirth and Converſation with filthy Jeſts, which put every modeſt Perſon to Pain, and under a Difficulty of behaving himſelf, whilſt ſuch Things are diſcourſed on: Though it is the Pleaſure the lewd Jeſter delights in to put Modeſty out of Countenance, and to

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ſet Impudence and Buffoonry in Triumph over it. But whether this be an Employment that even common Senſe and Reaſon ſhould ſubmit to, let every one, who is not quite loſt to Shame, determine. It is a great Argument of the Impurity of Men's Minds, when Things of this nature lie uppermoſt, and are ever at their Tongue's End: And therefore for their own Sakes they ſhould confine ſuch Thoughts, unleſs they take Pleaſure in hiding the Man to diſcover the Brute, and to let the World ſee what Pains they have taken to furniſh their Minds with a Knowledge, which Nature and common Decency have ever ſtrove to conceal.

This impudent Wit is in all Perſons abominable, but never more truly infamous than when it is found in the Company of grey Hairs; when Men ſeem to be feeding upon the Dregs of the Pollutions of their Youth, and entertaining their Minds with Luſt and Senſuality in ſpite of the Decays of Nature, which call for other Thoughts. I am almoſt afraid of calling theſe *idle Words*, becauſe the Expreſſion does not reach to the Heinouſneſs of the Crime: For nothing is more contrary to the Modeſty and Purity of our holy Religion, nothing more offenſive to God and

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all virtuous Minds, nothing more deſtructive of Morality, or that tends more to introduce Looſeneſs and Brutality, than this lewd Wit, which ſets at nought every thing that is chaſte and pure, whoſe preſent Glory is Shame, and whoſe future Reward ſhall be Confuſion.

If Men have a Knack of cloathing their unchaſte Thoughts in cleanly Language, yet it cannot juſtly be pleaded in Mitigation of their Crime. This poſſibly may be to ſin more like a Gentleman, but it carries an Aggravation with it that cannot eaſily be forgiven. To improve upon Vice, and to take off that Mark of Infamy which God has ſet upon it, is the higheſt Abuſe of your Reaſon and Senſe. To make Lewdneſs agreeable, to recommend it by an artful Addreſs and a pleaſant Wit, what is it but to convey the Poiſon in a precious Mixture, that may tempt and deceive the Palate to admit the Deſtruction? Modeſty is the Out-guard of Virtue, and gives Notice of the firſt Approach of Vice; and when Lewdneſs is ſo dreſſed up as to paſs unſuſpected, it proves but the more dangerous Enemy within; and therefore we muſt expect to give a ſevere Account for the Time and Words

Words we ſpend in this Diverſion; and you may imagine how Filthineſs and Lewdneſs ſhall eſcape, when God ſhall ſit as Judge, who is all Righteouſneſs and Holineſs, and *of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity.*

DISCOURSE IV.

PART II.

FOURTHLY, By *idle Words* we may underſtand uſeleſs and inſignificant Words; Words which are ſpent to no great End or Purpoſe either good or bad.

This Senſe will comprehend a great Part of the Converſation of the World, which aims at nothing but preſent Amuſement; and it is worth our while to inquire, what Guilt a Man contracts by theſe *idle Words*. All Words that are in any reſpect injurious to God or Man, or contrary to Truth or good Manners, are out of this Queſtion, which is ſtated upon Words merely impertinent; where

the Subject of Diſcourſe is mean and trifling, and not capable of yielding any Profit or Improvement to ourſelves or others. Now to diſcover whether uſeleſs, though innocent Converſation comes within the Judgment of the Text, we muſt conſider theſe following Particulars:

Firſt, The Scope of our Saviour's Argument in this Place.

Secondly, The End and Deſign of Speech, which is the Gift of God to Mankind: For, if we uſe our Speech to ſerve any Purpoſe contrary to the End deſigned by God in giving us Speech, we manifeſtly abuſe his Gift, and for ſuch Abuſe muſt be anſwerable.

Thirdly, The Nature of Man in general, and the different Degrees of Senſe and Underſtanding that different Men are endowed with: This Conſideration muſt have place in this Queſtion, becauſe the Tongue cannot ſpeak better than the Underſtanding can conceive; which infers a Proportion between the Abilities of our Mind, and the Soundneſs of our Speech; the latter muſt be judged by the former; for a Man cannot be obliged to utter more Wiſdom than God has given him.

Firſt, As to the Scope of our Saviour's Argument: It is evident that he deſcends from the greater to the leſs Evils of Speech; from Blaſphemy he comes to the other Evils which are generated in the Heart, and from thence derived to the Tongue: *A good Man out of the good Treaſure of his Heart bringeth forth good Things, and an evil Man out of the evil Treaſure of his Heart bringeth forth evil Things.* What the evil Things are, which are bred in the Heart, our Saviour upon another Occaſion tells us: *Out of the Heart proceed evil Thoughts, Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Theſts, falſe Witneſs, Blaſphemies.* Theſe then are the evil Things intended. But, as a farther Obligation upon us to keep the Door of our Lips with all Care, our Saviour adds, *But I ſay unto you, that every idle Word that Men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment.* Now the Form with which theſe Words are introduced, looks as if they were intended as an Addition and Improvement to the old Doctrines of the Law. The *Jews* knew that Perjuries and Blaſphemies and falſe Witneſs, and the like Crimes, ſhould certainly be puniſhed; and therefore our Saviour only mentions them, without adding expreſsly,

that they ſhould be puniſhed; for that was well known and believed upon the Authority of the Law: But then he adds, *But I ſay unto you*; which Words are very emphatical, and denote the Doctrine delivered to be new, and founded upon our Saviour's own Authority, *I ſay unto you.* The ſame Form is uſed in the fifth of St. *Matthew*, where our Saviour, in virtue of his Commiſſion received from God, evidently is explaining and enlarging the old Law: "Ye have heard it hath been "ſaid by them of old Time, Thou ſhalt "not kill: *But I ſay unto you*, Whoſoever "is angry with his Brother without a Cauſe, "ſhall be in danger of the Judgment. Ye "have heard it was ſaid by them of old "Time, Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery: "*But I ſay unto you*, Whoſoever looketh on "a Woman to luſt after her, hath com-"mitted Adultery with her already in his "Heart." The ſame is repeated in other Inſtances; in all which you may obſerve, that our Saviour enlarges our Duty, and debars us from the leaſt Approaches to Vice, and obliges his Diſciples to the greateſt Purity, to the ſtricteſt and ſevereſt Virtue.

To the ſame Purpoſe poſſibly does he ſpeak in the Text: "Evil Things, you know, pro-

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" ceed from an evil Heart; and your Law " teaches you, they ſhall be rewarded accord- " ingly: *But I ſay unto you,* That not only " theſe evil Things, but every idle Word ſhall " be brought into Judgment." The only Difference in this Caſe is, that in the Sermon on the Mount the enacting Words are more full, ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, in the Text they are only λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν· which, though they muſt be rendered alike in *Engliſh*, yet the former, according to the Idiom of the *Greek* Tongue, is an Expreſſion of greater Weight and Authority: But the Difference is not ſo great, but that we may ſuppoſe our Saviour to uſe both upon the ſame Account, to diſtinguiſh the Doctrine delivered upon his own Authority from the old received Doctrines of the Law. Allowing this, it follows, that we have in the Text a Rule implied for the Government of Chriſtian Converſation, which is of the greateſt Purity, and reſtrains us not only from all Evil, but from all Appearance of Evil, in our Converſation; from every thing which is inconſiſtent with the Gravity and ſerious Demeanour required in a Chriſtian; from ſuch Faults as bear no greater Proportion to the evil things before-mentioned, than Anger does to Murder, or a wanton Look to Adultery.

The Text then thus underſtood leads us to inquire, What are the Faults and Levities of Speech, which are not great enough to be numbered with the evil Things before-mentioned, and yet have ſomething in them miſbecoming a Diſciple of the Goſpel; ſomething that is inconſiſtent with that Temper and Frame of Mind, which are the Ornament of a Chriſtian Spirit, and the Reſult of a juſt Senſe and Reverence of the high Calling wherewith we are called: For, though it is not our Duty always to be meditating upon the ſurprizing Myſtery of Redemption wrought by Chriſt, or converſing with Heaven through Prayer, and exalted Thoughts of the wonderful Things of God; yet ſince this muſt neceſſarily, as we are Chriſtians, be great Part of our Employment, we ſhould, even at other Times, when we are taken up in our worldly Affairs, or in friendly Converſation, preſerve a Decorum, and maintain a Conſiſtency in our Character; that though we are not talking directly of the Goſpel, yet our *Converſation may be as becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt.* For conſider that you are a Diſciple of the Croſs, a Candidate for Heaven, an adopted Son of God, a Brother of Chriſt, and an Heir of Glory;

Glory; and then conſider what ſort of Behaviour and Converſation beſt become thoſe, who ſuſtain ſo great a Character. Should ſuch an one ſpend his Time and Thoughts to utter fooliſh Jeſts, to entertain idle Minds with idle Talk, till they are loſt in a Forgetfulneſs both of God and themſelves, and every thing elſe that concerns either their preſent or future Intereſt? Should ſuch an one be the Miniſter of Idleneſs and Looſeneſs, and ſerve to no better Purpoſe in the World, than to furniſh Entertainment to the Indiſpoſition that looſe and profligate Men have to ſerious Thought and Reflection?

The Part of a common Wit or Jeſter does not well become a Man; much leſs will it become a Chriſtian: It is below the Dignity of Reaſon; ſtill more ſo, when Reaſon is improved by Grace. And to this Purpoſe is St. *Paul*'s Prohibition in his Epiſtle to the *Epheſians*; where, among other Things, he forbids them all *fooliſh Talking and Jeſting, which are not convenient*. What our Tranſlation renders *Jeſting*, the Original ſtiles εὐτραπελία, which *Ariſtotle* reckons among his Virtues; and defines it to be the *Habit of Jeſting handſomely*. So that what paſſed in the Heathen World for a Virtue is forbidden

to a Chriſtian; and it is probable, that by *idle Words* our Saviour meant the Jeſts which were ſo much delighted in, and were under ſo good a Character. And this gives a Reaſon why our Saviour ſpoke as introducing a new Law, *But I ſay unto you*, that every idle Word ſhall be brought into Judgment; becauſe the Preachers of Morality had taught the contrary before, and placed the Jeſter, the Man of *idle Words*, among their Heroes, and honoured his Talent of raiſing Laughter with the Title of a Virtue.

There are, no doubt, Seaſons of Relaxation both from Buſineſs and Religion; and innocent Diverſion maintains the Vigour of the Mind, as moderate Exerciſe does the Strength of the Body: But, as Exerciſe muſt anſwer the Strength and Parts of an human Body, ſo muſt your Diverſion be anſwerable to the Temper, and Frame, and Character of a Chriſtian: Otherwiſe Exerciſe deſtroys the Man, and Diverſion corrupts the Chriſtian.

We are made by Nature, that is, by God, to be ſociable Creatures; and therefore in ſeeking Society, in cultivating Friendſhips with each other, we follow the Inſtinct of Nature; and what Time we ſpend in Diſcourſe and mutual Converſe, if it ſerves no other

other Purpoſe than to maintain a good Friendſhip and Acquaintance, yet cannot be ſaid to be miſ-ſpent; becauſe in propagating Love and Good-will among ourſelves, we ſerve one End of Nature, and are doing the Work which our Father hath given us: And when Company meet, he that can talk entertainingly upon common Subjects, and divert their Minds with inoffenſive Wit, has an excellent Talent; and if Men are endowed with an happy Conception, with a Livelineſs of Expreſſion to repreſent their own Ideas to others, their Converſation may be agreeable without exceeding the Limits of Virtue or Innocence.

But a common Jeſter, one who is ſent for to Company to make Sport, acts a Part much below the Character of a Man, or a Chriſtian: For Jeſting, though it may be an innocent Diverſion, can never be an honeſt Employment; it will not bear being made a Profeſſion; and therefore when Men make it their Buſineſs, it muſt needs be an unlawful Calling; and the Jeſter will lie expoſed to the Threatening of the Text, to be called into Judgment for every *idle Word* he ſpeaks. And if you again ſet before you the Dignity and Character of a Chriſtian,

you

you will eaſily diſcern, how ſuitably and with what a Grace a Chriſtian acts, when his whole Buſineſs is to make himſelf laughed at. *I ſaid of Laughter, it is mad,* ſays the Wiſe King of *Iſrael.* This only Difference there is, and let the Jeſter have the Benefit of it, the Madman's Folly and Extravagance proceed from Misfortune, the Jeſter's from Choice: And this Choice will render him accountable for his Extravagancies; and whether he has not the beſt Title to apply the Text to himſelf, you muſt judge from what has been ſaid. His Talent certainly lies in *idle Words,* and therefore he falls under the Letter of the Text; his Buſineſs is poor and ſordid; he ſerves to no other Purpoſe in the World than, like the Fool in a great Houſe, to make Sport; and whether in this he ſuſtains the Character of a Diſciple of Chriſt, let all who have learnt Chriſt judge.

Conſider likewiſe whether he can juſtify himſelf againſt the Apoſtolical Rule of *converſing as becomes the Goſpel of Chriſt.* If you ſay that he means no Harm, I will agree to it; and go yet farther, and add, that he means nothing: But whether this Excuſe will come well from the Mouth of one,

whom God has endowed with Senſe and Reaſon and Underſtanding, they who have not loſt their own ſhall determine. But, allowing the Excuſe, it will not exempt him from the Judgment of the Text; becauſe by *idle Words*, as has been already ſhewn, ſuch Words are meant as are capable of this Excuſe, as not being chargeable with any great Evil. Laſtly, Add to the Text the Comment of St. *Paul*, and then by *idle Words* we muſt underſtand *fooliſh Talking and Jeſting, which are not convenient*. This may teach us what Judgment we are to make from the Scope and Deſign of the Text: But yet here we can find nothing directly pointing againſt common Converſation, where the Subject of the Diſcourſe is poor and mean, and incapable of yielding any Profit or Improvement; and ſince we cannot directly conclude from the Text, let us conſider,

Secondly, The End and Deſign of Speech, which is the Gift of God to Mankind: For if we uſe our Speech to ſerve any Purpoſes contrary to the End deſigned by God in giving us Speech, we manifeſtly abuſe his Gift, and muſt anſwer for ſuch an Abuſe.

Speech was given us for the Communication of our Thoughts to each other; the Mind is furniſhed with Variety of Thoughts and Reflections, ſome of which are proper for Diſcourſe, and ſome not: There are ſome Things which a Man cannot but have Ideas of, ſome Things which intrude upon the Mind, but are not fit Subjects of Diſcourſe. So that though Speech be given for the communicating of our Thoughts, yet all our Thoughts are not to be diſcloſed, or brought into Converſation. We muſt judge what are proper Subjects, and muſt be anſwerable for the Government of our Tongues. A Man may be innocent in having ſome Thoughts in his Mind, which he cannot innocently diſcloſe; the Reaſon is, becauſe he cannot always chuſe his Thoughts, but he can always chuſe what he will talk of. As to the proper Ends of Speech, we may reaſon thus: God has made us reaſonable Creatures, and fitted us for his Service, and therefore expects a reaſonable Service from us: As he has given us all the Good we enjoy, it is our Duty to praiſe and adore him; to raiſe in ourſelves and others a Senſe of Gratitude and Duty towards him: This is one End of Speech. As he has made us liable

to

to many Wants and Neceſſities, it is our Duty to pray to him, and in all our Wants to apply to him both in public and private: This is another End of Speech. Under theſe Heads we include, with reſpect to Reaſon, the Contemplation of the Works of Nature and Providence, which ſerves to give us a juſt Senſe of the Power and Wiſdom of God; and, with reſpect to Speech, all Diſcourſes upon theſe Subjects, which tend to inſpire others with the ſame awful Senſe of the Almighty: Theſe are, no doubt, proper Subjects for reaſonable Creatures and Chriſtians.

But then farther, The Wants and Neceſſities of Nature, which are preſent, call for our Help. We muſt by Labour and Induſtry ſupply ourſelves with Neceſſaries and Conveniencies of Life; and as this Subject muſt employ great Part of our Thoughts, ſo likewiſe great Part of our Speech; for we cannot live without the mutual Aid and Aſſiſtance of each other; and this neceſſarily makes the Buſineſs of Life the frequent Subject of Diſcourſe. And a very proper Subject it is, and Men are uſefully employed, when they are learning themſelves, or inſtructing others in the Buſineſs of their Trade or Profeſſion. So then this is another End

of

of Speech, that Men may confer concerning the neceſſary Affairs of Life, and be mutually aiding and helping to each other.

But farther ſtill, God has made us to delight in each other's Company. We are by Nature ſociable Creatures, and there is a Pleaſure in Converſation, though we have no End to ſerve by it, no Buſineſs to diſcourſe of, nor any thing to aſk or deſire of one another. And ſince God has made us ſociable Creatures, and it is his Will and expreſs Command to us, that we love and delight in one another; it follows, that it is very lawful and commendable for Men to meet for this Purpoſe, for the improving and maintaining mutual Love and Friendſhip: And then another End of Speech is to be a Bond of Society, to be a Means of bringing and keeping Men together.

Now then, if it does appear that Men may meet for mutual Society and Converſation, it follows, that nothing can render Converſation unlawful that is not ſinful: For God made us for the Society of each other, and has commanded us to love each other; and therefore if our Diſcourſes are friendly and ſocial, they are ſo far virtuous, as they ſerve the End of Nature.

Now

Now Men may talk of many Subjects, which have no preſent Profit or Inſtruction in them, and yet they may ſerve this End of Converſation, of making Men delight in each other's Company: And ſince Love and Friendſhip are ſuch great Goſpel-Virtues, a Man may ſafely dedicate ſome Hours in the Day to them without a Proſpect of ſerving any other End, and yet be virtuouſly employed. How often is it ſeen, that Men by meeting accidentally, and diſcourſing only upon common Subjects, come to have a good Liking to each other, which by degrees improves into Love and Kindneſs? How often too are the greateſt Enemies reconciled, by being brought into Company together? At firſt they hardly bear the Sight of each other: Were they to talk of their own Affairs, or even of any thing that would admit of a Diſpute, their Reſentments would flame out into Anger and Paſſion; but upon common and indifferent Subjects they make ſhift to bear with one another in Converſation; which by degrees ſoftens them into a mutual Compliance, and reſtores the long-forgotten Friendſhip and Kindneſs: And will you ſay the Time is ill ſpent, that ends ſo profitably, ſo much to the Glory of God, and the Good of Men?

At proper Seaſons, and in proper Company, we ought to chuſe nobler Themes: We have all the Works of Nature before us; we have the Hiſtory of Providence through many Ages faithfully preſerved in the ſacred Records; and we cannot be excuſed in overlooking theſe great Subjects. We owe likewiſe to one another, whatever each other wants; we ſhould comfort the Weak, inſtruct the Simple, rebuke the Sinner; *rejoice with them that do rejoice, and mourn with them that mourn.* To neglect the proper Opportunities of performing theſe Duties, is a Fault not to be extenuated. But then they are as improper at ſome Times as they are proper at others; and when well-minded, but weak Men, unſkilfully break in upon theſe Subjects, all that they get by it is the Pity of good Men, and the Scorn and Contempt of the Wicked.

Since then Society is a Thing in itſelf commendable; ſince one End of Speech is to be a Bond of Society, which is preſerved by mutual Converſe; and ſince Religion is not always a proper Subject; it follows, that for the maintaining Society, and for promoting Love and Friendſhip, Men may innocently meet, and ſpend their Time upon

ſuch Subjects as offer, though the Subject in itſelf does not tend directly either to the Good of Men, or the Glory of God. If this kind of Converſation be blameable, it muſt either be a Sin of Commiſſion, or a Sin of Omiſſion. It cannot be a Sin of Commiſſion, becauſe it is ſuppoſed to be innocent; and I know no Sin that a Man can commit by being innocently employed or diverted. Neither can it be a Sin of Omiſſion; for no poſitive Act can be a Sin of Omiſſion. A Man may incur the Guilt of omitting his Duty, whilſt he ſpends his Time in this kind of Diſcourſe; and ſo he may if he talks of Buſineſs or Religion. If your Friend or Relation wants your immediate Help, and you will ſtand diſputing or diſcourſing of Religion, you incur a Breach of Charity, and are guilty of a Sin of Omiſſion. So if you waſte your Time in talking impertinently, when you ought to be at your Buſineſs or Calling, to the Neglect and Impoveriſhing of your Family; or if you leave no room for the Duties of Religion, no doubt but you are very guilty: But your Guilt does not ariſe from the nature of your Converſation, but from your Miſapplication of Time, from the Neglect of your proper Buſineſs and

Duty; and your Guilt will be the ſame, if you miſ-ſpend your Time, though you diſcourſe upon Subjects ever ſo great and momentous.

But, Laſtly, Let us conſider the Nature of Man in general, and the different Degrees of Senſe and Underſtanding that different Men are endowed with. This Conſideration muſt have place in this Queſtion, becauſe the Tongue cannot ſpeak better than the Underſtanding can conceive; which infers a Proportion between the Abilities of our Mind, and the Soundneſs of our Speech; the latter muſt be judged by the former; for a Man cannot be obliged to utter more Wiſdom than God has given him.

Now to diſcourſe profitably upon the moſt profitable Subjects requires a good Share of Reaſon, a clear Conception, and a diſtinguiſhing Judgment: Without theſe Qualifications Men do but expoſe the nobleſt Subjects they take in hand; and, in proportion, there are but few Men thus qualified. I aſk therefore, what muſt the reſt do? Would you have them chuſe great and noble Subjects, which they do not underſtand? Or would you have them hold their Tongues? The firſt, I think, they ought not to do; the

the laſt, I am ſure, they will not do. It remains then that they muſt talk of ſuch Things as lie level to their Capacities, that is, of mean and every-day Subjects: For theſe Men are fitted for Society, and have a Reliſh of Converſation, as well as brighter Spirits, and they ought not to be excluded from it; and therefore they muſt be allowed to follow their Genius, which is not likely to lead to any very uſeful or improving Topics of Diſcourſe. It is fit, you may ſay, that theſe People ſhould learn, and that others ſhould inſtruct them; ſo ſay I too: But to be always under Inſtruction is not very diverting, and not many will ſubmit to it; and when Men of the ſame Stamp meet together, who ſhall be the Inſtructor?

I think it would be a good Compoſition, if we could prevail ſo far with the meaner People, as to reſtrain them from envious and malicious Diſcourſe, from lewd and filthy Jeſting, which are great Ingredients in their Converſation: For, ſince God has deſigned them for Society as well as you, and given them no great Share of Underſtanding, you can neither reſtrain them from Society, nor exact more Wiſdom from them than they have received.

This Conſideration will likewiſe reach the Caſe of wiſer Men: You muſt not deſpiſe your weak Brother. Charity obliges you to be civil and courteous to him; and when a Man of Underſtanding is joined in Society with a weak Man, the Diſcourſe muſt be according to the meaneſt Capacity; and it is ſometimes a Piece of Charity to ſubmit to the Converſation of Men of much leſs Ability than yourſelf.

From all theſe Conſiderations together then it appears, that the Converſation of the World, upon common and trivial Subjects, is not blame-worthy. It is a Diverſion in which we muſt not ſpend too much Time; if we offend in this Reſpect, we ſhall be anſwerable for the Neglect of weightier Matters; but otherwiſe, if we tranſgreſs not the Bounds of Innocence and Virtue, we truſt in Chriſt that our harmleſs, though weak and unprofitable Words, ſhall not riſe up in Judgment againſt us.

DISCOURSE V.

PART I.

EPHESIANS iv. 28.

Let him that ſtole, ſteal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

THE Words now read to you make up a complete Senſe, without depending upon what goes before, or comes after. They contain a Confirmation and Explication of the eighth Commandment: For what the Apoſtle enjoins concerning Labour, and working with our Hands, is no more than the neceſſary

Conſequence of the Command, *Thou ſhalt not ſteal.* For ſince all Men are equal Sharers in the Wants and Neceſſities of Life, and the Things which ſhould ſupply theſe Wants are unequally divided, ſo that ſome have more than enough, and ſome much leſs; it follows, that the Neceſſities of the one muſt be ſupplied from the Abundance of the other. Steal you muſt not, and give perhaps he will not. The only Way then by which you can come at the Things you want, is by Purchaſe or Exchange; and the only Thing a poor Man has to exchange, is the Work and Labour of his Hands: And therefore it follows as a Conſequence of the Law, that ſince you muſt not ſteal, you muſt work, and purchaſe by your Labour and Induſtry the Things which are neceſſary for your Support and Subſiſtence. In all that rich Men do, they want the Help and Aſſiſtance of the Poor; they cannot miniſter to themſelves either in the Wants, or Conveniencies, or Pleaſures of Life: So that the poor Man has as many Ways to maintain himſelf, as the rich Man has Wants or Deſires; for the Wants and Deſires of the Rich muſt be ſerved by the Labour of the Poor. But then

then the rich Man has often very wicked Deſires, and often delights in ſinful Pleaſures; and though to ſerve the Rich be the poor Man's Maintenance, yet in theſe Caſes the poor Man muſt not ſerve him; and therefore the Apoſtle adds, that he muſt labour, *working with his Hands the Thing which is good.* His Poverty obliges him to ſerve Man, and therefore he muſt *work with his Hands*; and his Reaſon and Religion oblige him to ſerve God, and therefore he muſt work only *the Thing which is good.*

Labour is the Buſineſs and Employment of the Poor, it is the Work which God has given him to do; and therefore a Man cannot be ſatisfied in working merely as far as the Wants of Nature oblige him, and ſpending the reſt of his Time idly or wantonly: For if God has enabled him to gain more by his Labour, than his own Wants, and the Conveniencies neceſſary to his Station, require, he then becomes a Debtor to ſuch Duties, as are incumbent on all to whom God hath diſpenſed his Gifts liberally. He muſt conſider that he owes a Tribute to his Maker for the Health and Strength he enjoys; that there are others who want Limbs to labour, or Senſe and Underſtanding

to arrive at the Knowledge of any Art or Myſtery, whereby to maintain themſelves; and to theſe he is a Debtor out of the Abundance of his Strength, and Health, and Knowledge, with which God has bleſſed him: And therefore he is obliged to labour, working with his Hands the Thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

To the great Men God hath given Riches, to the Mean Strength and Underſtanding; both are equally indebted for what they have received, and equally obliged to make Returns ſuitable to their Abilities: And therefore, as the rich Man muſt honour God out of his Subſtance, ſo muſt the Man of low Degree make his Acknowledgment out of the Product of his Labour and Underſtanding: And therefore Men are obliged to uſe Labour and Induſtry in their honeſt Callings and Employments, firſt to provide for themſelves, and all who depend upon them for Maintenance; and, in the next place, to provide a Stock to diſcharge the Debt they owe to their Maker, by adminiſtering, in proportion to their Ability, to the Wants and Neceſſities of their poorer Brethren.

And this may ſerve to give us a general View of the Senſe and Reaſoning of the Text; which I ſhall now more particularly conſider, according to the diſtinct Parts of which it conſiſts. And thoſe I think are four: Firſt, A Prohibition, *Let him that ſtole, ſteal no more.* Secondly, In Conſequence of that, an Injunction, *But rather let him labour.* Thirdly, A Limitation of this Duty of labouring to Things honeſt and lawful, expreſſed in theſe Words, *Working with his Hands the Thing which is good.* Fourthly, The Rule and Meaſure of this Duty, *That he may have to give to him that needeth.*

Firſt, As to the Prohibition, *Let him that ſtole, ſteal no more.* By this we are forbidden the Uſe of all ſuch Means, for our own Maintenance and Support, as are injurious to our Neighbour. The Command, *Thou ſhalt not ſteal,* was given to ſecure every Man in the Property and Poſſeſſion of his Goods; and therefore the Reaſon of the Law reaches to all kinds of Fraud and Deceit by which Men are injured in their Goods and Eſtate: And there are many Things which, in Propriety of Speech, we do not call Stealing, which nevertheleſs muſt be underſtood to be comprehended in this Law, in virtue of the

Reaſon upon which it is founded. The unjuſt Acquiſition of any thing is Theft; for what you unjuſtly acquire, another loſes, and ſuffers in his Property, for the Security of which the Law againſt Theft was enacted: And therefore, in the way even of Trade, if you ſell a Commodity to an unſkilful Buyer for a Shilling, which, according to the Market Price, is worth but ſix Pence, you are a Thief to the Value of ſix Pence; for of ſo much you unjuſtly defraud the Man. He that is ſtronger than another may rob him by Violence, he that is more ſubtle may do it by Cunning; but if the Injury in both Caſes be the ſame, muſt not the Guilt be ſo too?

Some are apt to repine at the unequal Diviſion of the Goods of Fortune, and think that they have as good a natural Right to a Share of the World, as thoſe who at preſent poſſeſs it; and conſequently that they may aſſert their Right, whenever it is in their Power ſo to do. From theſe Principles ſprang the Sect known by the Name of Levellers, who were for having the World equally divided among the Inhabitants of it; and thought it very unnatural that one ſhould be a Lord, and another a Beggar. This

Opinion

Opinion deſtroys all Law and Juſtice, and evacuates the Command given againſt Theft and Stealing, by laying all Things open and common, and making all Men joint Proprietors of all Things. It renders Labour and Induſtry uſeleſs; ſince he that labours can acquire nothing which he had not before; and were it a prevailing Opinion, it would ſoon make the World a Neſt of idle Vagabonds, by leaving no Encouragement for the Labour either of the Body or the Mind. But few Words may ſhew the Vanity of this Opinion: For firſt, though we cannot produce a divine Law ordering the Diſtribution of the Things of the World, yet nevertheleſs Property is evidently of divine Right: For when God gave the Commandment, *Thou ſhalt not ſteal*, he confirmed to every one the Poſſeſſion and Property of his Goods; ſince from that Time, at leaſt, it became unlawful for any Man to wreſt out of his Neighbour's Hands the Goods he was in Poſſeſſion of. So that it is to no Purpoſe in this Queſtion to inquire by what Means Men at firſt divided the World among themſelves, or how one acquired in any thing a private Right to himſelf; ſince we find this

Right

Right and Property declared and confirmed by a ſubſequent Act of God. God is the ſupreme Proprietor of all Things; and it will not be denied but that he might at firſt have divided the World as he thought good; and this he may do at any Time, ſince he cannot loſe or forfeit his Right: And therefore it matters not by what Means the World was divided, when God confirmed the Diviſion, and eſtabliſhed Men in their Right and Property; ſince his Confirmation gave a Right, if there were none before. And hence it appears, that Property is eſtabliſhed, if not by the Law of Reaſon and Nature, yet by the poſitive Law of God; which is to us the higheſt Reaſon and Authority. And from hence it follows, that no Man can acquire the Poſſeſſion of any thing which is at preſent another's, without the Conſent of the preſent Proprietor fairly obtained. And to this Right of his own eſtabliſhing even God himſelf ſubmits: The Poor are his peculiar Charge; his Providence ſtands engaged for their Support: But neither does God force us to part with our Eſtates to the Poor, or give the Poor any Right to ſerve themſelves out of the Abundance and Superfluity of others; but he has

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left them to be maintained by Charity, that is, by the free and voluntary Gift of ſuch as can ſpare from their own Subſiſtence ſome Part of what they enjoy. Now none can have greater Want than thoſe who are Objects of Charity; and ſince God has not thought fit to break into the ſacred Law of Property for the Relief of theſe, no Man's Neceſſity can be great enough to warrant him to tranſgreſs the Law, ſince the greateſt Neceſſity is made ſubject to it: In Conſequence of this it follows, that thoſe who have not enough of the good Things of this Life for their Maintenance and Support, are obliged to work for their Living: Which is the

Second Thing to be conſidered in the Text, *But rather let him labour.* Your Wants muſt be ſupplied from the Abundance of others; and therefore you muſt find ſome honeſt Way of transferring to yourſelf what at preſent is not yours: This muſt be done by Conſent of the preſent Poſſeſſor, which muſt be obtained either by Purchaſe or Intreaty. A Man may, if he pleaſes, part with his Goods freely to others by way of Gift; and it ſhould ſeem, that what another freely gives, we may freely

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and innocently take. And this raiſes a Queſtion, Whether Begging be a lawful Way of maintaining ourſelves? If a Man may lawfully beg, and can by begging raiſe a ſufficient Maintenance, then it does not neceſſarily follow, that becauſe we muſt not ſteal, therefore we muſt labour; for it may be anſwered, we may beg. In this Queſtion we muſt diſtinguiſh concerning Perſons; for ſome have a Right to be maintained by Charity; and thoſe who have a Right to this kind of Maintenance, have a Right to aſk for it, that is, to beg the Charity of all well-diſpoſed Chriſtians. Charity is the Inheritance of the Poor; it is, as I may ſay, their Property: And therefore for any one, who is not an Object of Charity, to live by Charity, is invading the Right and Property of the Poor; which is by much the worſt Way of ſtealing.

Who are not Objects of Charity, the Apoſtle plainly tells us in another Place, *If any Man will not work, neither let him eat*; that is, if a Man can work, and will not, he ought to ſtarve. Now, no Man ought to ſtarve, who ought to be maintained by Charity; for ſuch have a Right to eat of Charity: From whence it follows, that

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ſuch as can labour, but will not, have no Right to Charity, and conſequently have no Right to aſk it: And therefore Begging, for ſuch as are able to labour, is an unlawful Calling. It is indeed but a more ſpecious Theft: For firſt, you do not fairly obtain the Conſent of the Proprietor to part with what you by begging extort from him; which is a neceſſary Condition in all juſt and lawful Acquiſitions. You repreſent yourſelf as an Object of Charity, pretend Age, or Sickneſs, or Lameneſs, or ſome other Indiſpoſition, which renders you incapable of an honeſt Calling. The charitable Man, as bound in Duty, relieves theſe Neceſſities, and, out of what he allots for Charity, gives ſomething to you. Here you manifeſtly deceive him; for, did he know you, he would give you nothing; and therefore, by your falſe Pretences, you fraudulently obtain his Conſent to part with his Money to you: This is a direct Cheat. Secondly, you diminiſh the Maintenance of ſuch as are truly Objects of Charity. If the Money that is given charitably in this Kingdom were applied only to proper Objects, our Streets need not be crowded with Beggars: But ſince Begging has been found

to be a profitable Trade, it has diverted the Maintenance of the Poor to a parcel of idle, lazy Hypocrites, who are taught to whine and beg with as much Art and Care, as others are taught their lawful Trades and Myſteries. Theſe common Beggars are public Robbers of the Poor, and live out of their peculiar Inheritance. The Money which well-diſpoſed People allot of their Subſtance for the Maintenance of the Poor, theſe inſinuating Hypocrites, by their pretended Wants and Neceſſities, appropriate to themſelves; ſo that their Employment is like to that of a Pirate, they lie in wait to intercept whatever comes to the Relief and Support of the Poor. Now if common Begging is but a diſguiſed Kind of Robbery, and really injurious both to Rich and Poor, it follows, that this Crime, like all others, falls under the Care and Correction of the Civil Magiſtrate, and that Laws made to reſtrain this Evil, and to puniſh idle Vagabonds, are founded in Reaſon and Juſtice; and accordingly all wiſe States have made Proviſion to prevent and to puniſh this Evil.

Since then it is neither lawful for you to beg, nor to ſteal, it follows, that you muſt labour, and by your own Induſtry and Dili-

gence

gence maintain yourſelf, and ſuch others as have a Right to be maintained by you. The Apoſtle adds, that you muſt labour, *working with your Hands:* Which is your Duty when you are not capable of any better Work; for ſuch as cannot live without it, muſt live by bodily Labour. But the Injunction is more general, and includes all Kinds of Labour and Toil, or Study, by which Men may be ſerviceable to themſelves and others: And it may properly be aſked, how far this Duty extends? And it will, I conceive, be no unſeaſonable Digreſſion to inquire, whether only ſuch are obliged to labour, who cannot live without it; or whether thoſe who have enough to ſupport themſelves without either ſtealing or begging, are not likewiſe obliged to turn to ſome honeſt Calling and Employment?

Man, I think, was not made to be idle; God has not given him Senſe and Underſtanding to ſit ſtill and do nothing. If Man was made only to eat and drink, then indeed it would follow, that thoſe who have enough to eat and drink, need do nothing elſe: But if he is made for, and is capable of nobler Employment; then it is a very abſurd Thing to aſk, whether a Man may be idle,

provided he wants nothing? For if he is not made merely to ſerve his own Wants, then his wanting nothing can never be a Reaſon for his doing nothing. The neceſſary Affairs of the World cannot be managed by the Labour of the Hand only: The Head muſt be employed in all Matters of Policy and Government, in preſerving Peace and Order in the World; and in all Matters that concern the future and preſent Well-being of Mankind. Theſe are Matters of higher Moment than to fall under the Direction of Artificers. Theſe are Things of the laſt Conſequence, and muſt be regarded; and therefore it is the Duty of ſome to qualify themſelves for theſe Purpoſes. And every Man owes it as a Duty to God and his Country to render himſelf ſerviceable according to the Station he is in, and to qualify himſelf to diſcharge ſuch Offices of Truſt and Power, as generally fall to the Share of Men of his Rank and Degree; that when he is called upon by Authority to take any Office upon him, he may be able to diſcharge it with Credit to himſelf, and Benefit to others. Thoſe of the higheſt Degree among us reckon it among their Titles of Honour that they are born Counſellors of the Kingdom: The Conſe-

quence, I think, is extremely plain, that it is their indiſpenſible Duty, by Labour and Study, and Knowledge of the Laws and Conſtitutions of their Country, to fit themſelves to be what they ſay they are. The Men of Eſtates among us are generally entruſted with the Execution of the Laws in their Country; and can it be a Doubt, whether they ought to be fit for their Employment, or no? From theſe, and ſuch like Conſiderations, it appears, that all Men are obliged to that kind of Labour and Work, which is ſuitable to the Station in which God has placed them. We generally ſay, that God has made nothing to no Purpoſe; and yet, pray tell me what the rich Man is made for, if his Buſineſs be only to eat and drink, and ſpend his Eſtate? Can you juſtify the Wiſdom of Providence in ſending ſuch a Creature into the World? There is Work cut out for all Creatures, from the higheſt to the loweſt; all Things in Nature have their proper Buſineſs, and are made to ſerve ſome wiſe End of God. The Angels are his miniſtering Spirits, they attend upon and execute his Commands. The inanimate Things of the World have their Office; the Sun duly performs his Courſe, and rules the

Day; the Moon and Stars rule the Night: And if there be a Man in the World who has no Work, but was formed to be idle, he, among all the Works of God, is the only Thing that is ſo. Are not Senſe and Reaſon great Gifts of God? And if he has exempted your Hands from Labour and Toil, by ſupplying you with Neceſſaries and Conveniencies of Life, will he not expect that you ſhould improve your nobler Parts? Will he not exact an Account from you, how you turned your better Talent, and what Uſe you made of his more excellent Gifts? Is it reaſonable, that a poor Man ſhould be accountable for not getting Bread for himſelf by the Labour of his Hands, and that the rich Man ſhould be liable to no Judgment for not getting Underſtanding, which is a more valuable Poſſeſſion, by the Work and Labour of his Mind? Bread is the Nouriſhment of the Animal, but Knowledge is the Food of the Man: By one we grow to the World, by the other we reach to Heaven. And has God made it an indiſpenſible Duty to labour for the Meat which periſheth, and not required an equal Concern and Labour for the Food of Life and Immortality?

DISCOURSE V.

PART II.

I PROCEED now to the Third Thing, which is the Limitation by which we are confined to work only the Things which are good, foregoing all unlawful Means of ſupporting ourſelves: *Let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing which is good.*

Had not this Condition been expreſſed, it might have been collected from the Nature of the Command; for if the Law of God be ſuperior to our Neceſſities in any Point, it muſt be ſo in all Points. The Reaſon why we muſt not ſteal, but labour, is this: That we muſt not do evil, or tranſgreſs the Laws of God, to ſupply our Wants or Neceſſities.

And if for this Reaſon we muſt not ſteal, neither muſt we lye or perjure ourſelves, or do any thing elſe inconſiſtent with the Principle or Maxim upon which this Law is built. Our Saviour tells us, that *Man ſhall not live by Bread alone, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of God.* If ſo, then muſt we not for Bread tranſgreſs any Part of the Word of God: For if the Word of God be as neceſſary to the Life of Man as Bread; then to tranſgreſs the Word to get Bread, is really to deſtroy Life upon Pretence of preſerving it; it is ſacrificing Life and Immortality to the Belly, which muſt periſh together with its Meat. As we are Men, we are the Servants of God; and therefore to ſerve him is the Law of our Nature, which is of the higheſt Obligation: As we are poor, we muſt ſerve Men, which is the Law of our Condition, which can never take place of the Law of Nature; and therefore no Neceſſity can diſpenſe with the Service of God, or juſtify us in the Breach or Contempt of his Laws. Our Saviour's Argument againſt Covetouſneſs holds likewiſe in this Caſe; *Is not the Life more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment?* You may by the Service of Men get Food and Raiment,

but

but by the Service of God you hold your very Life and Being. When you have done your utmoſt to provide Neceſſaries and Conveniencies for the Support of Life, you muſt depend upon God for the Continuance of it; for at his Diſpleaſure we all periſh: He can render all your Care abortive, by ſhortening the Life which you take ſuch Care to provide for; and therefore the Wants and Neceſſities of Life can never be a juſtifiable Excuſe for tranſgreſſing the Laws of God. For no Man would give his Life for Bread; and yet he that diſobeys God for the ſake of any preſent or temporal Advantage, does indeed hazard Life itſelf for the ſake of the Conveniencies of Life. Since then no Neceſſity can be great enough to excuſe the Neglect of our Duty to God, it follows, that the Apoſtle's Limitation muſt always take place, and we muſt labour, *working the Thing which is good.*

From hence we may learn what Value there is in the Excuſe, which Servants and poor Men uſually make for themſelves, when they are ſenſible that they are employed otherwiſe than they ought to be. They dare not, they ſay, deſert the Service of their Maſter, upon whom they depend for their Livelihood; the Work

they do is his, and not theirs; and therefore he ought to be conſidered as the Perſon acting, and not they; and conſequently the Guilt ſhould be all his, from whoſe Choice and Will the Evil flows, in which they are only Inſtruments, not acted by Choice, but by the Neceſſity of their Condition. The firſt Part of this Excuſe is evidently falſe, upon Suppoſition that God is ſuperior to Man; for if God be your ſupreme Maſter, then is it no Excuſe to ſay you ſerved another Maſter, when you diſobeyed him. The Excuſe is likewiſe ridiculous; for though you depend upon Man for your Livelihood, yet you depend upon God for your Life; and Life is more than Meat; and therefore to diſobey the Lord of Life to get a Maintenance is impious and fooliſh. But neither will the other Part of the Excuſe do any better Service; for though we allow that the Evil you do is not of your own chuſing or contriving, but that you act as an Inſtrument of another's Will, yet will not this clear you of the Guilt of the Evil you do. This Excuſe may ſerve for an Horſe, but it will not ſerve for a Man; for to Man God has given Reaſon and Judgment to govern and direct all his Actions; and that Reaſon

will

will make you a Principal in all the Evil you do. Poverty neither diveſts you of Reaſon, nor exempts you from the Rule and Government of it; and therefore the poor Man muſt live by Reaſon, as well as the Rich, and muſt be judged by it too, and conſequently can never be excuſed for acting contrary to what his own Senſe and Reaſon direct. From what has been ſaid, it is manifeſt, that as the Law of your Condition obliges you to work and labour for your Support and Maintenance; ſo the Law of Reaſon and Nature, which is a ſuperior Law, obliges you to work only Things which are lawful and honeſt, that you may preſerve *a Conſcience void of Offence towards God and towards Man.*

But you may aſk perhaps, what are lawful and honeſt Employments? In anſwer to this, it muſt be conſidered, that the Work and Labour of the Poor depends upon the Wants and Deſires of the Rich: For if a poor Man ſpends his Time in doing what no body deſires him to do, he may go unpaid for his Pains; and when he has done, be as far to ſeek for Bread as he was before. From hence it follows, that you muſt be confined to ſome Work, which may anſwer

to

to the Wants or Deſires of Life. Now the Things which Men want, are either the Neceſſaries, or Conveniencies, or Pleaſures of Life; and all Trades or Callings are ſubſervient to one or other of theſe.

God has made nothing neceſſary to us, which is not lawful and honeſt; and therefore it is lawful to provide whatever is neceſſary to Life; and therefore all Trades and Employments which ariſe from the neceſſary Wants of Life are lawful Trades. Under this Head come all the Works and Labours of Huſbandry, which ſupply the World with Food, and Nouriſhment, and Cloathing; and all other Trades, which furniſh us with ſuch Things as we cannot well be without.

When Men are furniſhed with Neceſſaries, they then look out for Conveniencies; and if rich Men may lawfully deſire and enjoy the Conveniencies of Life, then poor Men may lawfully provide them by their Labour and Induſtry: And this is a large Field of Work. Whatever is uſeful or ornamental in Life may be reckoned under this Head: And Conveniencies muſt be eſtimated according to the Degrees and Quality of Men; and as long as Men ſeek the Conveniencies which are agreeable to their Station, and bear Proportion to

the

the Plenty of their Circumſtances, they are blameleſs: If they exceed this Meaſure, they fall into Pride and Extravagance, and the Sins conſequent upon them, ſuch as ruining themſelves and their Families, and miſſpending the Subſtance which God has given them. But ſince all Conveniencies are ſuitable to ſome Condition or other, they may all be the proper Subject of the Labour of the Poor, who work indifferently for all, from the Prince to the Commoner, without inquiring, or being obliged to inquire, into the Circumſtances or Condition of the Man who employs them, who alone is anſwerable for the Prudence of his Undertaking: And therefore likewiſe all Trades and Employments, which provide Things uſeful or ornamental in Life, are lawful Callings.

The next Thing which may furniſh Work and Employment for Men are the Pleaſures of Life. Some Pleaſures are very innocent, and ſome very wicked; and the Rule in this Caſe muſt follow this Diſtinction: Such Pleaſures as the rich Man may lawfully enjoy, the poor Man may lawfully ſerve him in; ſuch Pleaſures as are wicked may neither be enjoyed or provided without Guilt. I need not inſtance in Particulars of either kind: To

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ſerve the Luſts and Paſſions of Men; to make Vice eaſy and practicable; to remove the Obſtacles which lie in Men's Way to wicked Pleaſures, is directly to become the Servant of Sin: This is a plain Caſe.

But then there are ſome Things which, according as they are uſed, may adminiſter to innocent Pleaſure, or to Vice and Immorality. Wine may make the Heart of Man glad, or it may deſtroy and drown his Reaſon, and ſink him down to the Degree of a Brute. And hence a Queſtion may ariſe, How far we may lawfully provide Things of this kind? And in the Caſe already mentioned it may be inquired, Whether it be lawful to keep Public Houſes, which are ſo often abuſed, and made ill Uſe of? Now, ſince the Innocence or Wickedneſs of theſe Things lies altogether in the Uſe of them, he that uſes them amiſs may be to blame, and he that provides them may be innocent. If you buy a Sword, and ſtab a Man, you that do the Murder are guilty, but not he that either made or ſold the Sword. The ſame will hold in the preſent Caſe: Public Houſes are neceſſary often to tranſact Buſineſs in, to entertain Strangers, or to receive Men who meet to be innocently chearful. Theſe are

all

all lawful Things, and therefore here is a Foundation for a lawful Calling. This may indeed be abuſed; and what may not? By the ſame Rule you muſt ſhut up not only Public Houſes, but moſt other Houſes too; for there are very few Things ſold, which are not capable of being abuſed. Beſides, ſince the Thing in its own Nature is indifferent, and may be either well or ill uſed, one Man's uſing it ill cannot deprive another Man of his Right to uſe it well; and if, notwithſtanding the Exceſs of ſome, others may uſe the innocent Pleaſure, then they may be ſerved by others in their innocent Pleaſure; becauſe what one Man may innocently enjoy, another may innocently provide; and conſequently to ſerve them cannot be a Crime.

When Things in their own Nature evidently tend to corrupt and debauch Men's Manners, they are capable of no Defence. Whatever expoſes or renders Religion contemptible; whatever ſerves to make Virtue and Piety ridiculous, to make Vice glorious, to give Luſt the Dominion over Reaſon, or to heighten the Appetite after ſinful Pleaſures, is of this kind. Theſe Conſiderations have

carried

carried many wiſe and good Men unto an utter Condemnation of the Employments of the Stage, as unlawful Means of Maintenance. And whatever may be ſaid of the Repreſentations of the Theatre in general; yet when they tranſgreſs the Bounds of Decency, and employ their Wit and Art to make Virtue, and Sobriety, and Chaſtity ridiculous; when they treat the ſacred Laws of Marriage with Contempt, and paint out the Villain, who betrays his Friend, breaks the Laws of Hoſpitality, and brings to Ruin unguarded Innocence, as an accompliſhed Character, and fit for Imitation, there can be no doubt but the Employment is extremely wicked. And whenever the Stage is ſo employed, every good Man, every good Chriſtian, muſt condemn it. Poets were anciently Inſtructors of Mankind, and Teachers of Morality; and Virtue never went off the Stage without Applauſe, nor Vice without Contempt. Thus Heathen Poets wrote!

It may be worth inquiring, whether Gaming can be a lawful Calling or Profeſſion for Men to maintain themſelves by? That there is room for this Inquiry, is evident from the great Numbers who live and thrive by it.

Thoſe

Thoſe who live upon this Art may ſay in their own Excuſe, what the unjuſt Steward ſaid for himſelf, *Dig I cannot, to beg I am aſhamed:* And I am afraid they are not unlike him in the Method they chuſe to ſupport themſelves. Gaming may either be reduced from Chance to Art, or it may not. If it cannot be reduced to an Art, then it cannot be the Subject of an Employment to live by; for you will not ſay, that a Man may be maintained by that, which, according to the very Nature of the Thing, may as well prove his Ruin as his Maintenance: And therefore if Gaming is built purely upon Chance, no Man can or ought to make it his Calling; becauſe it can never anſwer the End, and bring in a conſtant Supply for the conſtant Wants of Life. If Gaming may by Skill and Practice be reduced to an Art, then it is a very unjuſt Art, and muſt be a diſhoneſt Way of getting Money: For Men venture their Money upon a Suppoſition that they have an equal Chance with you; but if you are Maſter of a Skill which can overrule this Chance, you deſtroy the Game by taking away the Chance, which is the Foundation of it; and you make your Advantage purely

of

of the Ignorance and Folly of others, and live by an Art which you dare not own; for were it known, you could not live by it. So that, take it either Way, to play upon the Square cannot, in the Nature of the Thing, be a Maintenance, becauſe it may equally happen to be your Undoing; to play otherwiſe is a Cheat and Abuſe upon Mankind, and cannot be an honeſt or fair Livelihood.

From what has been diſcourſed in general, and upon the particular Caſes mentioned, we may collect what is an honeſt Labour or Maintenance: We muſt follow our honeſt Callings honeſtly. The next Thing to be conſidered is, what is the Meaſure of this Duty; whether we are obliged to labour merely to ſupply our own Wants and Neceſſities; or whether there be any other Duties incumbent on us, which muſt likewiſe be anſwered by our Labour and Toil? This the Apoſtle has ſettled in the

Fourth and laſt place, enjoining us to labour, *that we may have to give to him that needeth.* So that the End we ought to aim at by our Labour and Induſtry is to enable us, not only to ſupport ourſelves and our Families, but to be Contributors likewiſe to the

Wants

Wants and Neceſſities of ſuch as are not able to work and labour for themſelves. Charity has no Meaſure, but the Wants of others, and our own Ability. The Scripture has told us, *the Poor ſhall never fail:* There never will want Objects of Charity, and therefore we can never get beyond this Rule of the Apoſtle; for the more we can get, the more we ought to give, and therefore muſt conſtantly labour to enable ourſelves to anſwer this End in the beſt manner. But there are many Things which a poor Man ought to provide for, before he can come to exerciſe Charity: The firſt poor Man he is to take care of is himſelf; his own Wants and Neceſſities muſt be anſwered out of his Labour: Nor is he obliged only to provide for his preſent Wants, but by Induſtry and Frugality to lay up in Store, out of what he can ſpare from his preſent Maintenance, to provide againſt the Caſualties and Misfortunes of Life, which he, with all Mankind, is liable to. He may be diſabled by Sickneſs, or Lameneſs, or Age, and rendered incapable of following his Trade or Labour; and theſe being ſuch common Incidents, he is bound to provide for them. This is evidently a Conſequence of the Apoſtle's

Rule, that we muſt work to ſerve the Ends of Charity. The firſt Piece of Charity you are bound to, is to keep yourſelf from being a Charge and Burden upon Charity; that there may be the greater Maintenance for ſuch as are truly neceſſitous; and therefore it is a Breach of this Rule, inſtead of providing for Futurity, to ſpend all at preſent, and leave yourſelf to be a Burden upon the common Charity, whenever Age or Sickneſs diſables you: So that it is a Duty owing, as well to your poorer Brethren, as yourſelf, to keep yourſelf by the honeſt Arts of Labour and Frugality, from preying upon their Maintenance, when your Strength and Labour forſake you. And hence it appears, that by the Apoſtle's Rule, you are bound as well to Thrift and Frugality, as to Labour; and therefore ſuch as work hard, and ſpend freely all they get, are highly to be blamed, and may be found at laſt to have ſpent out of the Poor's Stock; ſince by ſquandering their own, they come at laſt to a Neceſſity of living upon Charity; by which means others are ſtraightened, that they may be ſupplied.

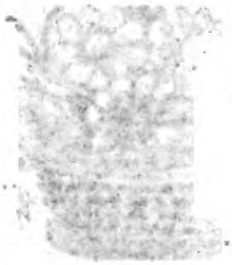
Next to yourſelf you are likewiſe bound to provide for your Family, for your Children,

dren, and near Relations. This is a Duty of Nature; and the Apoſtle has told us, *If any Man provide not for his own, eſpecially thoſe of his own Houſhold, he is worſe than an Heathen, and hath already denied the Faith.* Nor muſt their preſent Maintenance be your only Care, but likewiſe their future Well-being: For the ſame Reaſons which oblige you to lay up in Store for yourſelf againſt future Calamities, oblige you to do the ſame for your Family. But what is the Meaſure, you will ſay, of this Proviſion for Futurity? Who can gueſs how much himſelf or his Family may want hereafter? And when ſhall we ſatisfy this Duty, ſo as to be able to begin the other of being charitable to our poorer Brethren? Our own preſent Wants muſt be ſupplied; and therefore he who can get no more than is neceſſary for the preſent Maintenance of himſelf and Family, is under no Obligation to give to Charity: But when we get beyond this Neceſſity, we are then obliged to provide for our own future Wants, and the preſent Wants of the Poor; ſo that I reckon to lay up in Store for ourſelves, and to give in Charity to others, are concurrent Duties.

But it muſt be allowed, that Charity is naturally the Duty rather of the Rich than the Poor. And if it be the Duty of the Poor to give to Charity out of the little their Hands can earn; how much more will it be expected from ſuch, to whom God has given more than enough? who are appointed Stewards over his Houſhold, and are entruſted with the good Things of the World, that they may uſe them to the Honour and Glory of his Name, and to the Comfort and Relief of their poor Brethren? He has given you plentifully, and made the Things you enjoy to be your own; he has ſecured to you your Poſſeſſions, and commanded that no Man rob or ſteal from you, on purpoſe that you may ſhew your Love by the Freedom of your Offering. Look down and behold the Toil and Labour of Mankind, how in the Sweat of their Brow they eat their Bread; how their Hands are galled with Work, and their Shoulders with Burdens: And then look up to Him, who has exempted you, and given you a Life full of Eaſe and Comfort; and reflect what it is you owe to this kind, to this bountiful God. The Time will come when you muſt quit your Lands and your Houſes; when you

ſhall

ſhall be Suitors for Mercy and Favour: *Make to yourſelves therefore Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteouſneſs*, that when all ſhall leave and forſake you, you may be received into the Habitations of Righteouſneſs, where there is Mercy, and Peace, and Joy for evermore.



DISCOURSE VI.

PART I.

1 PETER iv. 8.

And above all Things have fervent Charity among yourſelves; for Charity ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins.

THE Exhortation in the Text being joined with other Exhortations to Sobriety, and Watchfulneſs in Prayer, to Hoſpitality, and to a faithful Uſe and Exerciſe of the Gifts and Graces of God beſtowed on the ſeveral Members of the Church; and yet, being introduced in this diſtinguiſhing Manner, *Above all Things have fervent Charity among yourſelves*, plainly

ſhews, how highly the Apoſtle eſteemed this great Virtue of Charity; and that it is the Perfection of a Chriſtian, the very Life and Soul of all other Duties, which without this are empty Performances, and of no Value in the Sight of God.

This Excellency of Charity, which we collect from the peculiar Manner in which St. *Peter* recommends it to the Practice of Chriſtians, is fully and expreſsly ſet forth by St. *Paul* in the 1 *Cor.* xiii. where ſpeaking in his own Perſon, he ſays, *Though I ſpeak with the Tongues of Men and of Angels, and have not Charity, I am become as ſounding Braſs, or a tinkling Cymbal. And though I have the Gift of Prophecy, and underſtand all Myſteries, and all Knowledge; and though I have all Faith, ſo that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing. And though I beſtow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and though I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.* It is to be obſerved, that St. *Paul* does not merely compare and prefer Charity before all ſpiritual Gifts and Attainments, before Liberality and Almſgiving; but he declares, that theſe without Charity are nothing, of no Value in the Sight of God, of no Profit to the Salvation of

of Man. Is it not therefore of great Conſequence to us rightly to underſtand this great Virtue, that we may uſe proper Methods to attain it; ſince it is that only which can ſanctify our Offerings to God, and make either our Prayers or Praiſes, or our Alms and Oblations, acceptable in his Sight; ſince it is that only which can make the Gifts and Abilities beſtowed on us of any Uſe, or render them a proper Means to ſave ourſelves and others?

It is neceſſary to enter into the Conſideration of the Nature of this great Virtue, that we may rightly apprehend the Meaning of the Text. St. *Peter* affirms, that *Charity ſhall cover a Multitude of Sins.* Whatever we are to underſtand by this Expreſſion, it is evident that this great Promiſe or Effect muſt be aſcribed to that Virtue only, which the Apoſtle had in his Mind, and which he meant to expreſs in the Words of the Text; and if we apply it to any thing elſe, we abuſe his Authority, and deceive ourſelves. I ſhall therefore confine this Diſcourſe to two Inquiries:

Firſt, What that *fervent Charity* is, which the Apoſtle in the Text ſo earneſtly recommends; and,

Secondly,

Secondly, What is the true Meaning of the Apoſtle's Affirmation concerning this Charity, that *it ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins.*

As to the Firſt Inquiry, it will appear by the Language made uſe of by St. *Peter*, that he is not recommending any particular Duty, much leſs any particular Acts of Duty. (The Words in the Original, rendered by our Tranſlators *fervent Charity*, are ἀγάπην ἐκτενῆ, *continual* or *uninterrupted Love.*) Love is a Principle, or a good Habit of Mind, from which many Duties flow, but does not denote any one kind of Duty more than another; and therefore the Charity ſpoken of in the Text has no more immediate Relation to *Almſgiving*, (as the Uſe of the Word in our Language often leads People to think it has) than it has to Patience, Forgiveneſs of Injuries, or any other natural Effect of Love or Charity. It is therefore the Principle of Charity, or a general Beneficence of Mind towards one another, which the Apoſtle recommends. And this muſt be conſtant and regular, not ſubject to the Efforts of Paſſion or Reſentment; it muſt preſide with a Superiority over all the Deſires of our Heart, that neither Wantonneſs and Luſt, nor Anger

and Revenge, nor Covetouſneſs and Ambition may carry us aſide from the Ways of Righteouſneſs and Equity in our Dealings one with another.

This Deſcription diſtinguiſhes the Virtue of the Goſpel from what the World means by Good-nature, which ſeems to be a Quality reſulting rather from the Conſtitution, than from the Reaſon of a Man, and is frequently ſubject to great Efforts of Paſſion and Reſentment; to the Deſires of Ambition and Laſciviouſneſs, and other Vices, which have no Society, which can have none, with Chriſtian Charity. Good-nature has oftentimes ſomething that wants to be corrected in the very Principles of it; ſometimes it is an agreeable and eaſy Weakneſs of Mind, or an Indolence or Careleſsneſs with reſpect to Perſons and Things. But Charity is Reaſon made perfect by Grace: It is a Beneficence which ariſes from a Contemplation of the World, from a Knowledge of the great Creator, and the Relation we bear to Him and to our Fellow-Creatures: It is that Reaſon into which all Duties owing from Man to Man are ultimately reſolved; and when we chuſe to ſay in a word what is the Character, the Temper, or the Duty of a Diſciple

ciple of the Goſpel, *Charity* is the only Word that can expreſs our Meaning.

The ſame Sort of Actions materially conſidered do oftentimes proceed from very different Principles. Liberality and Hoſpitality are natural Effects of Charity, which inſpires us with the tender Motions of Compaſſion and Benevolence towards our Fellow-Creatures: But it is no very uncommon Thing for Men to be liberal out of Pride, and hoſpitable out of Vanity; *to do their Alms before Men, that they may be ſeen of them*; and of ſuch our Saviour's Judgment is, that they *ſhall have no Reward of their Father, which is in Heaven.*

This leads to an Inquiry, By what Means we may certainly diſtinguiſh the Principles from which our Actions are derived, without which we can have no well-grounded Confidence towards God, how ſpecious ſoever the Appearance may be which we make in the Eyes of the World? The ready Anſwer to which Inquiry is, that we muſt conſult our own Hearts, and examine what paſſes in them, in order to form a right Judgment upon the Motives of our own Actions. But if we conſider what is meant by ſearching the Heart, we ſhall find that to ſearch

the Heart, and to examine into the Motives and Principles of our Actions, is one and the ſame Thing; and therefore this Direction does not ſet us one Step forward in the Inquiry. Beſides, it is no eaſy Matter to come to the Knowledge of our own Hearts, ſince from Experience it is plain, that Men do impoſe upon themſelves at leaſt as often as they do upon the World; and find an Eaſe and Satisfaction in doing the Things, which ſhall yield no Fruit in the great Day, when the Secrets of all Hearts ſhall be diſcloſed. And though in Actions which require Deliberation, and are not undertaken without a previous Debate had with ourſelves upon their Expediency or Inexpediency, an honeſt Man may judge of his own Motives and Sincerity; yet a thouſand Things there are which Men do habitually, and with ſo much Eaſe and Readineſs, as not to attend to the Influence of any particular Motive at the Time of doing the Action. Charitable Perſons do not, in each ſingle Inſtance of Charity, ſet before their Minds the Connection of that Action with the Honour of God, and the Good of the World; nor can they perhaps be able to ſay what particular Motive led to each Act of Charity. A Man of a regular

regular Chaſtity and Sobriety does not every Day, nor perhaps every Month, reaſon himſelf into the Obſervation of theſe Duties, and exert the Motives in his Heart, upon which the Practice of theſe Duties is founded; nor can he anſwer, ſhould he be examined to the Point, how far his Virtue is owing to this or the other Motive, or how far to his natural Temperament and Conſtitution. And ſince no one Virtue conſiſts in a ſingle Act, or in any certain determinate Number of ſingle Acts, but in a regular and habitual Conformity to the Rules of Reaſon and Morality; which Conformity the more habitual it is, the leſs we feel of the Influence of any particular Motives; it is hardly poſſible for Men to eſtimate the Good or Evil of their Actions, by conſidering the immediate and ſenſible Connection between each Action, and the Motives producing it. For, as many Motions of the Body, which depend on the Acts of our Will, are exerted with the greateſt Reaſon, and yet the Reaſon of exerting them is but ſeldom by any, and by ſome hardly ever attended to; ſo in moral Actions a Man of confirmed habitual Goodneſs does many things right, without recurring back by Reflection to the ſpecial Grounds and

and Reaſons of Duty, in which the Morality of ſuch Actions is founded.

For theſe Reaſons, and for others which might be aſſigned, it ſeems to me to be a very diſtracting Method, to put People upon Inquiry into the Motives of all their particular Actions; and ſtill more unreaſonable it ſeems to be, to exclude Sincerity from all Actions that are not immediately influenced by a ſpecial Conſideration of the proper Motives of Religion; becauſe, in this Caſe, the more naturally and habitually Men do good, the more Reaſon they will have to doubt of their Sincerity.

We muſt therefore ſearch after a more equitable and more practicable Way of judging of our Sincerity. Our Saviour tells us, we muſt *love our Neighbour as ourſelves*; making hereby that Love, which naturally every Man bears to himſelf, to be the Standard of that Love and Charity which we ought to have to one another. As therefore it is ſufficient to love our Neighbour as ourſelves; ſo likewiſe it will be ſufficient Evidence of the Sincerity of our Charity, if we can give as good Proof of our Love towards our Neighbour, as we ordinarily can do of our Love towards ourſelves.

Now

Now certain it is, that the Principle of Self-preſervation does generally act ſo uniformly in Men, that they do the Things moſt neceſſary to their own Well-being, without much Thought and Reflection upon the Reaſons for ſo doing; nor do we ever ſuſpect Men ſo far in the Sincerity of their Love to themſelves, as to queſtion whether the Things which they do rightly for their own Preſervation, proceed from proper Motives, and out of a due Regard to their own Well-being.

What the Principle of Self-preſervation is with reſpect to ourſelves, the ſame is Charity with reſpect to our Neighbour: And the more real and vigorous this Principle is, the more eaſily, and with the leſs Deliberation, does it exert the Acts of Love and Beneficence towards our Fellow-Creatures. Hypocrites and Diſſemblers, and ſelf-intereſted Perſons, have always a Deſign in what they do; and therefore they neceſſarily deliberate, whether it be worth their while to do good to others or no; and can therefore aſſign to themſelves a particular Reaſon for any good Office they perform to their Neighbour: And it is a great Preſumption, that a Man acts upon a general Principle of Charity and Humanity, when he lives well towards others,

others, without having a particular Reaſon to aſſign in every Inſtance for ſo doing.

It is either a Principle of Self-love, or a Principle of Charity, that inclines us to do good to others. Where Men act out of Self-love, and ſeek to promote their own Intereſt, to gratify their own Vanity or Ambition by ſerving others, there is ſo much Deſign in what they do, that they cannot but be conſcious of the Reaſons which prevail with them: And where there are no ſuch Reaſons to be aſſigned, what Cauſe is there for Men to ſuſpect their own Sincerity, or to imagine, that the Love they ſhew to others proceeds from any Thing but a good Principle?

It is therefore, if not a certain Rule, yet at leaſt a very reaſonable Preſumption, that we act upon a true Principle of Charity, when we ſeek the Eaſe, and Satisfaction, and Comfort of others, without being conſcious to ourſelves of any ſelfiſh Views to our own Intereſt in what we do.

But to prevent Miſtakes, I would not be underſtood, by laying down this Rule, to condemn Men always in the good they do to others, with a View to themſelves: For ſurely, it is as reaſonable to exchange good Offices, as other leſs valuable Conveniencies of

Life; and, indeed, the Happineſs of civil Life conſiſts in this mutual Exchange of good Offices: And therefore, where Men ſerve others in an honeſt Way, expecting only honeſt Returns, this Juſtice muſt at leaſt be done them, to own that they are fair Traders, and deal in a good Commodity. The Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* exhorts us *to provoke one another to Love and to good Works*; and the beſt Way to provoke others to Love, is to ſhew Love towards them.

But the ſureſt Way to know whether we are influenced as we ought to be by a Principle of Charity, is to conſider not this or that particular Action, for very bad Men may ſometimes do very good Things; nor yet to conſider our Behaviour with reſpect to particular Perſons, for the worſt of Men are capable of ſtrong Paſſions of Love for particular Relations and Acquaintance; but to reflect upon our Carriage towards all in general, and in all Inſtances: For, if the Principle of Charity be in us, it will diſcover itſelf in an Uniformity of all our Actions; as the Principle of Self-preſervation makes Men ſeek their own Good, not at one Time more than another, or in one Inſtance more than another, but at all Times and in all Inſtances equally.

If

If therefore we find that our Sentiments of Tenderneſs and Humanity are confined to certain Perſons, to our Relations or particular Friends, to the Men of our own Sect or Party; we may be ſure that ſuch Sentiments are the Product of ſome partial and narrow Views, and not the genuine Offspring of true Charity, which is in its Nature extenſive and univerſal, and reaches as far, nay much beyond the Power we have of doing good: Or, if we find that in ſome Inſtances we are apt enough to deal juſtly and mercifully with our Neighbours, but that in others we are regardleſs of Mercy and Juſtice, and value not the Credit, or Reputation, or Contentment of our Brethren, but are ready to ſacrifice them all to our own Paſſions and corrupt Inclinations; our being vile in ſome Inſtances is a certain Indication, that our being good in others is not owing to a Principle of Charity, but to ſomething elſe, which we may call by any other Name rather than Virtue. If you love not the World, and the good Things of it, ſo much as to injure your Neighbour for the ſake of making a Gain to yourſelf, it is well. If you can part with your own for the Relief of the Neceſſities of ſuch as are indigent, it is

better. If, beſides this, you have a friendly Temper and Diſpoſition, and love to ſee all about you eaſy and happy, it is a great Step towards being perfect. But ſtill if Luſt prevails, and leads you to violate the Wife or the Daughter of your Friend, how dwells the Love of God or of your Neighbour in you? For Charity is *the fulfilling of 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.*

The Rule which I am endeavouring to eſtabliſh, in order to enable Men to judge of the Principle upon which they act towards others, is the very ſame which the Apoſtle to the *Corinthians* has in effect deſcribed in the thirteenth Chapter of the firſt Epiſtle; where, ſpeaking of ſpiritual Gifts, and ſhewing that without Charity they are of no Uſe to the Poſſeſſors thereof, his Subject led him to give the certain Marks and Characters of that Charity, which he ſo highly exalted. What then is it? Is it Almſgiving? No, ſays the Apoſtle; *Though I beſtow all my Goods to feed*

feed the Poor, and though I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity is not a particular Virtue, nor is it confined to any Kind of good Works, but it is a general Spirit of Life influencing all the Actions of a Man; it is the very Soul of Virtue, and ſhews itſelf in the Functions of it: *Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind,—envieth not,—vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up, doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no Evil; rejoiceth not in Iniquity, but rejoiceth in the Truth; beareth all Things, believeth all Things, hopeth all Things, endureth all Things.*

Thus, you ſee, the Scripture Rule of judging ourſelves in this great Point of Charity, is to compare our Conduct with the Precept, and to conſider whether our Actions are uniformly ſuited to the Principle we pretend to act by. We are not directed to conſider only particular Actions, or the immediate Motives which induced us to do this or that particular good Office; from whence we can argue but with little Certainty, and little Comfort to ourſelves: For a general Principle is diſcoverable only by a general and uniform Influence over all our Actions. Men may be good by Starts; may be tender

and compaſſionate more at one Time than another, according as their Minds are ſoftened by accidental Misfortunes happening to themſelves: But Charity moves in an higher Sphere, and views all the Creatures of God with a conſtant Benevolence: It is, as the Text calls it—ἀγάπη ἐκτενὴς—*an uninterrupted Love*, and which exerts itſelf uniformly in all our Actions.

When we find this conſtant Benevolence in our Minds, and that we act conformably to it within the Rules of Reaſon, why ſhould we doubt of our own Sincerity, or ſcrupulouſly examine into the ſpecial Motives which attended on every Act of Charity? For, where we are conſcious of no ill Deſigns, no private Self-intereſt, and yet find that what we do is agreeable to Truth and Equity, why ſhould we doubt that we do amiſs? It is therefore an unreaſonable Burden to put Men upon this Sort of Self-examination; and more unreaſonable to ſuggeſt to them, that the Good they do is of no Value, unleſs in every Inſtance it be extorted from them by an anxious Conſideration of the ſpecial Motives of Religion. You may as well tell a Man, that he means not his own Nouriſhment in what he eats

and

and drinks, unleſs he has before his Mind an Aphoriſm of *Hippocrates* to juſtify every Bit he puts into his Mouth: For, as the Principle of Self-preſervation directs us without much Reflection, and often without any, to ſeek our own Good; ſo a general Principle of Charity will make it, as it were, natural to us to ſeek the Good of others, without the Trouble of Choice and Deliberation.

To conclude: You ſee the extenſive Nature of Charity; and you ſee a plain and a natural Way of judging, whether this excellent Gift works in you or no. If you allow yourſelf in any Inſtance to injure or oppreſs your Neighbour, how can you be ſaid to love him? ſince all Ways of Injuſtice and Oppreſſion are equally inconſiſtent with Charity. Whatever therefore is the darling Paſſion, which makes you tranſgreſs againſt your Brother, that, that is the Thing which deſtroys in you this moſt excellent Grace of the Goſpel. What have you then to do, but to root out this Evil from your Heart; to expel this Weed, which over-runs the Ground, and choaks the good Seed? Here therefore let us point all our Examination to diſcover wherein we offend; let us truſt the

Good we do to ſhift for itſelf, without being anxious to pry into the Cauſes and Motives leading to it: But let us double our Care to ſeek out our Failings, and to correct them; that our Love may be without Stain, and deſerve the Name of that Charity, *which ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins.*

DISCOURSE VI.

PART II.

IT remains now that we conſider in what Senſe the Apoſtle's Aſſertion is to be underſtood, *That Charity ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins.*

To *cover Sins* ſignifies to excuſe them, to exempt them from Wrath and Puniſhment: In any other Senſe it is impoſſible for Sins to be *covered* in the Sight of God, who cannot be deceived or impoſed on, or ſo over delighted with the Good we do, as not to ſee and note our evil Actions.

With reſpect to the Judgment of Men, this Expreſſion will bear a ſtronger Expoſition: For, whether we conſider the charitable Perſon

Perſon judging of other Men's Sins, it may very well be, that his Charity may incline him to think much better of Sinners than they deſerve; or, whether we conſider others judging of the charitable Perſon's Offences, it is natural enough for Men to be charmed with the Goodneſs and Excellency of Charity, and not to ſee, or not to attend to, the Defects which appear in ſo good Company.

Which of theſe two Expoſitions ought to prevail, depends upon a farther Inquiry; namely, whether the Apoſtle in his Aſſertion, that *Charity ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins*, had reſpect to the Judgment of God, or the Judgment of Men.

Nor is this the only Inquiry neceſſary in order to fix the determinate Meaning of the Text: For we muſt conſider alſo of whoſe Sins the Apoſtle ſpeaks; and whether he means to affirm, that Charity ſhall cover the charitable Perſon's Offences, or the Offences of other People.

There are probable Reaſons to be given for the Support of each of theſe Interpretations: And it will be proper to examine theſe Reaſons, and to conſider how far each Interpretation may be admitted within the Limits of Reaſon and Scripture.

First,

Firſt, There are good Reaſons to be aſſigned for limiting the Apoſtle's Aſſertion concerning Charity to the Judgment of Men. *Hatred*, ſays the Wiſe King of *Iſrael*, *ſtirreth up Strifes, but Love covereth all Sins:* Where *covering of Sins* being oppoſed to *ſtirring up Strifes*, the Meaning needs muſt be, that as Hatred perpetually begets Complaints, Animoſities, and Reſentments, ſo Love allays theſe intemperate Heats, and diſpoſes to Peace and Friendſhip, and inclines Men to overlook and to forgive the Offences of each other. In this place therefore it is evident, that *Love* is ſaid to *cover all Sins* with regard to the Judgment that Men make of each other's Offences. And the Expreſſion in St. *Peter* is ſo much the ſame with this in *Solomon*, that it is very probable the Apoſtle borrowed it from hence, and applied the Saying of the Wiſe King in Support of his general Precept, *Have fervent Charity among yourſelves.*

In this View then the Apoſtle recommends mutual Charity, as the only Thing that can render Life comfortable and ſupportable to us, and deliver us from perpetual Vexations, and put the Mind in a proper Poſture to conſider and prepare for the great Change at hand:

hand: For thus his Reaſoning ſtands, *The End of all Things is at hand; be ye therefore ſober, and watch unto Prayer; and above all Things have fervent Charity among yourſelves.* A Man drunk with Paſſion, and engaged in perpetual Strifes, is no more capable of making a due Preparation for the great Change which is near, than one intoxicated with Wine.

Temperance and Charity are the propereſt State we can put ourſelves into, to wait for the Coming of our Lord. And the Apoſtle had learned to ſubjoin this Advice to the Mention of the great Day from his bleſſed Maſter, who had denounced Judgment without Mercy to all ſuch as ſhould be found, at his ſecond Coming, void of Charity and Sobriety: *But and if that Servant ſay in his Heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and ſhall begin to beat the Men-ſervants and Maidens, and to eat and drink, and be drunken; the Lord of that Servant will come in a Day when he looketh not for him, and at an Hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in ſunder, and will appoint him his Portion with the Unbelievers.* In Conformity to this Declaration of our bleſſed Lord, the Apoſtle having given Warning of the End of all Things being

being at hand in the Verſe before the Text, immediately exhorts to Sobriety, Prayer, and Charity, that we may not be found in the Number of thoſe, who are beating their Fellow-ſervants, or abuſing the Gifts of God to Luxury and Intemperance.

Charity therefore, as it naturally inclines us to overlook and to forgive the Offences of our Brethren, ſo it puts us into that State of Peace and Serenity of Mind, which is neceſſary to enable us to prepare for the Reception of our great Judge.

In this Senſe of the Words, St. *Peter*'s Aſſertion agrees exactly with the Accounts given us of Charity in other Places of Holy Scripture. St. *Paul* is very particular in deſcribing the Properties of Charity; and tells us, that it *ſuffereth long, and is kind, and is not eaſily provoked*; but *beareth all Things, endureth all Things*. What is it now that Charity ſuffereth, beareth, and endureth? Not its own Offences ſurely, but the Offences and Provocations of others. Men who are void of Charity can be kind enough to themſelves, and are apt to bear but too long with their own Offences: But this is not the Praiſe of Charity, to overlook its own Faults; but it is its Glory to

bear with the Faults of others, and to ſuffer much, and yet not be much provoked. And what is this but, in the Expreſſion of *Solomon* and St. *Peter*, to *cover a Multitude of Sins*; to draw a Curtain over the Infirmities of our Brethren, and to ſpread our own richeſt Garment over the Nakedneſs of our Friends?

Beſides, the Expreſſion here made uſe of by St. *Peter*, *The Multitude of Sins*, leads to this Interpretation. When our Saviour exhorted his Diſciples to forgive Men their Treſpaſſes, St. *Peter* put the Queſtion to him, *Lord, how oft ſhall my Brother ſin againſt me, and I forgive him? Till ſeven Times?* Our Lord anſwered, *I ſay not unto thee until ſeven Times, but until ſeventy Times ſeven.* From which Anſwer St. *Peter* could not but learn, that it was the Property of Charity to *cover the Multitude* of our Brother's Sins; to forgive him, not only when he offended againſt us ſeven Times, but even when he tranſgreſſed ſeventy Times ſeven: A large Number; and the larger, becauſe it is not ſet down to mark the preciſe Number of Offences which Charity may forgive, but rather to denote, that there is no Number which Charity ought not to forgive.

Moreover,

Moreover, it is much more reaſonable to think, that a truly charitable Man ſhould meet with a Multitude of Sins in other People for the Exerciſe of his Charity, than that he ſhould have a Multitude of his own to cover. We meet with no ſuch Deſcription of Charity in Holy Writ, as may lead us to imagine that it is conſiſtent with a Multitude of Sins. Charity is the *fulfilling of the Law*, as the Apoſtle to the *Romans* informs us; and it proceeds, as he farther acquaints us in his Epiſtle to *Timothy*, *out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conſcience, and of Faith unfeigned.* Now, how can the Multitude of Sins, ſpoken of in the Text, be conſiſtent with fulfilling the Law? How can it be ſuppoſed to dwell in a pure Heart? to be joined with a good Conſcience? and to have Fellowſhip with Faith unfeigned? We may aſk the ſame Queſtions here, which the Apoſtle to the *Corinthians* does in another Caſe: *What Fellowſhip hath Righteouſneſs with Unrighteouſneſs? and what Communion hath Light with Darkneſs? and what Concord hath Chriſt with Belial?* So that, conſidering how inconſiſtent theſe Things are, the Hopes which Men conceive of compounding their Sins by the means of Charity, are in

great Danger of being overthrown by this Concluſion, That where there is Charity, there will not be a Multitude of Sins; and where there is a Multitude of Sins, there can hardly be true Charity to hide them.

If you think that the Text, according to this Interpretation, holds forth no great Comfort or Encouragement to Charity, ſince the Benefit accrues to others, whoſe Offences are covered by Charity, and not to the charitable Perſon, who grows rather indolent than happy through an Exceſs of Goodneſs; it muſt, on the other Side, be conſidered, how bleſſed a State it is to enjoy a Calm, whilſt the World around us is ſailing in a Storm; to ſit free from the Torments of Anger and Revenge, whilſt others burn with Reſentment and Indignation; to have the Mind at Liberty to look into itſelf, and to look up with Pleaſure to its great Creator, whilſt others ſacrifice both their Reaſon and their Religion to the Tranſports of Paſſion. It is this happy Temper alone, that can bring us to expect our great Change with any Satisfaction. How happy a Condition will it be to be found at Peace with ourſelves and the World, when our great Maſter ſummons us to appear! And who would not dread to be

called

called from Quarrels, Contentions, and Strifes, to ſtand before the Judgment-ſeat of God?

Secondly, There may be Reaſons for expounding the Text of the Judgment of God, and yet the Apoſtle's Aſſertion may ſtill relate to the Sins of others, and not to the Sins of the charitable Perſon. But what, you will ſay, may one Man's Sins be covered in the Sight of God by another Man's Charity? Yes, they may; and in this Senſe the very Expreſſion of the Text is made uſe of by St. *James: Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the Sinner from the Error of his Way, ſhall ſave a Soul from Death, and ſhall hide a Multitude of Sins.* Where it is evident, that the Sins to be covered are the Sins of the Soul to be ſaved from Death; that is, the Sins of the Perſon converted from the Error of his Ways, and not the Sins of the Converter: And the doing ſo great a Good to a Brother, as the ſaving his Soul, and hiding the Multitude of his Sins, is propoſed as an Incitement to every charitable Perſon to labour the Converſion of a Sinner. Join other Caſes: It is very plain, how much Sin and Folly proceed from the mutual Paſſions of Men labour-

ing deſpitefully to vex and provoke each other; and how much might be prevented on both Sides, had one of them only Reaſon and Diſcretion enough to put an end to Strife. This Part the charitable Man is ever ready to act; and when he does, his paſſionate Adverſary owes it to his Goodneſs, that in his Anger he did not ſin againſt God. This the Prophet *David* ſaw and acknowledged in his own Caſe, and bleſſed the happy Inſtrument which prevented his Hands from ſhedding Blood: He had ſworn in his Wrath to deſtroy *Nabal*, and all his Family with him; but the Wife of *Nabal* with gentle Intreaties put a Stop to his Revenge, and ſaved him from committing the great Crime. *David* no ſooner recovered himſelf from his Paſſion, but he ſaw how much he was indebted to his Petitioner; and cried out, *Bleſſed be the Lord God of Iſrael, which ſent thee this Day to meet me; and bleſſed be thy Advice, and bleſſed be thou, which haſt kept me this Day from coming to ſhed Blood, and from avenging myſelf with mine own Hand.* This Speech every paſſionate Man may have Reaſon to make to his charitable Neighbour, who gives way to his Wrath, and by gentle and kind Treatment ſaves him from the Extravagances,

travagances, which a warm Oppoſition would hurry him into. And is it not a great Encouragement to put on Meekneſs and Charity, ſince by bearing with the light Offences of our Brethren againſt ourſelves, we may poſſibly ſave them from much greater Offences againſt God, and be inſtrumental in delivering them from that Judgment, which, by their own Bitterneſs of Spirit and Thirſt after Revenge, they would certainly draw upon themſelves?

Were we to go through the ſeveral Works of Charity, and conſider it inſtructing the Ignorant, encouraging the Weak, rebuking the Preſumptuous, in a word, giving an helping Hand to every good Work; it would appear, in many Inſtances, how inſtrumental Charity is in covering the Sins of others. But I haſten to the

Third and laſt Inquiry, What Encouragement we have from Reaſon and Scripture to expect, that by Charity we may cover our own Sins.

In the Verſe before the Text the Apoſtle gives us this Warning—*The End of all Things is at hand.* To this ſolemn Notice he ſubjoins a proper Exhortation: *Be ye therefore ſober, and watch unto Prayer; and above all*

Things have fervent Charity among yourſelves. The Reaſon of the latter Part of this Exhortation he gives in the Words now under our Conſideration, *For Charity ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins.* Theſe Things laid together create a Preſumption, that the Apoſtle might mean to inſtruct each Man how to cover his own Sins, and to prevent the ill Effects naturally to be feared from them, when the End of all Things ſhould come. When we think of Judgment, of whoſe Sins do we think, or for whoſe Offences do we tremble, but our own? When the Preachers of the Goſpel warn us of the great Day of the Lord, it is a ſtrong Call to Repentance, and for whoſe Sins but our own? Since therefore the Apoſtle calls on us to uſe the beſt Means to cover the Multitude of Sins, in Expectation of the great Change that is at hand, whoſe Sins can we more naturally think on than our own? And if this be indeed the Caſe, then is Charity recommended to us, as a proper Means to cover or excuſe our own Sins in the Sight of God.

Beſides, the Exhortation to mutual Charity being ſubjoined immediately to the Mention of Prayer, may be a farther Argument of St. *Peter*'s Intention to inſtruct us how to hide

hide our own Offences. He well knew upon what Condition our Lord had taught us to aſk Forgiveneſs of our Sins: *Forgive us our Treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us.* This being the Condition upon which the Pardon of God is promiſed, what have we to cover our Sins in the Sight of God without Charity? that Charity which *beareth all Things, endureth all Things*, which hideth the Treſpaſſes of our Brother from our Eyes, and for that Reaſon will cover our own Offences, when the Lord ſhall come to judge the Earth.

But farther: The Nature and Extent of Charity conſidered, there ariſes a farther Argument to confirm the charitable Man in the Hopes of Pardon for his own Tranſgreſſions: For Charity is the *fulfilling of the Law*; it is the *Royal Law*, as St. *James* calls it, which *whoſoever fulfills ſhall do well.* And in this View, St. *Peter*'s Advice, to *have fervent Charity, that it may cover the Multitude of Sins*, is equivalent to *Daniel*'s Advice to *Nebuchadnezzar: O King, let my Counſel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy Sins by Righteouſneſs, and thine Iniquities by ſhewing Mercy to the Poor.* Charity is indeed the *breaking off of Sin*; it is *Righteouſneſs* and

Mercy; it is the eſſential Part of that Repentance to which the Promiſes of Life are made in the Goſpel.

For theſe Reaſons it may be allowed, that the Apoſtle meant to exhort us to Charity, as a proper Means to obtain Forgiveneſs of our Sins at the Hands of God. But, to prevent Miſtakes in ſo momentous a Concern to ourſelves, I beg leave to lay a few Obſervations before you, which may help to ſet this Matter in a clear Light.

Firſt, We muſt not ſo expound this Text, as to make it contradict the general Terms of Pardon and Reconciliation propoſed in the Goſpel of our Saviour: And therefore, ſince the Goſpel allows no Licence for continuing in Sin, nor gives any Encouragement to hope for the Pardon of Sin, but upon Repentance and Amendment of Life, we do but deceive ourſelves when we give way to other Hopes, and, by the Help of a ſtrong Imagination, wreſt the Words of St. *Peter*, and other like Paſſages of Scripture, to the Service of our Inclinations. You have ſeen that the Words of the Text are capable of divers Interpretations, and therefore they cannot be ſo ſtrong in any one Senſe, as to controul the Meaning of more plain and expreſs

preſs Declarations of Holy Writ: Nor can we reaſonably imagine, that the Holy Writers forgot or neglected to acquaint us with our beſt Advantage, and left it to a ſingle Expreſſion in an Epiſtle of St. *Peter*, to inform us of ſomething more comfortable and beneficial to us, than the general Terms, as propoſed in the Goſpel, do contain.

Secondly, We muſt not ſo expound this, or any other Paſſage of Scripture, as to raiſe up a Doctrine contumelious and reproachful to God, or inconſiſtent with his Attributes of Holineſs and Juſtice. Now there is nothing more reproachful to God, than to deal with him, as if you could purchaſe a Pardon or an Indulgence at his Hands, as if you could compound Sins with him, and bargain for ſo many Acts of Charity in lieu of ſo many Acts of Extortion and Oppreſſion, which you have been, or do intend to be, engaged in. Conſider, with the Almighty dwelleth Truth and Juſtice, and in the Court of Heaven there is no Commutation for Iniquity; no Excuſe for it, but forſaking it; no Pardon for it, but by renouncing it. *Go, and ſin no more*, ſays our Saviour to the Woman taken in Adultery. You ſee here the Condition of Pardon for Sin; ſo eſſential a

Condition, that no Indulgence, no Charter can be good, that wants this Clauſe.

Under theſe Limitations then, let us conſider how far we may apply this ſovereign Remedy of Charity to our own Sins.

We may conſider our Sins as paſt, preſent, and to come. With reſpect to our paſt Sins, it is out of our Power to recall them: With reſpect to our preſent, it is in our Power to forſake them: With reſpect to thoſe to come, it is in our Power to prevent or avoid them. To begin with the laſt: No Sort or Degree of Charity can ſo far vacate the Duties of Virtue and Religion, as to make it unneceſſary for us to avoid the Occaſions of Sin for the Time to come. To reform Mankind is the End of the Goſpel; and it is the conſtant Call of God to us, ſpeaking by the Voice of Nature and Revelation, *That denying all Ungodlineſs, we ſhould live righteouſly and ſoberly in this preſent World.* It is abſurd therefore to ſuppoſe, that either Nature or Revelation can diſſolve our Obedience to God, or ſhew us a Way how we may ſafely give ſcope to Sin, and promiſe ourſelves the Pleaſures of Iniquity with Security. Nay, Charity itſelf, could it poſſibly entertain ſo malicious a Thought againſt God, as to lay

up

up for itſelf an Opportunity of ſinning againſt God with Impunity, would ceaſe to be Charity; and our very Remedy, ſo applied, would turn to Poiſon in our Hands.

Secondly, As to our preſent Sins: As it is in our Power, ſo it will ever be our Duty, to forſake them; and nothing can diſpenſe with this Obligation. We muſt not therefore pretend to balance our Good and Evil together, and fondly imagine, that our Virtues do ſo far exceed our Iniquities, that we may ſafely enjoy them. Our Saviour tells us, *that when we have done our utmoſt, we muſt ſay that we are unprofitable Servants.* Where then is our Claim to ſo much Merit and Righteouſneſs, as may render it proper for us to do leſs than our utmoſt, and may entitle us to the Reward of the Servants of God, whilſt we wilfully continue the Servants of Sin? Such a Pretence once allowed would render Repentance unneceſſary, would vacate the Terms of the Goſpel, and, by ſetting up one new Remedy for Sin, would render ineffectual all that ever Nature or Revelation preſcribed.

Thirdly, As to our paſt Sins: It is not in our Power to recall them. Here therefore the Goodneſs of God has provided a Remedy,

Remedy, that we may not periſh everlaſtingly. This then is the only Caſe in which we have any Encouragement to ſeek for a Cover for our Sins. If we are indeed ſincere in deſiring to ſerve God and ſave ourſelves, we may forſake our preſent Iniquities, and avoid them for the future; and therefore to propoſe After-remedies would be to encourage Sin: But, for our paſt Offences, we cannot recall them; here therefore a Remedy is neceſſary, and here the Goodneſs of God has provided one. Repentance and Amendment of Life is the Remedy provided; and ſince Charity is the Perfection of the Law, to forſake Sin, and to live by the Rules of Charity, is the ſureſt, the moſt effectual Way to obtain Pardon. Under theſe Reſtraints let not the Sinner be diſcouraged in his Hopes, that *Charity ſhall cover the Multitude of Sins*; for his Hope ſhall be confirmed to him by Him, who is true and faithful, and cannot deceive.

But even in this Caſe there is need to guard againſt Miſtakes: For, though returning to our Duty, and the Works of Charity, is the beſt Amends we can make for the Guilt of paſt Offences; yet Charity will not be accepted of God in lieu of Juſtice. If we

have

have injured and defrauded our Neighbour, our Debt to him will not be paid by Charity to another. An hundred Pounds given to the Poor will not atone for a thouſand, nor even for an hundred, gained by Extortion or Oppreſſion. We muſt do Juſtice before we pretend to be charitable, even in this Senſe, and refund our wicked and ungodly Gains, before any Part of our Wealth can be made an acceptable Sacrifice to God. It is too common for Men to compound ſuch Debts as theſe, and to imagine they ſanctify their Extortion by laying out Part of it for the Glory of God, as they love to ſpeak; but it is the higheſt Inſolence and Affront to God to think to bribe his Juſtice, and to obtain his Pardon, by ſuch a Piece of Corruption as any human Court would condemn. Go to any Court of Juſtice, tell them that you have by Fraud and Extortion got a thouſand Pounds from one Man, but you are willing to give an hundred to another who is in great Want: What would they ſay to you? Would they not tell you, that your Charity was Hypocriſy, a Pretence to cover Iniquity? And ſhall not God judge righteouſly, who knows your Fraud, whether you will own it, or not?

In a word: Charity will not atone for Want of Juſtice. *Owe no Man any Thing*, ſays the Apoſtle, *but to love one another*. Firſt pay the Debts of Juſtice, and then think of Charity; at leaſt, till the Debts of Juſtice are diſcharged, do not imagine that your *Charity will cover the Multitude of Sins*.

DISCOURSE VII.

GALATIANS vi. 9.

And let us not be weary in well-doing: For in due Seaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.

THE Text, and other like Paſſages of Scripture, are founded in this known Truth, That God does not ordinarily diſpenſe the Rewards and Puniſhments due to Virtue and Vice in this Life; but that he has appointed another Time and Place, how far diſtant we know not, in which all Accounts ſhall be ſet right, and every Man receive according to his Works. What Force the Objects of Senſe have upon the Minds of Men, how far they outweigh the diſtant Hopes of Religion, is Matter of daily Experience. The World pays preſently; but the

Language of Religion is—*We ſhall reap, if we faint not.* It may be thought perhaps, that it would have been better for the Cauſe of Religion, if the Rewards of it had been immediate, and more nearly related to our Senſes; and, the Caſe being otherwiſe, proves in fact a great Prejudice to Virtue. But, if we can take leave of our Imaginations a little, and attend to Reaſon, we ſhall ſee, that this Diſpenſation of Providence was ordained in Wiſdom. Were the Caſe otherwiſe; were Men to receive a due Recompence of Reward in this World for the Good they do, there would be no Reaſon why they ſhould grow *weary in well-doing*, no Cauſe for their *fainting* under the Work, which would ſo abundantly and immediately repay all their Labour and Pains.

It is natural for Men, when they have before their Eyes flagrant Inſtances of Wickedneſs and Impiety, to make a ſecret Demand upon God in their own Hearts, for Juſtice againſt ſuch notorious Offenders. If their Demands are not anſwered, (and they rarely are) but the Wicked continue to flouriſh, and the Good to ſuffer under their Oppreſſion; they, rightly judging that they were miſtaken in their Expectations, and not

rightly

rightly judging where to charge the Miſtake, are apt to conclude, that they have *cleanſed their Hearts in vain*, and in vain have they *waſhed their Hands in Innocency*.

Whenever the Hopes and Expectations are raiſed beyond all Probability of being anſwered in the Event, they can yield nothing but Uneaſineſs, Anger and Indignation againſt the Courſe of Things in the World: And yet, who is to blame? Not he that appointed this natural Order, but he who underſtood it ſo little, as to expect from it, what it was never intended to produce. Would you pity the Huſbandman, ſhould you ſee him lamenting his Misfortune, becauſe he could not reap in Spring, when all the World knows the Time of Harveſt is not till Summer? The Caſe is the ſame in all other Inſtances: If Men anticipate the Reward of their Labour by the Eagerneſs and Impatience of their Hopes, they will be diſappointed indeed; but not becauſe their Labour is in vain, which in due Time will bring its Reward, but becauſe their Expectations are vain and unreaſonable, and outrun the Order of Nature, which cannot be tranſgreſſed.

You ſee then of what Conſequence it is to us rightly to balance our Expectations, and

to adjuſt them to that natural Courſe and Order of Things, which Providence has eſtabliſhed in the World. We may eaſily loſe the Fruit of our well-grounded Hopes, by giving ourſelves up to the Deluſion of falſe ones. If we grow ſick of our Work, becauſe our untimely Wiſhes are diſappointed, we ſhall forfeit the Reward, which patient Continuance in well-doing would, in the natural Courſe of Things, bring with it. And this I take to be the Foundation and Ground of the Apoſtle's Exhortation in the Text, *Let us not be weary in well-doing: For in due Seaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.*

It is no uncommon Thing, I know, to preſs Men to a virtuous Behaviour, in Proſpect of the Rewards which ſuch a Behaviour is entitled to in this World; and there is, as well Experience, as Scripture, to juſtify the ſo doing: For, if Peace and Tranquillity of Mind here, and Hopes full of Comfort with reſpect to hereafter, are Ingredients in human Happineſs; and ſurely they are the greateſt! theſe are to be had, and only to be had, from a Conſcience void of Offence towards God and towards Man. But this Argument is ſo little concerned with the external Good and Evil of the World, that it is applicable

applicable to Men of all Fortunes and Conditions. Thus we preach to the Prince, and thus we preach to the meaneſt of his Subjects: One cannot enjoy his Greatneſs, nor the other bear his Diſtreſs, without thoſe Supports, which Innocence and Virtue can only adminiſter. The Pleaſures of Life are a joyleſs Fruition to a Mind ſick of Guilt; and the Evils of it are too ſharp to be endured by a wounded Spirit.

Thus far we tread ſafely in promiſing a preſent Reward to Virtue; we exceed not the Order appointed by God, who, if he has given us ſome Deſires, which, in our preſent State of Degeneracy, often prove Temptations to Iniquity, has given us alſo ſo much Reaſon and Underſtanding, that we cannot be wicked and happy in ourſelves at the ſame Time: How much farther than this we may go, ſhall preſently be conſidered. But if Men, when they hear of an Happineſs due as the Reward of Virtue in this Life, will conceive Hopes of obtaining Honour, Power, and Riches from God in Recompence of their Obedience, they raiſe an Expectation which was never yet generally anſwered, and, I ſuppoſe, for very good Reaſons, never will; and whilſt they purſue

this Shadow, they are in great Danger of loſing the Subſtance, the real Reward of Obedience, which ſhall one Day be beſtowed on all, who can be contented to wait for Glory and Immortality.

To clear this Point will be well worth your Attention. In order to it we muſt inquire what Reaſon or Authority we have to aſſert the Interpoſition of Providence in the private Affairs of Men, with a view of proportioning to their Virtue or Vice proper Rewards and Puniſhments.

If we view the whole Frame of the World, and conſider the great Laws of Nature by which it is, and has for Ages paſt been, preſerved in Order and Beauty; we can no more queſtion its being ſuſtained by a conſtant and immediate Influence of God's Providence, than we can of its being at firſt brought into Order by him. If we conſider ourſelves, and how we live, move, and have our Being, it is evident, that we are upheld every Moment by the Hand of God. I ſpeak, and would be underſtood to mean, literally. If there be any thing in the Compaſs of our Knowledge certain, it is this, that we owe our Life to that Power, by the Influence of which the Functions of Life are performed:

performed: Search diligently for this Power, and you will not fail of finding God. If any Man be otherwiſe minded, let him account for the firſt Principle of Motion in animal Bodies, and he ſhall have leave to doubt of all the reſt. But this is not our Point: The Queſtion now is, ſince God has made Man a reaſonable Creature, and endowed him with a Liberty of acting, how far he has thought fit to leave him to his Liberty, and to give him up here to the Iſſues and Conſequences of his own Doings? Of his Power we doubt not; we know he can overrule every Action of Man, and every Thought of his Heart: Our Search is not what he can do, but what he has been pleaſed to do, and what Method he has preſcribed to himſelf, with reſpect to the Actions of Men, and the Conſequences which flow from them in this Life. To come at any Knowledge in this Caſe, there are but theſe three Ways; to conſider, what Reaſon requires, what Experience teaches, what Scripture confirms.

Let us conſider what Reaſon requires. It has pleaſed God to make us reaſonable Creatures, that is, to endow us with a Power of judging, and a Liberty of acting. Why were theſe Powers given? Was it that we

might uſe and exerciſe them, and give Proof of our Virtue or Vice in ſo doing? Or was it that God might overrule them, and render them in every particular Inſtance uſeleſs and inſignificant? If this is the Caſe, had he not much better have made us Machines at firſt, than have created us free Agents, and then make us Machines by an arbitrary Interpoſition of Power? Who can account for the Wiſdom of God in making ſo great a Thing to no Uſe or Purpoſe; in filling this lower World with free Agents, and then excluding all Freedom by immediate Acts of his Power? Now this would in great meaſure be the Caſe, were Rewards and Puniſhments to be punctually adminiſtered in this World; and that for this plain Reaſon: The temporal Proſperity of Men depends upon their own Actions, and the natural Conſequences of them, and upon the Actions and natural Conſequences of the Actions of others, with whom they live in Society. Now, to ſecure the Happineſs of a Man, not only his own Actions, but the Actions of all others, with whom he is any way concerned, muſt be determined, ſo as to conſpire in making him proſperous; that is, he and all about him muſt loſe the Freedom of acting, in order

to ſecure his Welfare here. If a righteous Man muſt never ſuffer in this World, all the Wicked about him muſt be reſtrained from doing him Violence. If a wicked Man muſt be puniſhed according to his Merit, all who would do him more Harm than he deſerves to ſuffer, muſt be with-held; and if none deſigned him Harm enough, ſomebody muſt be employed to do the Work. Carry this Reflection abroad into the World, where the Fortunes and Intereſts of Men are mixed and complicated ſo variouſly together, that one Man's temporal Proſperity depends upon the Actions of many beſides himſelf, and it will be very clear, that there muſt be an End of all Freedom, upon Suppoſition that Rewards and Puniſhments are to be equally diſpenſed in this World.

This Conſideration leads to another of ſtill greater Weight: For, if the Freedom of human Actions cannot be maintained upon this Suppoſition, neither can the Diſtinction of Virtue and Vice. There is no Morality or Immorality, where there is no Choice or Freedom: Conſequently were the Actions of Men under an abſolute Controul, they would no more be anſwerable for their Doings, than a Clock is for its Motions: And there-

fore to call upon God to make all things work by immediate Interpoſition of his Power, for the preſent Reward of Virtue, and Puniſhment of Vice, is a Requeſt not conſiſtent with itſelf; it is deſiring God to do that for the ſake of Virtue, which would deſtroy Virtue, and leave no room for the Exerciſe of it, no Ground upon which to diſtinguiſh it from Vice and Iniquity.

But, to leave theſe Conſiderations, let us obſerve farther, That was Virtue to be conſtantly attended with Succeſs in worldly Affairs, and Vice certainly purſued with Miſery, there would be no room for that Trial of our Faith and Obedience, which is requiſite to prepare us for the greater Bleſſings of another Life. Upon this Suppoſition, Virtue would not be what it now is; it would be a kind of ſenſual Thing, ariſing often from Ambition, Avarice, and an inordinate Love of worldly Enjoyments: Reaſon and Judgment, the Love of God, and a juſt Senſe of our Duty to him, would have little Efficacy in the Buſineſs. Now, ſince God has placed us here in order to our fitting ourſelves for a better World, and has ordained this World for a State of Trial only, it is abſurd to expect from his Wiſdom and Juſtice

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ſuch a Procedure, as would contradict this great and main End of our Creation. The Pleaſures and Afflictions of Life are ordained for Trials of our Virtue; and, according to the viſible Courſe of Providence, they really are ſo: But if you introduce a new Order, and, by another Diſpenſation of Good and Evil in this Life, convert theſe Trials into Rewards and Puniſhments, you invert the Order of Providence; this Life will no longer be a State of Trial, nor the next a State of Rewards and Puniſhments; for all future Expectations would be in great meaſure ſuperſeded by the immediate Recompence beſtowed in this Life.

Upon this Conſideration we may go farther, and ſay, That the Condition of good Men would be really worſe than it is, were this World a Place of Rewards and Puniſhments for Virtue and Vice. Were this to be the only Place of Rewards and Puniſhments, the Aſſertion would be too evident to be denied by any, but ſuch mean wretched Spirits, as would be content to give up their Hopes of Immortality for the preſent Enjoyment of the World. But take the Caſe as it now ſtands with us, ſuppoſing only this Alteration, that Virtue and Vice received their due

Portions of Good and Evil here, would not good Men be Sufferers by loſing one great Support of their Hopes and Expectations in another World? The Notions we have of Good and Evil, the Conceptions we form of God by the Exerciſe of Reaſon, joined to the Experience we have of the unequal Diſtribution of Good and Evil in this Life, conſpire to prove to us, that there is another and better State, in which the Sufferings of the Righteous ſhall be fully compenſated. Now break this Chain of Reaſoning, by introducing Rewards and Puniſhments into this Life, and you deface the great Hopes of the Righteous, and preſent him with an empty Scene of worldly Pleaſure, inſtead of that Weight of Glory which he, upon ſure Grounds, expected. And what is it that you give him in lieu of his Hopes? Honours, Riches, Power: But do you not know how little Value true Virtue has for ſuch Poſſeſſions? Together with theſe you give him new Fears of Death; your Honours and Riches will not purchaſe Life, or Length of Days; and if he receives his good Things here, what Security can you give him, that he ſhall have any Thing due to him hereafter? Upon the whole, good Men are in a much better State, taking, as they

they do, their Chance in the World, and relying upon the Juſtice and Goodneſs of God for a juſt Recompence of their Labour; they have more true Comfort and Satisfaction in this Condition, than if they had the World at Command, and no Hopes, or but faint Hopes, of future Happineſs.

Theſe Reaſons ſeem to me ſufficient to induce us to think, that it is conſonant to the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God to leave Men freely to uſe the Freedom he has given them: That having beſtowed on them an Underſtanding to know him, and to diſtinguiſh between Good and Evil, and ſent them into this World, as a Place proper for the Trial of their Virtue, he has left them in the main to the Conduct of their own Reaſon to improve the uncertain Events and Caſualties of Life, and to glorify him either through Honour or Diſhonour, through Riches or Poverty, or whatever other Condition of Life may fall to their Share.

Though theſe Reaſons teach us not to expect from the Hand of God the good Things of this World in Reward of Virtue and Obedience; yet they ought not to be carried, nay they cannot be carried ſo far, as to exclude the Providence of God from the

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Care and Government of the moral Part of the World. It is one Thing to turn a State of Trial and Probation into a State of Rewards and Puniſhments, by diſpenſing Good and Evil to every Man according to his Work; and another Thing to exerciſe Acts of Government ſuitable to the State, and ſubſervient to the Ends of Creation. If God thinks fit to proſper any Nation, or to afflict any People, he has a thouſand Ways of doing it, without interfering with the Freedom and Liberty of one Man. Years of Plenty are a great Bleſſing, but the Fruitfulneſs of the Seaſon is no Reſtraint on you or me; it is a general Bleſſing, but it makes no Diſtinction between Good or Evil. Plague and Peſtilence are general Calamities, they may and ought to awaken all the World to a ſober Senſe of God and themſelves: But their Rage is not ſo directed, as to touch the Sinners only; the Good periſh with the Bad, and he that called both out of the World will ſoon make a Difference; though in the Sight of the World the End of both was taken to be Miſery. The ſame holds true with reſpect to private Perſons: God can correct them without breaking in upon the ordinary Courſe of his Providence. If a Man wants

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to be bowed down by Afflictions, Fevers and Agues, and all the Tribe of Diſtempers, ſtand ready to obey the Order of Providence: But there is no Mark to know a Fever ſo ſent from another; there is no Appearance of the Execution of Judgment upon a Perſon ſo viſited; the Phyſic may be ſent, becauſe it is wanted, but the Hand that adminiſters it does not appear.

Thus much is ſaid to prevent Miſtakes: But the forementioned Reaſons remain ſtill in force againſt the Expectations, which Men are too apt to raiſe, of ſome immediate Recompence to be beſtowed on them by the Interpoſition of Providence upon account of their Virtue and Goodneſs.

Let us now proceed to conſider what Experience teaches in this Caſe. That Good and Evil are not diſpenſed in this Life in Proportion to the Merits of Men, appears ſo plainly to all Men of Senſe and Reaſon, that the Fact, I think, has never been diſputed. The World has never been without Complaints upon this Head. The Righteous in all Times have lamented their Caſe; their Hearts have been even ready to fail under the Oppreſſion of the Ungodly. On the other Side, the

the Wicked, ſeeing their own Proſperity, have been hardened, and grown ſecure in their Iniquity, upon the fooliſh Preſumption, that God regarded not them, nor their Doings. To abate theſe Preſumptions on one hand, to ſilence the Fears and Clamours on the other, has found Work for good and wiſe Men in all Ages; yet none of them called in queſtion the Truth of the Caſe, though all condemned the perverſe Uſe made on all Sides of this Adminiſtration of Providence. *Becauſe Sentence*, ſays the Preacher, *againſt an evil Work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully ſet in them to do evil.* That the Caſe was ſo, he acknowledges: *For all this I conſidered in my Heart even to declare all this, that the Righteous and the Wiſe, and their Works, are in the Hand of God: No Man knoweth either Love or Hatred by all that is before them. All Things come alike to all; there is one Event to the Righteous, and to the Wicked; to the Good, and to the Clean, and to the Unclean; to him that ſacrificeth, and to him that ſacrificeth not; As is the Good, ſo is the Sinner; and he that ſweareth, as he that feareth an Oath.* But this is indeed a very plain Thing, and needs not to be

be inſiſted on; we may leave it to every Man to judge for himſelf by what he can obſerve in the World, and he will ſoon find, that in fact God has not made this a Place for diſtributing Rewards or Puniſhments, but that *one Event happeneth alike to all.*

Laſtly, Let us inquire how far this Experience is confirmed by what the Scripture teaches us to expect.

There are ſome Paſſages of Holy Writ, which, at firſt hearing, and before they are duly weighed, may ſeem to promiſe more to the Righteous in this Life, than we have been able to find either Reaſon or Experience to juſtify. Let us hear the Pſalmiſt: *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not ſeen the Righteous forſaken, nor his Seed begging Bread.* How! his Son *Solomon* ſaw a different Scene in his Days; then there were *juſt Men unto whom it happened according to the Work of the Wicked.* Again, *there were wicked Men to whom it happened according to the Work of the Righteous.* In the Days of our Saviour and his Apoſtles, there were ſome Righteous in *Iſrael,* who begged their Bread by the Way-ſide, and at the Doors of the Temple. Among theſe we find ſome, who

who had Faith enough in the Son of God to be made whole of their Infirmities: An Evidence, I think, that they were not in a worſe Condition than others, becauſe they were worſe Men. The Truth is, that this Paſſage in the Pſalms relates not to our preſent Purpoſe; it deſcribes a general Caſe of Providence over good Men in providing them the Neceſſaries of Life, whilſt they endeavour to ſerve God, but of a juſt Reward for them in this World it ſays nothing: *The Seed of the Righteous*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *ſhall not beg their Bread.* Take it literally, and make the moſt of it, it will bear no Reſemblance to a juſt Reward for their Goodneſs: For, if the Righteous and the Wicked were to be diſtinguiſhed in this Life by temporal Proſperity and Adverſity, we might expect to hear of much better Promiſes to the Good than this, *That their Seed ſhould not beg their Bread*; we might expect to hear of Crowns and Scepters to be given them: But of this we hear nothing. As to the providential Care of God over the Righteous in ſupplying their natural Wants, our Saviour has given us great Reaſon to expect it: *Seek ye firſt*, ſays he, *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs,*

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and all theſe Things ſhall be added unto you. Upon whoſe Authority likewiſe St. *Paul* tells us, that *Godlineſs has the Promiſe of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come.* Nay, farther, there is great Reaſon to think, that God often bleſſes the honeſt Endeavours of the Virtuous in this World: But then there is no Appearance that the Rules of Juſtice are at all concerned in ſuch Diſpenſations; for the Righteous often ſuffer, nay, under the Goſpel they are called to ſuffer; for which Reaſon the Invitation to us is, *To take up our Croſs, and follow Chriſt.* But, to come to the Point of Rewards and Puniſhments, the Parable of the Tares in the thirteenth of St. *Matthew* is deciſive. The Meaning of which Parable our Saviour has expounded: It repreſents to us the State of the World, in which the Good and Bad flouriſh together; and though Men ceaſe not to call upon God for a Diſtinction to be made between them, yet He, who ſeeth not as Man ſees, has otherwiſe determined. In this World he permits them to flouriſh and live together; but the Time is coming, that great Harveſt of the World is approaching, when a full Diſtinction ſhall be made; when

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the Wicked ſhall be caſt into a Furnace of Fire, and the Righteous ſhine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

Thus, you ſee, Reaſon, Experience, and Scripture, all conſenting to teach us not to look for the Reward of our Labour in this World, but to wait with Patience God's appointed Time, when the Great Judge of the World will do righteouſly, and recompenſe to every Man the Things which he has done.

Let us look back then to the Text, and take from thence the proper Exhortation ariſing from this Concluſion: Since we plainly ſee, that this World is no Place of Rewards and Puniſhments, let us not be ſo fooliſh as to look for our Reward here, and be diſcouraged if we receive it not. If we raiſe in ourſelves ſuch idle Expectations, and imagine that to be good is a certain Way to be rich, great, or proſperous, we lay a Foundation for great Diſappointments, and ſhall be in danger of growing ſick of our Work, when our Hopes forſake us. But if we look to the appointed Time of Reward, and give ourſelves up contentedly to the Providence of God in this World, and to that Lot,

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be it what it will, which he has provided for us, our Hopes will never fail; we ſhall be ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, knowing that our Labour, however difficult here, ſhall not be in vain in the Lord: *For in due Seaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.*

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

DISCOURSE VIII.

PART I.

MATTHEW xiii. 29.

But he ſaid, Nay; leſt, while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up alſo the Wheat with them.

TO underſtand the Text we muſt look back as far as the twenty-fourth Verſe of this Chapter, where our Saviour puts forth a Parable, comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to a Man who *ſowed good Seed in his Field; but while Men ſlept, his Enemy came and ſowed Tares among the Wheat.* When they both ſprung up and appeared in the Field, the Servants, under a Surprize at the Diſappointment, report it to their Maſter;

Sir, didſt not thou ſow good Seed in thy Field? from whence then hath it Tares? He ſaid unto them, *An Enemy hath done this.* The Servants reply, *Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?* In Anſwer to which follow the Words of the Text, *But he ſaid, Nay; leſt, while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up alſo the Wheat with them.*

Take away the Dreſs of Parable, and what our Saviour here delivers amounts to this: There will always be a Mixture in the World of good and bad Men, which no Care or Diligence can prevent; and though Men may and will judge, that the Wicked ought immediately to be cut off by the Hand of God, yet God judges otherwiſe, and delays his Vengeance for wiſe and juſt Reaſons; ſparing the Wicked at preſent for the ſake of the Righteous; reſerving all to that great Day in which the divine Juſtice ſhall be fully diſplayed, and every Man ſhall receive according to his own Works.

The View of this Parable has, in ſome Parts of it, I think, been miſapprehended. It is intended to repreſent the neceſſary Condition of Mankind, ſome being good, ſome bad; a Mixture which, from the very Nature of Mankind, is always to be expected;

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and to juſtify God in delaying the Puniſhment of thoſe Sins, which all the World think are ripe for Vengeance. This being the View of the Parable, it is going out of the Way to conſider the particular Cauſes to which the Sins of Men may be aſcribed; for the Queſtion is not, from whence the Sins of Men ariſe, but why, from whatever Cauſe they ſpring, they are not puniſhed? In the Parable therefore our Lord aſſigns only a general Reaſon of the Wickedneſs of the World, *An Enemy hath done this.* But there are, who think they ſee another Reaſon aſſigned in the Parable, namely, the Careleſsneſs of the public Governors and Rulers, intimated in thoſe Words, *But while Men ſlept, his Enemy came and ſowed Tares among the Wheat:* And this Text always finds a Place in ſuch Complaints. And there is indeed no Doubt, but that the Negligence of Governors and Magiſtrates, Civil and Eccleſiaſtical, may be often one Cauſe of the Ignorance and Wickedneſs of the People: But that it is aſſigned as a Cauſe in the Parable cannot be proved; for theſe Words, *while Men ſlept,* inſtead of charging the Servants with Negligence, plainly ſhew, that no Care or Diligence of theirs could prevent the

Enemy. Whilſt they were awake, their Care was awake alſo, and the Enemy had no Acceſs: But ſleep they muſt, Nature requires it; and then it was the Enemy did the Miſchief. Had it been ſaid, while Men played, or were careleſs, or riotous, that would have been a Charge upon them; but to ſay, *while Men ſlept*, is ſo far from proving that their Negligence cauſed it, that it plainly proves their Diligence could not prevent it. For, what will you ſay? Should Huſbandmen never ſleep? It is a Condition upon which they cannot live, and therefore their ſleeping cannot be charged as their Crime. This Circumſtance therefore in the Parable is to ſhew, not the Fault of the Huſbandmen, but the Zeal and Induſtry of the Enemy to do Miſchief. Watch him as narrowly as you will, yet ſtill he will break through all your Care and Diligence. If you do but ſtep aſide, compelled by the Call of Nature, to eat, to drink, or to ſleep, he is ready to take the Opportunity to ſow his Tares; and the Ground, which will not anſwer the Huſbandman's Hope without his Toil, and Labour, and Coſt, will produce the ill Seed of its own accord, and yield but too plentiful a Crop. Farther, the Character of the Huſ-

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bandmen throughout the Parable agrees to this Expoſition: When they ſaw the Tares ſpring up, they betrayed no Conſciouſneſs of Guilt or Negligence; they did not come with Excuſes to their Maſter, but with a Queſtion, which plainly ſpeaks how little they miſtruſted themſelves: *Sir, didſt not thou ſow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then hath it Tares?* Would any Servant, who had ſuffered the Field to grow wild by his own Lazineſs, have expoſtulated the Caſe in ſuch a manner? The Maſter, far from charging any of his Family with the Fault, lays it at another Door, *An Enemy hath done this.* Upon which the Servants, not ſparing of their own Pains, were deſirous to go to work immediately, and to root out all the Tares at once. What is there in all this, that ſuits with the Character of a lazy, idle, negligent Servant? What is there that does not ſpeak a Care and Concern for their Maſter's Affairs? As ſoon as they diſcover the Tares, they go directly to their Maſter, and inform him, and offer their Service to root them out. In this Particular he corrects their Judgment, though he does not condemn their Diligence. And, in truth, one main View of the Parable is to correct the Zeal of thoſe, who cannot ſee the

Iniquity of the World without great Indignation; and, not being able to ſtop or to correct it themſelves, are apt to call upon God to vindicate his own Cauſe, by taking the Matter to himſelf, and puniſhing the evil Doers, The Men who have this Zeal and Warmth againſt Iniquity, are not commonly the idle, negligent Rulers; nor can we ſuppoſe that our Saviour would paint the ſame Men in ſuch different Colours in the Compaſs of a ſhort Parable, repreſenting them idle and careleſs at the twenty-fifth Verſe, active and zealous at the twenty-eighth. Beſides, as was obſerved before, to charge the Wickedneſs of the World upon the Negligence of this or that Part of Men anſwers no Purpoſe of the Parable, which is to juſtify the Wiſdom of Providence in permitting the Sins of Men to go unpuniſhed for the preſent: But the Juſtification does not ariſe from conſidering the Cauſes of Iniquity, but from conſidering the Effect which immediate Puniſhment would have. In the other Way, now explained to you, this Circumſtance, *that while Men ſlept the Tares were ſown*, promotes the main End of the Parable, and completes the Juſtification of the Providence of God: For this ſhews, *that Offences muſt needs come*; they

they are not to be prevented without diſturbing the very Courſe of Nature, without God's interpoſing miraculouſly to ſuſpend the Workings of ſecond Cauſes; ſince all Care exerciſed in an human Way is too little, for even when Men ſleep, and ſleep they muſt, the Enemy will ſow his Tares. Since therefore the Parable ſhews, that Iniquity can neither be prevented, nor immediately puniſhed, conſiſtently with the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, it ſhuts out every Complaint, and forces us to acknowledge, that God is juſt in all his Ways, and righteous in all his Dealings with Mankind.

The Scope of the Parable being thus accounted for, let us now proceed to conſider the Text more particularly; which contains the Reaſon, Why God delays to puniſh the Sins of Men in this World, reſerving them to the Judgment which ſhall be hereafter. There are two Ways in which we may conſider the Words of the Text:

Firſt, As they regard the particular Caſe in View, and account for the Juſtice of God in ſuſpending his Judgments.

Secondly, As they furniſh us with a Principle of Reaſon and Equity applicable to many other Caſes.

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Firſt, As they regard the particular Caſe in View, and account for the Juſtice of God in ſuſpending his Judgments. To ſee the full Force of the Reaſon in this reſpect, it is neceſſary to underſtand what ſort of Sinners are ſpoken of: For this Reaſon is not applicable to all Caſes, many Sinners are ſpared upon other Accounts than this which is given us in the Text. The Sinners intended in the Text are ſpared merely on Account of the Righteous, that they may not be involved in the Puniſhment due to the Sins of others: But ſome Sinners are ſpared out of a Mercy which regards themſelves, in hopes of their Amendment. Thus St. *Paul* has taught us, that the *Riches of God's Goodneſs, and Forbearance, and Long-ſuffering, lead to Repentance.* The Sinners, who are repreſented by the Tares in the Text, are ſuch of whoſe Repentance and Amendment there is no Hope; for Tares, let them grow ever ſo long, will ſtill be Tares, they can never turn to Wheat. And our Saviour has told us in the Cloſe of the Parable, that theſe Sinners ſhall certainly be puniſhed at the laſt; which cannot certainly be ſaid of any but incorrigible Sinners, for *he that repenteth, and forſaketh the Evil of his Way, ſhall ſave his Soul alive.*

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The Sinners therefore being conſidered as incorrigible, there was no room to juſtify the Delay of Puniſhment from any Circumſtances ariſing out of their own Caſe. Even the Mercy of God was excluded in this Circumſtance; for if the incorrigible Sinner be the Object of Mercy, no Sinner need fear Puniſhment. Our Saviour therefore gives them up entirely, and juſtifies the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in ſparing them from other Motives. The Intereſts of good and bad Men are ſo united in this World, there is ſuch a Connection between them in many Reſpects, that no ſignal Calamity can befal the Wicked, but the Righteous muſt have his Share in it. It is out of Mercy therefore to the Righteous that God ſpares the Wicked, leſt, whilſt he gathers up the Tares, he ſhould root out the Wheat alſo. This was *Abraham*'s Plea when he interceded with the Lord for the Men of *Sodom*, *Wilt thou alſo deſtroy the Righteous with the Wicked?* The Reaſon of which Plea was ſo ſtrong, that had there been ten righteous Perſons in the City, the whole had been preſerved from Ruin. In public Calamities it is evident that all muſt be Sufferers without Diſtinction: Fire and Sword, Famine and Peſtilence, rage indifferently in the

Borders of the Righteous and the Sinner, and ſweep away one as well as the other. Thus far then the Reaſon of the Text moſt certainly extends, and ſhews us the great Mercy of God in forbearing to appear againſt Sinners in ſuch viſible and exemplary Puniſhments, which would deſtroy whole Countries, and bring even upon the beſt of Men the Puniſhments due only to the worſt.

But are there not, you will ſay, many Ways of puniſhing Men without including others in the Calamity? Do not Fevers, and many other Diſtempers, carry off ſingle Perſons without ſpreading farther? And would not theſe be proper Meſſengers of Providence to ſingle out deſperate Sinners, in which Caſe there would be no Danger of involving the Righteous in the Puniſhment of the Wicked? And if the Wicked are ſpared only for the ſake of the Righteous, why are they exempted from theſe Puniſhments, in which the Righteous have no Concern or Connection with them?

In Anſwer to which ſeveral Things may be ſaid: And, Firſt, to him that aſks the Queſtion, an Anſwer may be returned by a like Queſtion; How do you know but that the Wicked are often and commonly thus puniſhed?

puniſhed? and that the Thing is done every Day, which you complain of as never done? Wicked Men die every Day, and die in the Way you ſpeak of, ſome by Fevers, ſome by other Diſtempers or Accidents. Can you diſtinguiſh which of them fall in the common Way of Nature, and which are taken away by the ſecret Judgments of God? Can you tell by the Pulſe when a Fever is to be reckoned among the common Accidents of Life, and when to be aſcribed to the Vengeance of God? If not, how can you tell but that every Hour may produce ſuch Inſtances, as you complain are very rare and ſcarce to be found, and the Want of which you think ſo great an Objection againſt an overruling Providence? As to outward Appearance, the ſame Caſualties attend both the Good and the Bad; but he has thought very little, who cannot ſee that the outward Appearance is no Rule to judge by in this Caſe. *Lazarus* died, and the rich Man died alſo: Thus far there was no Diſtinction in their Fate; the Lookers on could not ſay which was taken away in Mercy, and which in Judgment: But the very next Scene cleared up all the Doubt, and ſhewed how terrible a Judgment Death was to the rich Man,

how

how great a Mercy to the poor one: For the rich Man died, and was tormented in Hell; the poor Man died, and was carried to *Abraham*'s Boſom. It may therefore be true, that God does exerciſe many Judgments on the Wicked in this ſilent manner, though it is not in our Power to point out the particular Inſtances, or pronounce upon ſingle Perſons, who are under Judgments, and who not. Now the Objection from the want of ſuch Puniſhments can have no more Force, than the Objector has Certainty that there are no ſuch Puniſhments; and ſince there is no Certainty in one, there can be no Force in the other.

But, Secondly, allow the Matter of the Objection to be true, that there are great Numbers of wicked Men ripe for Deſtruction, who yet eſcape all theſe Puniſhments, who live and flouriſh in the World, and at laſt die the common Death of Men, and, as far as we can judge, go down in Peace to their Graves: Yet ſtill, though this be allowed, the Reaſoning of the Objection will not be good, becauſe our Saviour's Reſolution of the general Caſe extends to theſe Inſtances alſo; and the Wicked are often exempted even from private Judgment, that the Righ-

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teous may not be overwhelmed in their Ruin. For conſider; You ſee a great wicked Man in a proſperous and flouriſhing Condition, and you think his happy Tranquillity a perpetual Reproach to the Providence of God: What would you have done? You would not have God rain Fire and Brimſtone upon the City for the ſake of this great Offender, ſince many innocent Perſons would neceſſarily ſuffer in the Ruin? No; but you would have God take him away ſuddenly by ſome ſecret and ſilent Method; or you would have him puniſhed in his Fortune, and reduced to that Poverty which his Sins deſerve. This, you think, would be very juſt and reaſonable, and highly becoming the Wiſdom of God. But pray, has your wicked Man no Friends nor Relations, whoſe Happineſs depends upon his Proſperity? Has he no Children, who muſt beg with him when he falls into Poverty and Diſtreſs? There is no great Man, who is not related to others in ſome, if not in all theſe Circumſtances. If then you allow in general the Equity of ſparing the Wicked for the ſake of the Righteous, you muſt conſider their Caſe over again, and anſwer theſe few Queſtions: Are all the Relations and Dependents of this great

great Sinner as wicked as himſelf? Is there not one good Man the better for him? Are his Children all Reprobates? Or, would you turn out a Family of innocent Children to ſeek their Bread in the Streets, rather than let the Iniquity of the Father go unpuniſhed for a few Years? Till you can anſwer theſe Queſtions, you muſt not pretend to arraign the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in ſparing this Offender; for you know not how many innocent, how many virtuous Perſons may be cruſhed in his Fall; and when you can anſwer them, you ſhall have Leave to judge. Now theſe Conſiderations plainly ſhew the Equity and Goodneſs of God in delaying the Puniſhment of the Wicked for the preſent, both with reſpect to the public Calamities which the general Corruption calls for, and with reſpect to the private Puniſhments, which the Sins of particular Men, if conſidered alone, and by themſelves, do richly deſerve. In both Caſes Mercy triumphs over Juſtice, and the Guilty is preſerved for the ſake of the Innocent; which is ſuch an Act of Goodneſs as no Man ſurely has Reaſon to complain of. As to the Juſtice of God, neither will that ſuffer

in this Account. The Day is coming which will diſſolve all the preſent Relations between Men, when every one will ſtand ſingly by himſelf to account for the Good or Evil he has done. In that Day the Wicked ſhall not eſcape, nor ſhall his Puniſhment affect the Righteous, but his Iniquity ſhall be on his own Head only. When the *Harveſt comes*, the Maſter will order his Servants to *ſeparate the Tares from the Wheat*; the one he will *gather into his Barns*, the other he will give up to be *burnt with unquenchable Fire*.

Upon the whole then: This Method of God's dealing with the Children of Men is, in all its Parts, without Reproach. Even this Complaint, which is ſo commonly made againſt the Adminiſtration of Providence, that the Wicked are permitted to live unpuniſhed, is itſelf a great Argument how little Reaſon we have to complain, ſince it ſhews the Lenity of the Government we are under; and ſurely it is our Happineſs, that we are more to ſeek in accounting for the Juſtice of God than for his Mercy. Were God to be as rigid in the Execution of Juſtice, as ſuch Complainers ſeem to require he ſhould be, what ſhould you or I get by it? What we get by his Mercy we know, or ought to

know, I am ſure, if we underſtand ourſelves and our own Condition: And for Sinners to upbraid God with want of Juſtice againſt Sinners, that is, againſt themſelves, is a Crime which carries with it ſo much Folly, as I hope may in ſome meaſure excuſe the Inſolence, ſince nothing elſe can. Were the Caſe to be altered, and God to appear as terrible in Juſtice, as he is wonderful in Mercy, how much more ſhould we be puzzled to account for his Proceeding? As we ſee many now ſpared whom we account great Sinners, we ſhould then ſee many puniſhed whom we eſteem good Men: For all are not good who ſeem to be ſo. And how then ſhould we be called on to juſtify the Severity of God; a Severity which, to our thinking, fell alike upon the Righteous, and the Unrighteous? For whatever Way God takes, the Thing muſt appear myſterious to us; for the Faces and the Hearts of Men are often at Variance, and we, who can only judge by the outward Shew, ſhould often be at a loſs to diſcern the Equity of his Proceeding, who judges by the Heart. Should God therefore proceed to puniſh all who deſerve it, we ſhould ſtill have the ſame Objection, that Puniſhments and Rewards were not equally adminiſtered;

and,

and, ſince we muſt be in the Dark, how much happier is it for us to be in ſuch a Caſe, where we think we ſee too little of the Juſtice of God, than in a Condition, where we ſhould ſoon think we ſaw too little of his Mercy? The Advantage which our preſent Situation affords is ſuch a Balance on the Account, that we ſafely defy every bold Objector, and enter into his Reckoning without Fear or Danger; for in every Step the Goodneſs of God ſhines forth as bright as the Sun at Noon-day, and let thoſe call for his Juſtice, who are willing to abide the Trial by it.

I obſerved to you, that the Argument in the Text extends to one Caſe only, to the juſtifying the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in delaying the Puniſhment of incorrigible Sinners. It is true indeed, that if this Caſe can be defended, all others may; and therefore this Argument is by Conſequence a full Defence of the Providence of God, as it relates to the Puniſhment of Sinners: But, as other Caſes have their particular Reaſons, give me leave to cloſe this Diſcourſe with preſenting to you a ſummary View of the Caſe in its ſeveral Circumſtances.

That Men are Sinners is ſuppoſed in the Objection againſt the Juſtice of God for not

puniſhing Sin; and therefore, in Strictneſs of Reaſoning, it belongs not to this Queſtion to account for the Wiſdom of God in permitting Sin: And yet this Inquiry is ſo nearly allied to the preſent Caſe, that our Lord in the Parable has incidently cleared this Point, *While Men ſlept, the Enemy ſowed his Tares.* Such is the Condition of human Nature, ſuch the State of the World, that no Care or Diligence can prevent the Growth of Vice: And as every body ſees this to be the Caſe, ſo it is confeſſed by thoſe, who demand a Reaſon why God does not interpoſe to prevent Iniquity; for, as the Queſtion refers the preventing Vice to the overruling Power of God, ſo it ſuppoſes no other Remedy to be ſufficient to the Evil. But what is it that they demand, who require that God ſhould by his irreſiſtible Power prevent all Evil? Nothing leſs, than that he ſhould deſtroy all Law and Religion, and diveſt Men of that, which is at preſent their diſtinguiſhing Character, Reaſon and Underſtanding: For, if every Thing is to be done by a ſuperior Force, there is an End of all Law, and of all the Uſe and Exerciſe of Reaſon. It is ſaid to be a Crime, in ſome Eaſtern Country, for the Subjects to look upon the Prince; and therefore,

therefore, when he appears, they fall down and hide their Faces. Now this Law or Cuſtom neceſſarily ſuppoſes that the Subjects have Eyes; for ſhould the Emperor blind all his Subjects, it would be ridiculous to charge them not to look on him. The ſame would be the Caſe with reſpect to all Laws in general, ſhould God neceſſarily overrule the Wills of Men; for to bid Men not do that, which it is impoſſible they ever ſhould do, is abſurd and ridiculous.

Since then Offences muſt needs come, the Queſtion is properly aſked, Why are not Men as certainly diſtinguiſhed by Rewards and Puniſhments, as they are by Virtue or Vice? This would be a mighty Encouragement to Virtue, and what is to be expected from the Juſtice of God. The firſt Return to this Queſtion is to let Men know, that they inquire not wiſely concerning this Matter, for the Thing is too high for them: For, ſince the Deſerts of Men muſt neceſſarily be eſtimated by a Rule which they are not Maſters of, that is, by the Sincerity of their Hearts, they can never judge when Rewards and Puniſhments are duly adminiſtered: And therefore their Reaſon fails; for a due Adminiſtration of Rewards and Puniſhments in this World

would not tend, as they ſuppoſe, to the Encouragement of Virtue, becauſe Men cannot judge when there is ſuch an Adminiſtration, or when not; and poſſibly too they may be miſtaken in thoſe very Caſes, which they think deſerve to be made ſignal Examples of vindictive Juſtice. The next Return to the Queſtion is, that what they require is inconſiſtent with the preſent Condition of Men, and the Goodneſs of God. As to the Condition of Men, they are in a State of Trial and Probation, and therefore it is fit they ſhould have Time to ſhew themſelves; which they would not have, were every Offence to meet with its due Recompence of Reward immediately. As to the Goodneſs of God, it would ill become him to deſtroy Men, as long as there are Hopes of their Amendment, and therefore to bear with the Sins of Men, in Proſpect of their Repentance, is both juſt and merciful. Thus to bear with the Sins of Men is inconſiſtent with puniſhing the Sins of Men, as ſoon as the World thinks they deſerve it; for who can ſay when Men are paſt all Hope? But farther, even as to incorrigible Sinners, though nothing can be ſaid for them, yet much may be ſaid to ſhew, that this World is no proper Place for their

Puniſhment:

Puniſhment: For the Good and Bad are here ſo united together, that it is not poſſible to ſeparate them in temporal Puniſhments; and therefore God bears with them out of mere Mercy to the Righteous.

Thus then the Caſe ſtands: And now conſider who has Reaſon to complain. Examine your own Conſcience; if you are a Sinner, it ill becomes you to call for Vengeance; if you are righteous, or think yourſelf ſo, why ſhould you murmur, ſince it is for your ſake that the Wicked are preſerved from immediate Ruin, that you may not be overwhelmed in their Deſtruction? Conſider alſo, which is the Concluſion of the whole Matter, *That God hath appointed a Day in the which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs*; in which all the ſeeming Inequalities of Providence ſhall be ſet right, and every Tongue ſhall confeſs, that the Lord is juſt, and righteous, and holy in all his Ways.

DISCOURSE VIII.

PART II.

IT now remains that we conſider the Text, as furniſhing us with a Principle of Reaſon and Equity applicable to many Caſes.

It is the more neceſſary to make this Inquiry, becauſe the Rule in the Text is liable to be miſapplied, unleſs we carefully attend to the Reaſons upon which it is founded, from which only we can learn in what Caſes the Rule is applicable, in what not. The Mercy of God is the beſt Pattern that we can copy after, and our Lord has recommended to us, *To be merciful, even as our heavenly Father is merciful.* Since therefore God ſpares the

the Wicked who deſerve Puniſhment, nay, who are ripe for final Deſtruction, for the ſake of the Righteous, that they may not partake in their Sufferings, what ſhall we ſay? Is it reaſonable that Men ſhould act in like manner? that Magiſtrates, who are Diſpenſers of temporal Puniſhments, ſhould releaſe the Guilty, becauſe of the Innocent who are nearly concerned in the Fortunes of the Guilty, and who muſt ſhare either in the Shame or the Loſs of the Puniſhment? At firſt Sight perhaps you may imagine there is a Parity of Reaſon in theſe Caſes; and yet upon farther Conſideration you will find, that the ſame Reaſon which juſtifies God in delaying the Puniſhment of the Wicked, would condemn the Magiſtrate ſhould he permit the Guilty to live unpuniſhed.

To come at this View clearly, we muſt attend to the Difference between the Reaſon of Juſtice, and the Rules of Juſtice. By the Rules of Juſtice, I underſtand the general Principles and Maxims of Juſtice by which the Laws of all Countries are governed and directed. By the Reaſon of Juſtice, I underſtand the Fountain from which all Maxims and all Laws are derived, which is no other than right Reaſon itſelf: For Laws are not

juſt,

juſt, as partaking of the Authority of the Law-giver, but as partaking of his Reaſon. And hence comes the Diſtinction between good and bad Laws, though both derived from the ſame Authority; which ſhews, that Authority, though it may make a valid Law, yet it cannot make a good one, unleſs acting upon the Reaſon of Juſtice. Now between the Reaſon of Juſtice and the Rules of Juſtice there is this great Difference; the Reaſon of Juſtice takes in all Circumſtances of every Caſe, and therefore cannot err in its Judgment; but the Maxims of Juſtice have no Relation to the particular Circumſtances of any Caſe, but are formed upon general abſtracted Ideas, and conſequently they often may and do fail, when they are applied to ſingle Inſtances: From whence it often happens, that the Reaſon of Juſtice, and the Maxims of Juſtice, ſtand in direct Oppoſition to one another. And this gave Occaſion to that proverbial Speech, *Summum jus, ſumma injuria*; for the Words in themſelves, unleſs you have reſpect to the different Rules to which they refer, are a plain Contradiction. For it is not to be affirmed, that what is *ſummum jus* according to this Law, is, according to the ſame Law,

ſumma

ſumma injuria: But the Truth of the Proverb is to be underſtood by referring the Parts of it to their proper Rules. *Summum jus* regards the written Law, *ſumma injuria* regards the original Reaſon of all Law. And then in many Caſes it happens, that the Letter of the Law contradicts the Reaſon of the Law: And the Cauſe of this I before obſerved, becauſe Laws and Maxims of Law have no Regard to the Circumſtances of particular Caſes, which Circumſtances nevertheleſs do ſometimes entirely alter the Nature of the Caſe.

Hence it plainly appears, how liable we are to miſtake, as long as we form our Judgments by applying general Rules of Law or Equity to particular Caſes. Thus, for Inſtance, it is a right Maxim of Juſtice, that all Sinners ſhould be puniſhed; and the Maxim is derived from the certain Difference of Virtue and Vice, from the Ends of Reward and Puniſhment, which are adapted to promote Virtue, and diſcourage Vice. Place then before you a particular Sinner: By the Rule of Juſtice he muſt die; but what if it ſhould appear, from the Circumſtances of his Caſe, that you cannot puniſh him conſiſtently with the Ends of Juſtice, that is, you cannot

not promote Virtue, or diſcourage Vice, you cannot diſtinguiſh Good from Evil in his Caſe, but muſt afflict both alike? What will you ſay? Shall the general Maxim prevail contrary to the very Reaſons upon which the Maxim itſelf is founded? Or ſhall the Reaſons of Juſtice and Equity prevail to ſuperſede a general Law, which is not applicable to the preſent Caſe?

Now there is the ſame Difference between the Judgments of God, and the Judgments of Men, as there is between the Rules of Law, and the Reaſon of Law; For Men are tied down to judge by the Rules which the Law preſcribes; but the Judgment of God does not ariſe from any Rule or Maxim of Law, but in every Inſtance follows the Reaſon of the Thing to be judged of; otherwiſe his Judgments would not in every Caſe be reaſonable. It is mere Weakneſs that makes Men go by Rules; and becauſe they are not able to judge accurately upon all emergent Caſes, therefore they have general Rules for their Direction. But how abſurd would it be to imagine God as acting by any ſuch Rules, as having recourſe to ſtated Laws or Maxims for the Direction of his Judgment in particular Inſtances? As Reaſon is in all

Caſes

Caſes the Fountain of Juſtice, and of all Laws and Principles of Law, ſo the Divine Reaſon, which is perfect, is in every Caſe the true Meaſure of Juſtice. From hence it evidently appears, that ſince the Judgments of God are not formed upon the general Notions and Principles of Juſtice which we are converſant in, thoſe Notions can be no ſafe Rules for us in the Examination of the Ways of Providence, becauſe our Rules do not always extend to the Reaſon of particular Caſes; but the Judgments of God do always regard the Reaſons and Circumſtances of every Caſe.

Farther: Theſe Conſiderations will help us to form diſtinct Notions of Juſtice and Mercy, and diſcover to us, if not what they always are, yet at leaſt what they always ſhould be. Juſtice is thought to be a Thing fixed and certain, and to have its proper Bounds and Limits, which it cannot tranſgreſs without loſing its Name: But Mercy is taken to be of a more variable, uncertain Nature, to have no Rule to go by, but to ariſe from the Will of the Governor: And conſequently we uſually ſpeak of Juſtice and Mercy as Oppoſites to each other, and ſuppoſe that Mercy can have no Place, unleſs

Juſtice

Juſtice recedes to make room for it. What does or may happen in the World we are not concerned to inquire; our Buſineſs is to ſearch after the true Notions of Juſtice and Mercy, not the corrupt Practices in either. Now Mercy and Juſtice would not be diſtinguiſhed, were it not for the Intervention of general and particular Laws, which often fall very heavy upon particular Perſons; whence it is that we complain of the Rigor and Hardneſs of the Law: But were Men perfect both in their Reaſon and in their Wills, ſo that they could neither judge amiſs nor act amiſs, they would then do that which is exactly right and reaſonable in every Caſe, and there would be no room to correct the Rigor of Juſtice by the Interpoſition of Mercy; for there is no Rigor in that which is perfectly right and reaſonable. For conſider what are the Pleas for Mercy: Do they not ariſe from the Circumſtances of the Perſon, or the Action, which ſhew that the Law is too hard in his Caſe, and that he ought in Reaſon to be eaſed againſt the Extremity of the Law? But had all theſe Circumſtances been weighed in the firſt Judgment, and Juſtice adapted to the very Merits of the Caſe, all the Pleas for Mercy had

been

been prevented, and conſequently there had been no room for Mercy; for Mercy without Reaſon is a mere Effect of arbitrary Power, and not of Goodneſs. But now that all Caſes are judged by Laws made long before the Caſes happened, and which cannot conſider the Alleviations or Aggravations of particular Facts, it comes to paſs ſometimes, that the Law is a very inadequate Rule of Juſtice in Caſes that fall under it. Shall the Perſon then ſuffer according to the Rule of Juſtice againſt all Reaſon of Juſtice? No; he ought to have the Benefit of Mercy, and to be relieved againſt the Rigor of the Law. What then, becauſe the Puniſhment of the Law is too heavy for his Crime, ought he therefore to go unpuniſhed? becauſe this Puniſhment is unreaſonable, ſhall he therefore eſcape that which is reaſonable? No; for though Mercy ought to take off the Rigor of Juſtice, yet it ought not to deſtroy Juſtice itſelf. It is evident then, that it is the proper Work of Mercy to correct the Rules of Juſtice by the Reaſon of Juſtice; and, conſequently, were all Judgments formed upon the true Reaſons of Juſtice, Juſtice and Mercy would be one and the ſame Thing.

Hence, perhaps, we may be able to account for a Difficulty, which is apt mightily to diſturb Men when they ponder the Judgments of God: They conſider him as eſſentially juſt, and eſſentially merciful, from whence they rightly conclude, that he can never be otherwiſe than merciful, never otherwiſe than juſt; and yet how to reconcile theſe Attributes in every Caſe they ſee not. In human Judgments, it is plain, where Mercy prevails, Juſtice ſleeps; where Juſtice acts, Mercy is ſilent: But this cannot be the Caſe in divine Judgments, becauſe God can neither ceaſe to be juſt or merciful. But, if we conſider that the Acts of Mercy and Juſtice, as they are diſtinguiſhed from one another, are relative to ſtated Rules and Laws, and that they are both the ſame with reſpect to the Reaſon of Juſtice; we ſhall eaſily diſcern how God, who always acts by the pureſt Reaſon, that is, by his own, may be ſaid in every Judgment to do juſtly and mercifully. For when God does that which is perfectly reaſonable, all Circumſtances weighed, in every Caſe, there is no Caſe in which any one can complain for want either of Mercy or Juſtice; for, if there be any Reaſon to complain, it muſt be becauſe the Thing, in

ſome Reſpect, is not reaſonable; and therefore, when the Reaſon of Juſtice is exactly purſued, you have the true Point, where Mercy and Juſtice meet together: And this is the Point in which all the Judgments of God do centre. I ſpeak here of the Judgments of God properly ſo called; for thoſe Acts of Goodneſs which he exerciſes in Right of his ſupreme Sovereignty and Dominion are not within our preſent View. And that this Account is true, you may partly collect from the Inſtance in which the Text is concerned: Our Saviour does not juſtify God for delaying the Puniſhment of the Wicked, by diſtinguiſhing between the Mercy and Juſtice of God, and ſhewing how Mercy triumphed over Juſtice in this Delay; but he appeals to the Reaſon of the Caſe, and ſhews that God did what was fit and becoming a wiſe Judge and Governor; and that the Thing complained of as a Defect of Juſtice, was, all its Circumſtances conſidered, the Height of Juſtice and Equity: And this will plainly appear in the Application we are to make of what has been ſaid to this particular Caſe.

The Parable, of which the Text is Part, is evidently intended as an Anſwer to the common Objection againſt Providence, drawn from

from the Proſperity of Sinners, or rather, in the preſent Caſe, from the Impunity of Offenders. If you examine upon what Principles the Objection proceeds, and upon what Principles the Anſwer, you will find that the Objection is founded upon one of the common and general Maxims of Juſtice, which, as I have already ſhewn, do often miſguide our Judgments in particular Caſes; and that our Saviour's Anſwer is drawn from the Reaſon of all Law and Equity, which can never fail. Aſk the Man, who makes this Objection againſt God's Government, why he thinks it unbecoming the Wiſdom of God to delay the Puniſhment of Sinners? he will readily anſwer, becauſe it is contrary to his Juſtice; and, to ſupport his Reaſon, he will farther add, that it is an undoubted Maxim of Juſtice, that all Sinners deſerve Puniſhment. And here, I think, he muſt ſtop; for he cannot enter into particular Caſes, unleſs he knew more of Men than he does, or can know. In Anſwer to this, our Saviour owns the Truth of the general Maxim, as far as it relates to the Deſert of Sinners; and therefore teaches us, that God has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World: But then he ſhews, from ſuperior Reaſons of

Juſtice, that the Application of the Principle in the preſent Caſe is wrong; for though it be juſt to puniſh all Sinners, yet to puniſh them immediately would deſtroy the very Reaſon, which makes it juſt to puniſh them. It is juſt to puniſh them, that there may be a Difference made between the Good and the Bad according to their Deſerts, that their Puniſhment may be a Diſcouragement to Vice, an Encouragement to Virtue. Now our Lord ſhews in this Parable, that the immediate Puniſhment of the Wicked would quite deſtroy theſe Ends of Juſtice; for the Righteous and the Wicked, like the Wheat and Tares growing together in one Field, are ſo mixed and united in Intereſt in this World, that, as Things ſtand, the Wicked cannot be rooted out, but the Righteous muſt ſuffer with them: Conſequently, the immediate Deſtruction of the Wicked, ſince it muſt inevitably fall upon the Righteous alſo, would make no proper Diſtinction between the Good and the Bad; could be no Encouragement to Virtue, for the Virtuous would ſuffer; could be no Diſcouragement to Vice, for Vice would fare as well as Virtue: And therefore it is not only reaſonable to delay the Puniſhment of the Wicked, but even neceſ-

ſary to the obtaining the Ends of Juſtice, ſince they cannot be obtained in their immediate Deſtruction.

This then is a full Juſtification of God in his Dealings with Men; and ſhews his Juſtice, as well as his Mercy, in not executing Wrath and Vengeance as ſoon as Sinners are ripe for them. But if this be the Height of Juſtice in God, how is it not the Height of Injuſtice in Men to deal with one another quite otherwiſe? Temporal Puniſhments, even thoſe which are capital, are executed immediately; though often it happens that many Innocents ſuffer in the Puniſhment of one injurious Perſon. The Law does not conſider who ſhall maintain the Children, when it ſeizes the Father's Eſtate as forfeited; nor does Juſtice relent for fear ſhe ſhould make a miſerable Widow, and many wretched Orphans, by the ſevere Blow which cuts off the guilty Huſband and Father. Nay, farther; This very Method of Juſtice is ordained by God, and Magiſtrates are not at Liberty totally to ſuſpend the Execution of Juſtice; and how comes God to purſue one Method of Juſtice himſelf, and to preſcribe another to his Vicegerents? The plain Anſwer is, becauſe the Reaſon of theſe two

Caſes is very different. The Puniſhments of this World are not the final Puniſhments of Iniquity; but are Means ordained to ſecure Virtue and Morality, and to protect the Innocent from immediate Violence. Offences which diſturb the Peace of Society, and the Security of private Perſons, will not bear a Delay of Juſtice; for the End of Juſtice, in this Caſe, is to ſecure Peace; But this End can never be ſerved by permitting Thieves, and Murderers, and Rebels, to go unpuniſhed; and though, whenever they ſuffer, many Innocents may ſuffer with them, yet many more would ſuffer in their Impunity; and this World would be ſcarcely habitable, were ſuch Crimes as theſe to wait for their Puniſhment till another World ſucceeded this. Our Saviour's Reaſoning, when applied to this Caſe, leads to another Concluſion; that the Righteous may not ſuffer, God delays the final Puniſhment of the Wicked; for the ſame Reaſon, that the Righteous may not ſuffer, he has commanded the Magiſtrate to cut off all the Sons of Violence, all Diſturbers of the public Peace and Quiet. And, in ſo doing, he has followed the ſame Reaſon in both Caſes, namely, that the Righteous may be preſerved

and

and protected: In one Caſe, preſerved from the Violence of the Wicked; in the other, from the Contagion of their Puniſhment. In a Word, Offences againſt Men muſt be corrected and diſcouraged by preſent Puniſhment, or elſe this World will be a Scene of great Woe and Miſery to the beſt Men: Violence will prevail, and the Meek, far from inheriting the Earth, will be rooted out of it. Offences againſt God, though of a deeper Dye, yet have not in them the ſame Call for immediate Vengeance: For God ſuffers not from the Wickedneſs of Men; the Ends of Juſtice are beſt ſerved by the Delay, and his Goodneſs is at preſent diſplayed in his Forbearance; and his Honour will ſoon be vindicated in a more public Theatre than that of this preſent World, in the Sight of all the Dead, as well as of all the Living.

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DISCOURSE IX.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation: The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Fleſh is weak.

FOR the better underſtanding of theſe Words, I muſt deſire you to reflect a little upon what Occaſion they were ſpoken, and in what Circumſtances our Saviour was, when he made this Exhortation to his Diſciples. The Time of his Crucifixion was now near at hand, and he had foretold his Diſciples that they ſhould all be offended becauſe of him; upon which St. *Peter* made a very forward Profeſſion of Conſtancy, as did likewiſe all the Diſciples. But it does not appear that they clearly underſtood our

Saviour,

Saviour, or were apprehenſive that they ſhould ſo ſoon loſe their Maſter; if they had, they could not have been ſo ſupinely negligent and unconcerned for his Welfare, as immediately to fall aſleep, as we read they did. But our Saviour, as he had a different Senſe of what he was to undergo, ſo was he differently affected: He began to be ſorrowful, and very heavy; and expreſſed himſelf to his Diſciples, *that his Soul was exceeding ſorrowful, even unto Death.* He began to feel the Weakneſs and Infirmities of human Nature upon the Approach of Death, and the Terror and Apprehenſion of it increaſed ſo faſt, as to draw that Petition from him, *O my Father, if it be poſſible, let this Cup paſs from me.* In which Prayer he was ſo earneſt, and his Agony ſo great, that the *Sweat fell from him like Drops of Blood.*

No one was ever more willing to fulfil the Will of God than he was: He came into the World to do the Will of his Father, and was ready to finiſh the Work ſet before him. But yet, in this laſt and ſharp Trial, he found how great the Weakneſs of the Fleſh was, and how powerful Impreſſions it had upon him: From whence probably aroſe the Reflection mentioned in the Text, *The Spirit*

indeed

indeed is willing, but the Fleſh is weak; which he makes the Ground of his Exhortation to his Diſciples, *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation.* When he returned from Prayer to them, he found them aſleep, and, after expoſtulating with them for the Unconcernedneſs it betrayed towards him in his Diſtreſs and Affliction, he exhorts them rather to employ their Time in watching and praying; for, though they had made a very forward and bold Reſolution rather to die with him than deny him, yet he knew that a Reſolution and Willingneſs to obey were not a ſufficient Support againſt the Weakneſs of human Nature, but that they ſtood in need of all the Advantages that might be reaped from Watchfulneſs and Prayer. If he himſelf found Difficulties from the Weakneſs of the Fleſh, he might well conclude how unable his Diſciples would be, when their Time of Trial ſhould come. So that the Words of the Text, *The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Fleſh is weak*, ſeem rather founded on what our Saviour experienced in his late Agony, than from any thing that was criminal in his Diſciples. They were aſleep indeed, which was an unkind Part, when they ſaw in how great Diſtreſs their

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Maſter was, but otherwiſe it was not faulty in itſelf. They did not apprehend the imminent Danger their Lord was in; if they had, their Fear and Anxiety would have interpoſed to diſturb their Reſt. Nor did our Saviour blame their Sleep otherwiſe than as unſeaſonable at that Time, when the Danger that attended them required them to be otherwiſe employed. There was a great Storm ready to break, in which he foreſaw they muſt bear a Part, as well as himſelf; and therefore there was a Neceſſity they ſhould arm, and prepare themſelves againſt it. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation:* Which is a Warning for them to ſtrengthen themſelves againſt future Evil; and he does not much blame their Carriage as yet, but rather tacitly acknowledges the great Forwardneſs they expreſſed to ſuffer with him, and for him; *The Spirit indeed is willing.* But then he knew the Greatneſs of the Temptation they were to undergo, and had lately himſelf experienced the Weakneſs and Inability of human Nature, and therefore recommends Watchfulneſs and Prayer to them, becauſe *the Fleſh is weak.*

The Words thus explained contain a very proper and ſuitable Exhortation to the Seaſon

in which they were ſpoken, and to all Men in general: And the Reaſon of them is a powerful Excitement to us to pray continually for the Grace and Aſſiſtance of God's good Spirit, knowing, how ready and willing ſoever we may be to obey, that we are beſet with too many and too ſtrong Enemies to permit us long to continue in our good Reſolutions; which ſhould make us look about for Help, and, if I may ſo ſpeak, enter into new Alliances with Heaven, for greater Supplies of ſpiritual Strength to oppoſe the common Enemy of Mankind.

But this Explication of the Text, how worthy ſoever of its Author, and agreeable to the Circumſtances in which it was delivered, will not eaſily be digeſted; becauſe it undermines the Foundation of the favourite Doctrine of Sins of Infirmity, which, upon the ſlender Encouragement of this Text of Scripture, has thriven wonderfully, almoſt to the Excluſion of all other Sins out of the World. For Men are very willing to liſt all their Sins under the Colours of Infirmity, and ſo leave them to ſhift for themſelves: Which, whatever elſe it ſignifies, has this preſent Effect, it rids them of the Trouble and Pains of Repentance and Amendment,

and

and eaſes them of the Terror and Apprehenſion of Guilt, which would otherwiſe be very unwelcome Companions to the Pleaſures of Sin.

The Text, when uſed to this Purpoſe, is thus explained: The Diſciples are ſuppoſed to have committed ſome great Fault, for which our Saviour rebukes them; *What, could ye not watch with me one Hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation:* But then, checking himſelf, he makes this Excuſe for them, *The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Fleſh is weak:* Abſolving them for the Willingneſs that was in them, and throwing all the Blame and Guilt of Sin upon the Weakneſs of the Fleſh. Now to make the moſt of this: The Fault which the Diſciples were guilty of, could be no other than falling aſleep, and that after long and tedious Watching; ſo that if the Weakneſs of the Fleſh was applied as an Excuſe to the Apoſtles Caſe, nothing elſe can be underſtood by it, but the natural Wants and Cravings of Nature, which are neceſſary to the Support of Life; ſuch as Sleepineſs, Hunger and Thirſt, which no one doubts but may be ſo ſtrong, without any Fault of ours, as to interrupt us when we might be better employed; and, whenever

whenever they are ſo, are without queſtion very pardonable Infirmities. But, if this were the only Uſe made of this Notion, no one would think it worthy of a Diſpute.

But, as ſome Men of melancholic Tempers and Diſpoſitions have fancied every Sin they have been guilty of to be the Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, and themſelves irrecoverably rejected, and incapable of the Mercy and Favour of God; ſo others of a different Temper have reckoned all their Sins to be Sins of Infirmity, and themſelves ſecure enough from the Anger of God, and Danger of Puniſhment. The one pays dear for his Miſtake in this World, by the Fears and Apprehenſions under which he continually ſuffers: And the other will have no Reaſon to be proud of his Contrivance, when his Error comes to be rectified by the impartial Judgment of God in another. It is a falſe Security Men gain to themſelves by theſe little ſhifting Tricks in Religion; and there is juſt as much Policy in this Conceit, as in his, who ſhut his own Eyes faſt, and thought no body elſe could ſee him. For, however Men darken and blind their own Judgment, there is, who ſees through all their Pretences, and will judge a righteous Judgment.

But, the better to enable us to judge of this Matter, it may be proper to inquire, what are Sins of Infirmity, and what Value there is in the Excuſe. And though there is no Ground in the Words of the Text for this Diſtinction, yet, ſince they have been ſo often applied to this Purpoſe, I hope it will not be thought an unſeaſonable Deviation to endeavour to rectify the Miſtakes in this Caſe, which are but too general, and of too fatal Conſequence to the Souls of Men.

In this Inquiry I ſhall confine myſelf to the following Method:

Firſt, To conſider what is the Scripture Senſe of Infirmities.

Secondly, What Sort of Sins they are, which will admit of an Excuſe, becauſe of the Infirmity from which they proceed.

The State of human Nature is ſuch, as to be liable to many Pains, Diſeaſes, and at laſt to Death: And though all are not equally affected, ſome having a leſs Share of theſe Evils than others, yet all, by the Weakneſs of Nature, are equally liable and expoſed to theſe Miſeries: This is the firſt and proper Notion of Infirmity. In this Senſe Chriſt is ſaid *to bear our Infirmities*; being, by the neceſſary Law of his human Nature, ſubject to the

the like Miſeries and Afflictions with us. St. *Paul* ſays, *he was crucified through Weakneſs*; that is, he was by the Condition of his Humanity liable to Death, which expoſed him to the Death of the Croſs, through the Malice and Power of his Enemies. Under this Senſe are contained, as Particulars in a General, all the natural Wants and Weakneſſes of Nature; ſuch as Hunger, Thirſt, Sleepineſs, the Fear and Dread of Pain, and the Averſion and Horror of Death: Which Infirmity our bleſſed Saviour himſelf was not free from, as appears by what has been already ſaid.

But Men are not more weak and imperfect in their Bodies than in their Minds, nor more expoſed to bodily Pains than to the Impreſſions of Sin, which is our ſpiritual Diſeaſe: And though all are not Sinners alike, yet all are alike weak, and ſubject to the Temptations of Sin: And this is the general Senſe of Infirmity, when applied to our ſpiritual Condition. St. *Paul* tells us, *the Law was weak through the Fleſh:* And the Author to the *Hebrews* to the ſame Senſe, *There was a diſannulling of the Commandment going before, for the Weakneſs and Unprofitableneſs thereof: For the Law made nothing*

perfect. Which is not to be underſtood, as if the Law was weak, carnal, and unprofitable, conſidered in itſelf; for, St. *Paul* ſays, *the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy, juſt, and good:* But Men were ſo weak and carnally minded, the Diſpoſition to Evil was ſo great, for which the Law had not provided a ſufficient Cure, that the holy, juſt, and good Commandment was made ineffectual. Agreeable to this, St. *Paul,* in the Perſon of an unregenerate Man, ſays, *The Law is ſpiritual, but I am carnal, ſold under Sin; for in me, that is, in my Fleſh, dwelleth no good Thing: For to will is preſent with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.* This, and more to the ſame Purpoſe, you will find in *Rom.* vii. This Incapacity St. *Paul* calls *the Law of Sin which is in the Members,* which rules and governs in the Unregenerate, and from which we are freed by Chriſt, as he immediately declares: *The Law of the Spirit of Life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made me free from the Law of Sin and Death. For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the Fleſh, God ſending his own Son in the Likeneſs of ſinful Fleſh, and for Sin, condemned Sin in the Fleſh: That the Righteouſneſs of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk*

walk not after the Fleſh, but after the Spirit. So that now the Weakneſs of the Fleſh is done away, and we, having received the Spirit of Life and of Chriſt, muſt fulfil the Righteouſneſs of the Law; and may, if we walk according to the Spirit we have received. Nothing is plainer, than that St. *Paul* oppoſes the Law of Sin, and the Law of the Spirit of Life; and the Condition of him who was under the Law of Sin, in whom is the Weakneſs of the Fleſh, and of him who is under the Law of Life, in whom is the Spirit of Righteouſneſs. Yet ſome will have St. *Paul* ſpeak in his own Perſon without a Figure, that is, in the Perſon of a regenerate Chriſtian, when he deſcribes the State of the Law of Sin; and have learned to make Grace and Sin conſiſtent, and taught that Grace once received can never be effaced by actual Sins, of what Number or Quality ſoever, or the Sinner made leſs the Child of God. A Doctrine, of which it is hard to ſay, whether it has leſs of Chriſtianity or common Senſe.

In this Argument St. *Paul* more than once ſpeaks thus: *If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but Sin that dwelleth in me.* Which is thought by ſome to come very near

to the Caſe of Sins of Infirmity: For the Excuſe from Infirmity is made up of Willingneſs, and Want of Power; Willingneſs to obey, and Want of Power to withſtand the Temptations and powerful Impreſſions of Sin. In all moral Actions there is a Proportion between the Ability to perform, and the Guilt of not performing; and the one muſt be eſtimated by the other: But, if we conſider ourſelves as Chriſtians, who do not depend purely on our own Strength, but likewiſe on the Aſſiſtance of God, the Meaſure of which depends on the Application we uſe to obtain it, the Terms of the Proportion will be altered, and the Guilt of our Diſobedience will be meaſured by the Ability we might have had to perform our Duty. For, if we fail in Ability through our own Default in uſing the Means preſcribed by God to enable us, the Guilt of our Sins will be according to the Ability we might have had; and therefore the Excuſe may be true, and yet inſignificant. It may be true, that you had not Power to withſtand the Temptations you fell under; and yet this may be no Juſtification, becauſe it was your own Fault that you had not Power. The not obſerving which, is the true Foundation of Men's relying ſo much

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for Excuſe upon their Infirmities. They are conſcious to themſelves how violent the Temptation to Sin was, and how much it overpowered their Strength; upon which they ground their Excuſe: But then they leave out of the Conſideration, how much more Strength they might have had, if they had not neglected the Means of obtaining it. St. *Paul* tells us, *We are not in the Fleſh, but in the Spirit, if ſo be that the Spirit of God dwells in us*; and therefore we ſhall be judged, not according to the Strength of the Fleſh, but of the Spirit, which we have, or may have, if it be not our own Fault. A Man may as juſtly be puniſhed for not being able to perform his Duty, when he had it in his own Hands to make himſelf able, as for not doing his Duty when he was able. And there is not much Difference between theſe two; for it is one Part of our Duty to enable ourſelves to perform our Duty, and all the Conſequences of our Weakneſs and Infirmity are juſtly chargeable upon the Neglect of it. This is but little more than what all Moraliſts have agreed in the Caſe of vicious Habits: It is hardly to be imagined, how great a Neceſſity an ill Habit brings us under; yet no Man ever urged this as an Ar-

gument to excuſe Sin; but thought the firſt Neglect in ſuffering the Habit to grow up, entitled Men very juſtly to the Guilt of all the Sin conſequent upon it. If we know how to remedy our Infirmities, why do we ſtill boaſt of them, or place our Security in them? St. *Paul* complains of a *Thorn given him in the Fleſh*, for the Removal of which he thrice prayed; to which he had no other Anſwer from the Lord, than *my Grace is ſufficient for thee, for my Strength is made perfect in Weakneſs*. Upon which St. *Paul* triumphed and gloried in his Infirmity. But how? Not as we glory in our Infirmities, uſing them as an Excuſe for Sin; but, *becauſe through his Infirmity the Power of Chriſt reſted on him*. The Law of the Spirit of Life having then ſo plentifully provided againſt this Weakneſs and Depravity of the Fleſh, there can no longer any Colour of Excuſe be had from it.

Next to this general Senſe of Infirmity come the particular Infirmities included in it. As every Diſeaſe of the Body is called an Infirmity, as our Saviour, when he healed the Sick of their particular Diſtempers, is ſaid to cure their Infirmities; ſo, by the ſame Analogy, every particular Sin may be called an Infirmity. Thus *David*, ſpeaking

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of his Diſtruſt of God's Goodneſs, calls it his *Infirmity*. So the Author of the *Hebrews*, ſpeaking of the *Jewiſh* High-Prieſts, ſays, *the Law maketh Men High-Prieſts which have Infirmities*. But in the Scripture it is no where uſed in this Senſe as an Alleviation of Guilt.

But the Senſe of Scripture is the leaſt thing regarded in ſetting up this Plea of Infirmity, which has been invented and uſed to ſhelter ſome particular darling Sins, and ſeldom or never for the univerſal Imperfection of all, even the beſt of our Actions, in which Senſe only it can be reaſonably uſed; but that Men think not worth excuſing. The Boſom Sin is the Thing to be defended: In which Caſe two Things are generally urged, a natural Paſſion, and the Violence of the Paſſion. A natural Paſſion has the ſame Author with Nature, and belongs to us as we are Men, and therefore not to be avoided. For the Violence of the Paſſion, the particular Conſtitution and Temperament of Body are alledged, which expoſe ſome more to this or that Paſſion than others perhaps are liable to. But it is the Misfortune of ſome Arguments to prove too much, and, like an Arrow too ſtrongly drawn, miſs the Mark by going be-

yond it. What Sin is there that may not thus be excuſed? St. *Paul* reckons among the Works of the Fleſh, *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanneſs, Laſciviouſneſs, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenneſs, Revellings, and the like*; then adds, *they which do ſuch Things ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God.* Now try theſe round, they all immediately, or by Conſequence, ariſe from Paſſions which are called natural, and, as they meet with a ſuitable Temper, ſome may prevail in one, ſome in another; and then either the Excuſe is vain, or the Apoſtle's Judgment is vain, that *they which do ſuch Things ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

The Scripture uſes Weakneſs in another Senſe, as oppoſed to Knowledge; as *weak Chriſtians* are thoſe newly converted, and not yet confirmed in the Knowledge and Myſteries of Chriſtianity: But this Senſe is nothing to our Purpoſe.

So likewiſe Weakneſs is applied to them who have weak and tender Conſciences, eaſily offended, who ſcrupled eating Meat offered to Idols, the Uſe of which the Apoſtle allows to ſuch as had Senſe enough not to be offended at it. Their Infirmity was a nice

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and ſcrupulous Fear of Sin, where there was no Reaſon to fear: A Weakneſs we are pretty well got over.

Theſe are the moſt uſual, if not all the Scripture Senſes of Infirmity; and I think it appears, that none of them have Infirmity enough in them to be an Excuſe for Sin. All Sin is Weakneſs; the more perfect any Creature is, and the nearer it approaches to Him who is all Perfection, the more remote is it from a Poſſibility of ſinning. It was our Weakneſs made it neceſſary for the Son of God to come to our Aſſiſtance, to reſcue us from the Law of Sin and Death; which he did by condemning Sin in the Fleſh, and by the powerful Effuſion of his Holy Spirit. But to what Purpoſe is the Holy Spirit promiſed or given, but to overcome our Infirmities, that the Strength of God may be *made perfect in Weakneſs?*

But yet, after all theſe Helps, we are not, nor cannot be, perfect Creatures. St. *James* ſays, *In many Things we offend all.* How ſhall theſe Errors be excuſed, which the beſt of Men are liable to? Is there a Foundation for an Excuſe, or muſt all alike periſh in the Error of their Ways? This will receive an Anſwer, if we conſider,

Secondly, What ſort of Sins they are which will admit of an Excuſe, becauſe of the Infirmity from which they proceed.

And here you are not to expect a Catalogue of Sins, for I know no kind of Sin that can be otherwiſe excuſed than by Repentance and Amendment; and at beſt there is an Impropriety of Speech in Sins of Infirmity. The neceſſary Effects of our Infirmities are not ſinful: Where they are not neceſſary, they may be ſinful; but why they are called Sins of Infirmity in Diſtinction to other Sins is hard to ſay. There is an Imperfection in the Obedience of the beſt of Men. The five Wiſe Virgins ſlumbered, and their Lamps grew dim, and wanted trimming, when the Bridegroom came: But yet they ſoon made ready, and were received to the Marriage Feaſt: And, without queſtion, God will favourably look upon the Failings of good Men, and accept their ſincere, though not perfect Obedience. This, I hope, we have Reaſon to allow: But yet the common Notion of Sins of Infirmity gains nothing by it; for let any one ſay what is the Sin of Infirmity that all good Men are guilty of. There is an Imperfection which flows from the Weakneſs of our preſent Condition, and ſhews

itſelf,

itſelf, not regularly, but in various Inſtances. Many good Chriſtians have complained of a Coldneſs ſometimes in their Devotion, and of wandering and roving Thoughts; which is, without doubt, one of thoſe Weakneſſes that ſhall be forgiven to pious and ſincere Chriſtians. Will you then make this one of your Sins of Infirmity, an Evil that carries its Excuſe always with it? Surely no: For, though it ſhall be forgiven ſome, it will be an Aggravation of the Guilt of others, who have not the ſame ſincere Obedience and good Diſpoſition to plead in their Excuſe. Some are troubled with impious and blaſphemous Thoughts, unworthy Conceptions of God and Chriſt, and ſuffer a prodigious Torment and Anxiety of Mind becauſe of them, who are Objects of Pity and Compaſſion both to God and Man: And when this is the Caſe of well-diſpoſed Perſons, who are no ways conſenting to them, there ſeems to be as little Guilt in them, as in a Fever or an Ague.

Upon the whole then: Since there is ſo little Reaſon to depend upon this Excuſe, and ſince all Men in ſome Degree ſtand in need of it, I will ſhew you the Way, and I know but one Way of entitling ourſelves to this Plea,

Plea, which is by endeavouring ſincerely and univerſally to obey the Will of God; then ſhall we be in the Number of thoſe, whoſe Infirmities for the ſake of Chriſt ſhall be forgiven.

DISCOURSE X.

ISAIAH liii. 3.

He is deſpiſed and rejected of Men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief.

WHEN our Lord was led away to be crucified, and the Women bewailed and lamented his Miſery, he turned about to them, and ſaid, *Daughters of Jeruſalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourſelves.* Words, which we may very properly apply to ourſelves for the Direction of our Devotion on this Day of his Crucifixion: A Day it is of Sorrow and Mourning, but not for his ſake, who, crowned with Glory and Honour, is ſet down on the right Hand of the Majeſty on high; but for our own, whoſe Sins brought down this Load of Woe and of Miſery

Miſery upon our bleſſed Redeemer. If we conſider with how unbounded a Love he embraced us in our loweſt State of Weakneſs, and with how cool an Affection we daily approach to him; how much he gladly endured upon our Account, and how unwillingly we ſuffer any thing upon his; if we reflect how earneſtly he laboured to ſave our Souls, and how careleſsly and wantonly we throw them away; what Pains and Sorrows he underwent to perfect our Redemption, and to what empty Pleaſures we ſacrifice all his Sufferings, and our own eternal Happineſs, it will ſhew us where the true Cauſe of our Grief lies, and how vainly we compliment our Lord, by venting our Indignation againſt his antient Crucifiers, which ought to be ſpent upon ourſelves, who are daily renewing his Shame, and *crucifying him afreſh.*

Whilſt therefore I repreſent unto you this Scene of Woe, and endeavour to place before you *this Man of Sorrow, acquainted with Grief,* let every Chriſtian Heart ſupply this neceſſary Admonition, All this he ſuffered for my ſake; then caſt one Look upon yourſelves, and ſee how you have deſerved all this Love: This will teach you how to divide your Affections, to admire and adore the unbounded

bounded Goodneſs of your Redeemer, and to lament and weep only for yourſelves.

Many Prophecies there are relating to our Lord, which regard only ſome particular Actions and Circumſtances of his Life; but this in the Text points at no ſingle Calamity that befel him, but is a general Deſcription of his Condition during his Abode on Earth: It begins at his Cradle, and ends with his Croſs, purſuing him in every Step, and diſcovers to us the Son of God through the darkeſt Veil of Sorrow and Affliction.

Known unto God are all his Works from the Beginning of the World: In Wiſdom he ordained them all, and in Mercy he has revealed ſome of them to the Children of Men. How gracious was it in him to forewarn the World by the Spirit of Prophecy of the mean Appearance of their Redeemer, that their Faith might be armed againſt the Reproach and Contempt which attended his Poverty, and the great Scandal of his Croſs! In human Reckoning a mean Condition beſpeaks a mean Man; but here the Caſe is otherwiſe: For, when God had foretold the mean Appearance of his Son, his Poverty became a Proof of his Authority, and the Lowneſs of his Condition ſhewed the Ex-

cellency of his Perſon. He was *a Man of Sorrow, and acquainted with Grief*; and had he not been ſo, we could never have believed him to be that glorious Redeemer, who, as the Spirit of Prophecy foretold, ſhould be *deſpiſed and rejected of Men*. The Conſideration therefore of our Saviour's Sufferings is not only an Argument to inflame our Love, but to ſtrengthen our Faith likewiſe; ſhewing as well that he is our Redeemer, as how much he underwent for the ſake of our Redemption.

There are three Things then which may deſerve your Attention in this Subject:

Firſt, The Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in determining to ſend his Son into the World in a State of Poverty and Affliction.

Secondly, The Evidence of Prophecy, that he ſhould ſo appear in the Fulneſs of Time.

Thirdly, The hiſtorical Evidence, that he did ſo appear, and that in him the Prophecies had their Completion.

Firſt, The Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in determining to ſend his Son into the World in a State of Poverty and Affliction.

The Sufferings of Chriſt we find often inſiſted on by the ſacred Writers, as an Evidence of the Mercy of God towards Mankind.

Thus

Thus St. *Paul*, *He that ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all Things?* And again, *God commendeth his Love towards us, in that while we were yet Sinners Chriſt died for us.* So likewiſe St. *John*; *Hereby perceive we the Love of God, becauſe he laid down his Life for us.* This indeed was a great Demonſtration of his Love; for, as our bleſſed Lord himſelf hath told us, *Greater Love hath no Man than this, that a Man lay down his Life for his Friends.* Were it then ever ſo hard to render an Account of Chriſt's Sufferings to the Inquiſitive, to the Reaſoners of this World; yet, ſince it is plain his Sufferings were upon our Account, if we conſider them as an Argument of God's Goodneſs, and our Redeemer's Love to us, it ſtands clear of all Difficulties whatever, and plainly ſpeaks how much our Salvation was the Care of Heaven. Perhaps we cannot ſee the Reaſons that made it neceſſary for Chriſt to die, that the World might live: But this we certainly know, that if Chriſt died, that the World might live, he had an exceeding great Tenderneſs for the World, and we are bound to him in the ſtricteſt Bonds of Gratitude and Love. And, ſince

this Scene lies ſo open to our View, it ſhews great Perverſeneſs of Mind, and a baſe ungenerous Diſpoſition, to ſhut our Eyes upon it, and to harden our Hearts againſt the Impreſſions of ſo much Kindneſs, and to amuſe ourſelves with curious Inquiries into the hidden Reaſon of this myſterious Love. What is it that your Lord requires of you, but to love and to obey him? What greater Inducement can you have to both than this, that he firſt loved you, and laid down his Life for you? Could you give ten thouſand Reaſons for the Expediency of his ſo doing, yet ſtill your Love and your Obedience would ſtand upon the ſame Bottom, that Chriſt died, that you might live. What Purpoſe then of Religion would it ſerve, to know theſe hidden Things of God? Knowledge will ſave no Man. And who would not chuſe rather to be found in the Number of the moſt ignorant Lovers of Chriſt, and of his Word, than among the profoundeſt Inquirers into the ſecret Myſteries of Providence? Would you ſee the Goodneſs of God? Nothing plainer, Chriſt died for you. Would you encourage yourſelf in the Practice of Virtue by the Expectation of God's Aſſiſtance and Favour? Or would you comfort yourſelf

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in your Repentance, and be glad to know that God will receive you, if you return from the Evil of your Ways? Go, learn to reaſon of St. *Paul: If God ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not with him alſo freely give us all Things?*

Thus far then, that is, as far as we are concerned to go, our Knowledge is clear and diſtinct, and the Sufferings of Chriſt afford us ſuch an Argument for Love and Obedience, as the weakeſt Man muſt underſtand, and the wiſeſt muſt adore.

But farther: Though we cannot enter into the hidden Wiſdom of God, and ſee the Reaſons which made it neceſſary for Chriſt to ſuffer; yet if we conſider his Sufferings with reſpect to ourſelves, we may diſcern many wiſe Ends of Providence in this Diſpenſation.

Firſt, With regard to his being a Teacher, his Sufferings ſet him above the Reach of Suſpicions. What Ends could he have to ſerve by his Doctrine, who met with nothing but Miſery and Affliction, as the Reward of his Labour? Religions, we know, have been inſtituted to ſerve the Ends of Policy, and new Kingdoms have ſprung out of new Doctrines: Thus the Empire and

Alcoran of *Mahomet* have the ſame Date. But what room is there for theſe Jealouſies with reſpect to the Chriſtian Religion? What Advantage did Chriſt, or his Followers, make of the Goſpel? The Maſter lived in Poverty, and the Diſciples in Diſtreſs: He ended his Life upon the Croſs, they theirs by ſundry Kinds of Death. Nor was he diſappointed in meeting with this Uſage: He knew before that it was ordained for him; and it was one great Part of his Buſineſs to prepare his Diſciples to follow his Example, by acquainting them long before of the Afflictions which both he and they were to endure. Some perhaps will ſuſpect there was no Wiſdom in this; and all I think muſt own, that there was no worldly Wiſdom in it. Had our Lord come in the Form of a temporal Prince, ſurrounded with Power and Majeſty, often had we heard before now of his Cunning and his Policy, and been told, that our Religion was more nearly allied to this World than the other. But now the Goſpel ſtands clear of all theſe Objections, from which perhaps nothing could have purged it but the Blood of its Divine Author.

Secondly, With regard to our Lord's being an Example of Holineſs and Obedience,

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ſet before us for our Inſtruction and Imitation. His Sufferings render the Pattern perfect, and ſhew his Virtues in their trueſt Luſtre, and at the ſame Time ſilence the Pleas which Lazineſs or Self-Love would otherwiſe have ſuggeſted. Had he lived in worldly Proſperity, and found all Things eaſy about him, let his Virtues have been ever ſo conſpicuous, his Example would have been extended but a little way. Perhaps poor Men, and unfortunate, would have upbraided the rich and proſperous for not following the Copy ſet before them; but they would have thought their own hard Circumſtances a ſufficient Excuſe for not attempting it. But what Pretence is there now left for any Mortal? Are you more wretched than your Maſter? Are you poor, and therefore diſcontented? Look to him, who had not where to lay his Head, and yet was eaſy, and paid a chearful Obedience to his God. Are you provoked by ill Uſage to forget the peaceful Duties of Charity? Are you hurried to Revenge by uncommon Injuries? And can you at the ſame Time think yourſelf a Diſciple of the bleſſed Jeſus, who even upon the Croſs, and under the bitter Agonies of Death, prayed for his Perſecutors; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?*

Thirdly, With regard to his Divine Miſſion. His Sufferings were an evident Token, that the Hand of God was with him. He only can produce Strength out of Weakneſs, and knows how to confound the mighty Things of the World by Things which are of no Account. Power, we know, eſpecially if attended with happy Incidents, can produce great Things; but a weak poor Man is ſo eaſily oppreſſed, that this before us is perhaps the only Inſtance in which a whole Nation ever roſe to ſuppreſs one. And what was it that enabled him to withſtand the Rage of the People, and the Malice of the Prieſts, ſupported by the Power of the Government? When his Life was ſought, he was hid in the midſt of the Crowd, and was covered with Darkneſs at Noon-day; but, when his Time was come, he fell an eaſy Victim: But his Death, like *Sampſon*'s, was more victorious than his Life; in this only it differed, *Sampſon* by his Death deſtroyed his Enemies, but the Enemies of Chriſt were by his Death redeemed.

Add to this the Evidence of Prophecy, which is ſo much the ſtronger, by how much the weaker Chriſt was: So admirably has the Wiſdom of God diſplayed itſelf in this

this Myſtery of Faith. Had the Prophets foretold that a great Man ſhould do great Things; whenever that great Man had come, it might have been doubted whether he was the Perſon foretold, and whether his mighty Deeds were not the common Effects of ſuch Might and Power as he was armed with: But when the Prophets declared, that all they foretold ſhould be accompliſhed by a mean and wretched Man, oppreſſed with Sorrow, and worn out with Grief; this was a Caſe that could not be miſtaken, hardly two ſuch Men could come; and whenever he came, he would be eaſily diſtinguiſhed by the Greatneſs of his Works, and the Meanneſs of his Condition. And this leads me to conſider,

Secondly, The Evidence of Prophecy concerning the mean Appearance our Lord was to make.

I ſhall not need to carry you far in Search of this Evidence; the Chapter of the Text alone is ſo full a Deſcription of this Part of our Saviour's Character, that it looks more like an Hiſtory than a Prophecy, and may with more Reaſon be ſuſpected to be a Copy drawn from his Life, than not to be a Deſcription of it. Yet this Scripture was in Be-

ing long before our Lord was born, was in the keeping of his Enemies, of thoſe who hated and deſpiſed him, and at laſt put him to a cruel Death, and were at once the Preſervers and the Fulfillers of this Propheey. Here you find him repreſented as void of *Form and of Comelineſs*; as having *no Beauty that we ſhould deſire him*; one *deſpiſed and rejected of Men*; *a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief*; from whom *we hid as it were our Faces*; *he was deſpiſed, and we eſteemed him not*. Yet this is He, of whom before the Prophet had propheſied: *Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the Government ſhall be upon his Shoulder; and his Name ſhall be called Wonderful, Counſellor, the Mighty God, the Everlaſting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the Increaſe of his Government and Peace there ſhall be no End upon the Throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it, and to eſtabliſh it with Judgment and with Juſtice from henceforth even for ever.* What Ænigma's are theſe? Shall he be a mighty Prince, and yet deſpiſed and rejected of Men? Shall he be encompaſſed with the Glories of *David*'s Throne, and yet be void of Form and of Comelineſs? Shall he reign for ever, and eſtabliſh Juſtice and Judgment for evermore,

evermore, and ſhall he yet be taken from Priſon, and cut off from the Land of the Living? Where can theſe Contradictions meet, and in what Manner of Perſon can they be reconciled? But to go on: After this general Deſcription of his low Eſtate, the Prophet proceeds to point out ſome of the moſt remarkable Calamities of his Life. He was not only deſpiſed and rejected, but he *was oppreſſed and afflicted, yet he opened not his Mouth. He was taken from Priſon and from Judgment, and cut off from the Land of the Living; for the Tranſgreſſion of the People he was ſtricken.* And yet he *had done no Violence, neither was any Deceit in his Mouth. Yet it pleaſed the Lord to bruiſe him, and to put him to Grief. His Soul was an Offering for Sin.* And yet after this, when the Prophet had killed and buried him, he adds, *He ſhall prolong his Days, and the Pleaſure of the Lord ſhall proſper in his Hand. He ſhall ſee the Travail of his Soul, and ſhall be ſatisfied. By his Knowledge ſhall my righteous Servant juſtify many; for he ſhall bear their Iniquities.* Where are we now? Muſt he die a wretched Death, and be numbered with the Tranſgreſſors; and yet ſhall he prolong his Days, and ſee the Work of the Lord proſper in his

Hands? How ſhall we clear theſe Things? Look into the Goſpel, and there you will find the Scene opening apace: There you will find your Lord deſpiſed and rejected of Men, perſecuted and afflicted, and put to a cruel Death and open Shame, and yet riſing to Glory and Honour. There you may ſee this Priſoner of the Grave aſcending to the Glory of his Father, giving Gifts unto Men, and leading Captivity captive.

Let us then, in the laſt place, conſider the hiſtorical Evidence we have for the Completion of theſe Prophecies, which deſcribe the calamitous Condition of our bleſſed Redeemer.

The Way was prepared before he was born. His Conception led to it; ſince the Meanneſs of his Parentage could promiſe nothing for the Child but Labour and Sorrow: And ſo it proved. This mighty Prince of Peace made his firſt Appearance in a Manger; and we may well ſuppoſe the other Conveniencies he met, upon his firſt coming into the World, were anſwerable to this. No ſooner was he born, but his Life was ſought after: The diſtreſſed Parents fly their Country, and the Child is carried into Baniſhment, before he knew to diſtinguiſh between Good

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and Evil. His Youth was ſpent in the Difficulties of Poverty, and his Hands employed in the Works of it; and when the Time came that he was to be made known unto *Iſrael*, and ſtood forth in the Power of the Lord, confirming his Doctrine with mighty Signs and Wonders, the Oppoſition to him increaſed, and every Act of Charity he did to others brought new Sorrow and Miſery to himſelf. During this Time, in which he went about doing Good, *he had not*, as he himſelf has told us, *where to lay his Head.* When he caſt out Devils, he was immediately charged to be in League with the Prince of them. When he healed the Sick of their Infirmities, and forgave their Sins, then he was a Blaſphemer, an Incroacher upon the Prerogative of God. When he reſtored the withered Hand, and cured the Lame or the Blind on the *Sabbath-day*, then he was no longer fit to live: Theſe were ſuch Offences, as nothing but his Death could expiate. Conſider what he ſuffered, and he was the loweſt of the Sons of Men: Conſider what he did, and he appears, as he truly was, to be the Son of God.

But ſtill there remains behind the gloomieſt Scene of Sorrow. When the Powers of

Darkneſs prevailed, and the Time of his being offered up drew near, all Things conſpired to make his Death bitter and terrifying. In his Life he had choſen Twelve to be his conſtant Companions, and they at leaſt adhered to him, and willingly partook in his Afflictions: But now one of theſe Boſom-Friends conſpires his Ruin, and ſells him for thirty Pieces of Silver. The reſt, though they were guilty of no ſuch Baſeneſs, yet proved no Comfort in his Diſtreſs.

As the Danger drew near, our bleſſed Lord, who was in all Things tempted like unto us, Sin only excepted, felt the Pangs of Nature at the Approach of Death, and retired to Prayer, the only Support of an afflicted Spirit. In this his Grief he choſe *Peter*, and the Sons of *Zebedee*, to be his Companions, that they might watch with him in his Sorrow: But even here they forſook him, and, inſenſible of their Maſter's Agony, fell aſleep. They were ſoon awakened; but they awoke only to fly, and Chriſt was left alone. *Peter* followed, but it was afar off; and he only followed him to deny him. Thus betrayed, and thus forſaken, he is carried to Judgment. When he is ſilent,

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he is reproached with Sullenneſs: When he ſpeaks, he is charged with Blaſphemy. Sometimes he is buffeted and ſpit on; by and by, in cruel Sport, they pay him the mock Honours of a Prince, he is crowned with Thorns, has a Reed put into his Hand, and in Deriſion he is ſaluted, *Hail, King of the Jews.* And that nothing might be wanting to ſhew how vile and contemptible he was to the People, the Queſtion was put between him and a Murderer, which ſhould be releaſed; and with one Voice the People anſwered, *Releaſe unto us Barabbas.* Thus was he *deſpiſed and rejected of Men.*

Follow him but one Step farther, and you will find him hanging upon the Croſs between two common Robbers, groaning under the bittereſt Agonies of Death. Nor yet can all this Miſery create in the Lookers on any Pity or Compaſſion. See how they ſhake their Heads, and ſay, *Come down from the Croſs, Son of God, come down, and we will believe thee.* But neither the Pains of the Croſs, nor thoſe Pangs which drew from him that Complaint, *My God, my God, why haſt thou forſaken me,* nor all the Malice and Scorn of the Crucifiers could make him one

Moment

Moment forget his Love and Tenderneſs towards them. You hear no Complaint from him, no Appeals made againſt them to a future Judgment: Inſtead of this, with lateſt Breath he pleads their Cauſe, excuſes their Weakneſs, and begs for their Pardon; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

And here let us cloſe this Scene, and return to ourſelves with this Queſtion, *What Reward ſhall I give unto the Lord for all the Benefits that he hath done unto me?* Let us alſo anſwer for ourſelves in the Words of the Pſalmiſt, *I will receive the Cup of Salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord.* We have nothing to return but our Love and Obedience, and nothing elſe is required of us. *He hath borne our Griefs, and carried our Sorrows*; let us not call for them again by our Iniquities: Let them be buried for ever, but let us ariſe to a new Life of Righteouſneſs in Chriſt Jeſus, that *when Chriſt, who is our Life, ſhall appear, we may alſo appear with him in Glory.*

DISCOURSE XI.

COLOSSIANS iii. 1.

If ye then be riſen with Chriſt, ſeek thoſe Things which are above, where Chriſt ſitteth on the right Hand of God.

HOW much the metaphorical Language of Scripture has been miſtaken, and what Errors and Abſurdities Men have fallen into, under Pretence of adhering to the literal Senſe, is well known. The Words of the Text are hardly capable of being ſo abuſed; for it is not poſſible to imagine that St. *Paul* ſhould intend to tell the *Coloſſians*, or that the *Coloſſians* ſhould believe him if he did, that they lived no longer in this World, but were, in the literal Senſe, Men raiſed from the Dead.

Dead. But, as our State and Condition in this World is often ſet forth in the Scriptures in metaphorical Language, it has not fared ſo well in all Parts of it, but Men have ſometimes loſt Sight of the Metaphor, and raiſed very abſurd Notions from a literal Interpretation, as I ſhall have Occaſion to obſerve to you in treating upon this Subject.

The Words now read to you are an Inference from what had been before ſaid, as is evident from the Manner in which they are introduced: *If ye then be riſen with Chriſt.* It is plain likewiſe that they muſt refer to ſomething which had been ſaid of our Reſurrection with, or in Chriſt: For this Concluſion ſuppoſes that Doctrine already laid down and eſtabliſhed. To find this Connection, we muſt look back as far as the Middle of the foregoing Chapter, where the Doctrine referred to in the Text is plainly declared. At the tenth and following Verſes thus you will read: *And ye are complete in him,* (that is, in Chriſt Jeſus) *which is the Head of all Principality and Power. In whom alſo ye are circumciſed with the Circumciſion made without Hands, in putting off the Body of the Sins of the Fleſh by the Circumciſion of Chriſt. Buried with him in Baptiſm, wherein alſo you are riſen*

ſen with him through the Faith of the Operation of God, who hath raiſed him from the Dead: And you being dead in your Sins, and the Uncircumciſion of your Fleſh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all Treſpaſſes. From this the Inference in the Text naturally follows: *If ye then be riſen with Chriſt, ſeek thoſe Things which are above, where Chriſt ſitteth on the right Hand of God.*

For the Explication of theſe Words, it will be neceſſary to ſet before you the Repreſentation which the Scripture makes of the Natural State and Condition of Man, and of his Goſpel State upon his becoming a Chriſtian.

In the State of Nature the Scripture repreſents Men, *Eph.* iv. 17, 18. as *walking in the Vanity of their Minds. Having the Underſtanding darkened, being alienated from the Life of God, through Ignorance and Blindneſs of Heart.* As *walking according to the Courſe of this World, according to the Prince of the Power of the Air, the Spirit that worketh in the Children of Diſobedience,* Chap. ii. 2. As *Children of Wrath, having their Converſation in the Luſt of the Fleſh, fulfilling the Deſires of the Fleſh and the Mind,* ver. 3. As *Strangers to the Covenants of Promiſe, as having no Hope, and without God in the World,* ver. 12.

As *Servants of Sin, yielding their Members Servants to Uncleanneſs and to Iniquity, unto Iniquity*, Rom. vi. 19, 20. And becauſe the End of theſe Things is Death, therefore this State of Sin is called likewiſe a State of Death: *You hath he quickened*, ſays our Apoſtle, *who were dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins*, Eph. ii. 1. The ſame he repeats at the fifth Verſe. Whilſt Men were thus dead to God, and unto themſelves, they lived only to Sin and Unrighteouſneſs. Sin therefore is ſaid to *reign in them*, to have *Dominion over them*. The natural Paſſions and Affections in this State of Corruption were but the Inſtruments of Sin, in all things ſubſervient; and therefore are ſaid to conſtitute the Body of Sin, that Body over which Sin, as the Soul or active Principle, had entire Rule and Dominion. Thus we read, *Rom.* vi. 6. *The old Man is crucified with him, that the Body of Sin might be deſtroyed, that henceforth we ſhould not ſerve Sin.* And in the ſecond of the *Coloſſians*, and eleventh Verſe, we are *ſaid to put off the Body of the Sins of the Fleſh*. The Members, of which this Body is made up, are in the next Chapter deſcribed: *Mortify therefore your Members which are upon Earth, Fornication, Uncleanneſs,*

neſs, inordinate Affection, evil Concupiſcence, and Covetouſneſs, which is Idolatry, Eph. iii. 5. This Body is by St. *Paul*, in his Epiſtle to the *Romans*, called the Body of Death, for the ſame Reaſon that the State of Sin is called the State of Death: *O wretched Man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the Body of this Death*; or, as the Margin renders it, *from this Body of Death*, Ch. vii. 24. The Body, together with the Soul, which is the active Principle of Life, and the Influencer and Director of the Body and all its Motions, conſtitutes the Man. From hence therefore, by an eaſy and natural Metaphor, theſe depraved Appetites and Affections, which are the Inſtruments or Members of Sin, and which compoſe the Body of Sin, together with the evil Principle ruling in us, and directing theſe Affections in the Purſuit of all Uncleanneſs and Iniquity, and which is called *Sin*, are ſaid in Scripture to be the *Old Man*; the Man which only lived before the Regeneration by Chriſt Jeſus. Thus, *Rom.* vi. 6. *The old Man is crucified with him, that the Body of Sin might be deſtroyed.* And the *Epheſians*, Ch. iv. 22. are exhorted *to put off, concerning their former Converſation, the old Man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful Luſts.* This is the State of Nature,

according to the Repreſentation and Language of Holy Scripture: And it is eaſy to ſee what muſt become of this *old Man*, this Man of Sin, upon the Appearance of Chriſt Jeſus, who came to deſtroy the Works of the Devil, to give Light and Life to thoſe who ſat in the Shadow of Darkneſs and Death; he and his Works muſt be deſtroyed to make way for the Spirit of Righteouſneſs, and his holy Works. But thus to deſtroy the old Man, to root out all the corrupt Affections of Nature, and to implant a new Principle of Life and Holineſs, to reſtore the decayed Image of God, to give new Deſires to the Soul, new Affections to the Heart; what is it but to new-make the Man, and by a ſecond Creation to reſtore him to the Rights and Privileges of the firſt, which were long ſince forfeited by Sin and Diſobedience? For this Reaſon the Chriſtian is ſaid to be a new Creature: *If any Man be in Chriſt, he is a new Creature*, 2 Cor. v. 17. *In Chriſt Jeſus neither Circumciſion availeth any thing, nor Uncircumciſion, but a new Creature*, Gal. vi. 15. In the ſecond Chapter of the *Epheſians*, we are ſaid to be *the Workmanſhip of God, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good Works*. And in the fourth Chapter, ver. 23 and 24, we are ſaid *to be renewed*

in

in the Spirit of our Mind: To put on the new Man, which after God is created in Righteouſneſs and true Holineſs. Nay, we are ſaid even to put on Chriſt, from the Similitude of Will and Affections between Chriſt and his true Members: *As many of you as have been baptized,* ſays the Apoſtle to the *Galatians, have put on Chriſt,* Chap. iii. 27.

From this Account it is eaſy to underſtand the Propriety of the Words or Phraſes made uſe of to expreſs theſe two Conditions. Sometimes we read, that we were *dead* before the Knowledge of Chriſt: Sometimes, that *we died* and *were buried with Chriſt:* Again, *that we roſe with Chriſt, and are alive in him.* Now, to be dead before the Coming of Chriſt, and yet to die with Chriſt after his Coming, and yet ſtill to be alive in Chriſt, may ſeem to be Aſſertions inconſiſtent with reſpect to the ſame Perſon: And ſo indeed they are. But, if we take the ſame View of Man that the Scripture does, the Inconſiſtency will ſoon vaniſh. Man was at firſt created after the Image and Likeneſs of God, with a Rectitude of Mind and Will, with Inclinations adapted to his true Happineſs, and ſubject to the Influence and Direction of Reaſon: This was Man after the Image of God. But, upon

Diſobedience, Man became a quite different Perſon; his Underſtanding was darkened, his Will corrupted, his Inclinations diſtorted to the Purſuit of Evil continually. This Change was a real Death of the Man created after the Image of God; he could no longer exerciſe any of the Functions proper to his Life, but lay buried under the Ruins of Sin and Iniquity: And this was the Death of the World before the Knowledge of Chriſt. What then was the Life of the World at the Coming of Chriſt? It was the Life of Sin; of the earthly Man, made not in the Image of God, but after the Likeneſs of the Son of Diſobedience. To deſtroy this Man of Sin, Chriſt came into the World; *and they that are Chriſt's have crucified the Fleſh, with the Affections and Luſts*, Gal. v. 24. And thus, with reſpect to the Life we had at the Coming of Chriſt, which was the Life of Sin, we are ſaid to *die with Chriſt*, and to be *buried with him*; becauſe we renounce that Life, and the Affections proper to it. Thus dying to Sin, we begin again to live unto God, and unto true Holineſs: And this is a Reſurrection of the Man made after the Image of God, which before was dead in Treſpaſſes; and therefore we are ſaid to be made

alive

alive in Chriſt, and *to riſe* together with him.

Farther: This Change was what we had not Power ſo much as to wiſh for, or deſire for ourſelves: It was undertaken and effected by Chriſt alone; he took our Nature and our Iniquities upon himſelf, and underwent Death in the behalf of all: He dying therefore upon the Croſs for all, all are ſaid to be crucified with him. *He*, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* tells us, *taſted Death for every Man*, Heb. ii. 9. And it is St. *Paul*'s Inference, *that if one died for all, then were all dead*, 2 Cor. v. 14. And the Way to attain to the Benefits of the Death of Chriſt, is, as we learn from the ſame Apoſtle in his Epiſtle to the *Philippians*, *to be conformable unto his Death*. This Conformity conſiſts, as we have already ſeen, in dying to Sin, and the Affections of it; in putting off the old Man, in putting on the new Man, who is created after Righteouſneſs. This St. *Paul*, in the ſixth of the *Romans*, ſtyles, *being planted in the Likeneſs of his Death*, and *being planted in the Likeneſs of his Reſurrection*. To this likewiſe he plainly refers in the 29th Verſe of the eighth Chapter: *For whom he did foreknow, he alſo did predeſtinate to be conformed*

to the Image of his Son, that he might be the Firſt-born among many Brethren. There are many Precepts likewiſe in Scripture, founded upon this Notion of our Conformity with Chriſt. The Text is one Inſtance: Another you have in the thirteenth of the *Romans*; *But put ye on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and make not Proviſion for the Fleſh to fulfil the Luſt thereof.* And again, *How ſhall we, who are dead to Sin, live any longer therein?* And many other Places there are, which muſt be opened with this Key.

Nay, the very Eſſence of Chriſtianity conſiſts in this Conformity with Chriſt; and therefore Baptiſm, which is our Admiſſion to the Goſpel, is nothing elſe but a ſolemn taking upon ourſelves this Conformity. This we learn from St. *Paul* in the ſixth of the *Romans: Know ye not*, ſays he, *that ſo many of us as were baptized in Jeſus Chriſt, were baptized into his Death? Therefore we are buried with him by Baptiſm into Death; that like as Chriſt was raiſed up from the Dead by the Glory of the Father, even ſo we alſo ſhould walk in Newneſs of Life*, Chap. iii. 4. To walk in Newneſs of Life is our Conformity to the Reſurrection of Chriſt, which was to new Life and Glory. For thus the

Apoſtle

Apoſtle preſſes the Argument: *Chriſt being raiſed from the Dead, dieth no more: Death hath no more Dominion over him. Likewiſe reckon yourſelves to be dead indeed unto Sin, but alive unto God through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Let not Sin therefore reign in your mortal Body*, ver. 9, 11, 12. As the Reſurrection of Chriſt was to perpetual Life, never more to be expoſed to Death; ſo muſt our firſt Reſurrection, according to this Pattern, be to perpetual Holineſs, and a conſtant Freedom from Sin.

If we bear in our Minds this Account of the Scripture Language, and of the Reaſons upon which it is founded, it will be a Key to open unto us the Meaning of many, otherwiſe intricate, Paſſages of Scripture. For Inſtance: We ſhall not be to ſeek, when we find mention made of two Deaths which we muſt undergo, of two Reſurrections which we muſt partake in: We ſhall eaſily diſtinguiſh between the natural Death of the Body, and the Death unto Sin; between the Reſurrection to Life eternal hereafter, and the Reſurrection to Holineſs and Righteouſneſs in this preſent World. *I am crucified to the World*, ſays St. *Paul, and the World to me. Whoſoever is born of God*, ſays St. *John, i. e.*

whoever is begotten to this new Life in Chriſt by the Power of God, *overcometh the World.* St. *Paul* tells us, that the Spirit of God will *quicken our mortal Bodies,* as well as our dead Bodies. Which is not to be underſtood without having Recourſe to the firſt Reſurrection, which is to a new Life of Holineſs here, and which muſt be the Forerunner and Introducer of the ſecond Reſurrection to Glory. The Apoſtle to the *Philippians* tells us, that he willingly ſuffered the Loſs of all Things, that *he might know Chriſt and the Power of his Reſurrection.* And this he deſired to know, *that he might attain to the Reſurrection of the Dead,* Phil. iii. 10, 11. Where, if you remember what has been ſaid of our being made conformable to the Death and Reſurrection of Chriſt, by riſing to Holineſs and Righteouſneſs, you will not be at a loſs to underſtand what it is *to know,* or feel, *the Power of Chriſt's Reſurrection*; or to underſtand, how the knowing the Power of Chriſt's Reſurrection ſhould be a Means of attaining to the Reſurrection of the Dead. Such is the Power of Chriſt's Reſurrection, that thoſe who feel it have, as the Apoſtle in the 20th Verſe informs us, *their Converſation in Heaven; whence alſo we look for the*

Saviour,

Saviour, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. This, which St. *Paul* calls knowing the Power of Chriſt's Reſurrection, and having our Converſation in Heaven, the Author to the *Hebrews* calls, *Taſting the Powers of the World to come,* Heb. vi. 5. The Reſurrection is indeed one of the Powers of the World to come, which all partake in, and taſte of, whoſe mortal Bodies are quickened by the Spirit of God. In the Verſe after this it is ſaid, that thoſe who fall from their Faith, *crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to open Shame.* How does he who falls away crucify Chriſt, or put him to open Shame? This cannot be underſtood, but by having Recourſe to the Scripture Repreſentation already explained. But, if we remember that all who are baptized crucify the old Man with his Deeds; that they put on the new Man created after Holineſs; that the Apoſtle to the *Galatians* expreſsly ſays, *that as many as are baptized put on Chriſt*; it will readily appear, why it is that thoſe who fall away crucify Chriſt afreſh: For, by receiving the Faith, they put on Chriſt, and crucified the old Man and his Deeds; but if they deſert the Faith, and return to their former Deeds, and again put on the old Man, they do then crucify

Chriſt again with his Deeds, and put him once more to open Shame.

This Notion of the different States and Conditions of Man, of the Death of the old Man, of a new Creature in Chriſt, runs through the Precepts, Exhortations and Doctrines of the Goſpel, which cannot be underſtood but by Analogy to this Notion; and therefore I hope I may be excuſed in ſpending ſo much of your Time in the Illuſtration of it. You have heard already of our Death, and Burial, and Reſurrection with Chriſt: But the Apoſtle in the Text carries the Metaphor ſtill one Degree higher; *If ye be riſen with Chriſt, ſeek thoſe Things which are above, where Chriſt ſitteth at the right Hand of God.* As if he had ſaid, It is not enough that ye are riſen from the Dead with Chriſt, you muſt alſo aſcend after him into Heaven; for there is your Life hid in Chriſt, there are your true Riches, and thither muſt you go to take care of them. You are dead to the World, and can no longer live to it; your Life is ſpiritual and heavenly: As is your Life, ſuch muſt be the Actions which flow from it, the Inclinations that attend it. Since therefore you are dead to the World, alive to Chriſt through the Spirit of Holineſs, you muſt

muſt act like Members of Chriſt, and ſet your Affections on Things above, where Chriſt your Life is aſcended. Hence it is that St. *Paul* often exclaims againſt the Abſurdity of a Chriſtian's living in Sin. You may juſt as well ſay, that all the Actions of Life may be performed in the Grave, when a Man is dead and buried, as ſay that a Chriſtian may continue in Sin: For the Chriſtian has crucified and buried the Body of Sin. How then, as the Apoſtle cries out, *ſhall we who are dead to Sin continue any longer therein?* Sin is the only Poiſon by which the Life of Chriſt, which is in us, may be deſtroyed. It is a Life which no Man can take from you but yourſelf. Thoſe who kill the Body cannot reach it: Not all the Powers of Darkneſs, Sin only excepted, can ſeparate Believers and our Lord. But every unmortified Luſt, every unſubdued Vice, is a Cancer that eats into our very Vitals, and, if we do not cut them off, will in the End deſtroy us quite. Holineſs is as neceſſary to our ſpiritual Life, as Eating and Drinking are to our natural; and therefore the Apoſtle's Concluſion in the Text is juſt, *If we be riſen with Chriſt*, if we live with him, *we muſt ſeek the Things which are above.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XII.

JAMES iii. 17.

The Wiſdom that is from above is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocriſy.

THE Gifts of the Holy Spirit are diſtinguiſhable into two Kinds, being either extraordinary, and peculiar to ſome Times and Perſons; and given, not for the Sanctification of the Men on whom they are beſtowed, but for the Edification of the Church, which is the Body of Chriſt: Or they are common to all Times of the Goſpel, and neceſſary to perfect the Man of God in every good Work; and therefore tendered to all

all, who undertake the Conditions of Chriſtianity, according to the Promiſe of God made through Chriſt Jeſus. Of the firſt Sort were thoſe wonderful Gifts beſtowed on the Apoſtles, and firſt Planters of Chriſtianity, by which they were enabled to convey the Knowledge of the Salvation of God to Men of all Languages, and to convince the World by Signs, and Wonders, and mighty Works, of the Truth of their Miſſion; and that the Word by them ſpoken was the Word of Life, proceeding from Him, whoſe Power was made uſe of in Confirmation of it.

That the Gifts of this ſort conveyed no ſanctifying Grace to the Receiver, is evident from what St. *Paul* has taught us, 1 *Cor.* xiii. *Though I ſpeak with the Tongue of Men and of Angels, and have not Charity, I am become as ſounding Braſs, or a tinkling Cymbal. Though I have the Gift of Prophecy, and underſtand all Myſteries, and all Knowledge, and though I have all Faith, ſo that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing.* The Suppoſition here made, that the Exerciſe of theſe Gifts may conſiſt with a want of Charity, *i. e.* with the want of the moral Qualifications of a Chriſtian, warrants the Concluſion, That theſe Gifts do not convey the

the ſanctifying Grace of the Goſpel; and that they are given, not for the ſake of the Receivers, but for the ſake of others, who through their Miniſtry are to be converted to the Knowledge of the Truth. For this Reaſon they were given, and for ſome Time continued in the Primitive Church, to make way for the Acknowledgment of Chriſt, and for the Conviction of Unbelievers; and may be again renewed, whenever God ſhall think fit viſibly to interpoſe in the farther Propagation of his Goſpel in the heathen World.

It is manifeſt then, that the Scripture aſcribes to the Spirit of God a twofold Operation in the Work of the Goſpel. The firſt is that already mentioned, and is the ſupplying and furniſhing Motives of Credibility, and proper Means to eſtabliſh the Doctrine and Faith. The ſecond is that now to be conſidered in explaining the Words of the Text, to wit, the affording Aſſiſtance and Strength to all, who undertake the Conditions of the Goſpel, to perform them, and to render a Service worthy of the Goſpel, and acceptable to our God and Saviour.

The *Wiſdom* mentioned in the Text is deſcribed to be the *Wiſdom that is from above*, that is, which is given or communicated

from above. And in the firſt Chapter the Apoſtle inſtructs us how to obtain it: *If any of you lack Wiſdom, let him aſk of God, that giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it ſhall be given him: But let him aſk in Faith.* And ſoon after he ſhews us upon what Grounds his Advice ſtands: *Every good and every perfect Gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no Variableneſs, neither Shadow of turning.*

The Inſtruction given, that we ſhould aſk this Wiſdom *in Faith*; the Reaſon aſſigned to ſupport this Faith, that with God *is no Variableneſs, neither Shadow of turning*; do ſufficiently ſhew, that the Wiſdom which we are encouraged to aſk for, is no other than the Grace promiſed under the Goſpel: For the Declaration of God's Purpoſe to give this Wiſdom, which is no where declared but in the Goſpel, muſt be ſuppoſed, before the Immutability of his Purpoſe can be alledged, as a Ground of Hope and Aſſurance to obtain the good Gift by the Prayer of Faith.

By the Word *Wiſdom* then in the Text we muſt underſtand the Grace of God promiſed in the Goſpel, and conſidered in Scripture as the ruling and governing Principle in the

the Diſciples of Chriſt: That Principle of Holineſs by which they are enabled to *mortify the Deeds of the Fleſh*; by which they *do no Sin, and are alive to Righteouſneſs*: Elſewhere ſpoken of *as the Spirit of Chriſt dwelling in them*, and by which their *mortal Bodies are quickened*; and deſcribed as ſo neceſſary to a Chriſtian, that the Apoſtle to the *Romans* has affirmed, *If any Man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his.*

This Grace is called *Wiſdom* upon the ſame Account that the *Fear of the Lord* is ſaid to be the *Beginning of Wiſdom*; becauſe the Wiſdom of Man conſiſteth in the Obedience of God, in whoſe Hand are the Iſſues of Life and Death, and not upon the Account of any Degrees of Knowledge, either ſacred or civil, which it is ſuppoſed to convey. The Fruits aſcribed to this Wiſdom in the Text are all moral Qualifications: It is pure, and peaceable, and gentle, full of Mercy, and the like; of the Learning and Knowledge which proceed from it, we read nothing. The Knowledge of Myſteries, and Things ſacred, may be reckoned among the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit, and are mentioned as ſuch by St. *Paul* in the Paſſage of his Epiſtle to the *Corinthians* already al-

ledged: But he ſpeaks of them as not neceſſarily inferring Charity, and conſequently as diſtinct Gifts from that Grace, or *Wiſdom, which is pure, and peaceable, and full of Mercy.*

The Gifts of the Spirit, conſidered with reſpect to the Author of them, and the Motives inducing him to beſtow them, are properly ſtyled *the Grace of God*; for *of his own Will begat he us with the Word of Truth*, and of his own Will it is that he enableth us to run the Courſe that is ſet before us: So that our Confidence is, to uſe the Language of St. *Paul, that he which hath begun a good Work in us, will perform it until the Day of Jeſus Chriſt.* But, conſidered with reſpect to their Influence on the Receiver, they are, by St. *James* in the Text, ſtyled *Wiſdom*, as correcting the Depravity of Nature, and enabling Men to *become wiſe unto Salvation.*

The Gifts of God are free, and he beſtoweth them as ſeemeth beſt to his Wiſdom. If he gives to one more liberally than to another, yet he who receives leaſt has Reaſon to be thankful, and no Reaſon to demand an Account of God of the unequal Diſtribution of his Favour. Were the Gifts therefore of the Spirit to be conſidered as

ſpecial

ſpecial Favours only granted to ſome, we ſhould not be obliged, by the Terms of our Religion, to render an Account of God's proceeding herein. But the Promiſe of the Spirit being general to all Chriſtians, and repreſented in Scripture as the Purchaſe of Chriſt's Obedience to the Will of his Father, and as a Principle of new Life, by which they who were dead in Sin are made alive to Righteouſneſs; it is evident that we cannot account for our being Chriſtians, without ſhewing a Reaſon for the Neceſſity of Grace to render our Hopes and Aſſurances of Salvation effectual.

This is a Point in which there is an eſſential Difference between the Goſpel, and mere Natural Religion; and it is conſequent to another Point of Difference relating to the State and Condition of Mankind before the Goſpel. If Men were in that State of original Purity in which God muſt, in Juſtice to his divine Attributes, be ſuppoſed to have made them, it will be hard to ſay what Grace was wanting to enable them to attain the End of their Creation. If they have fallen from that State, and contracted a Corruption not to be cured by natural Means, it will be hard for any Man to diſpute againſt the

Grace of God, without having a Reaſon to produce, that ſhall render it impoſſible, or improper, for God to redeem the World. For, the Fall of Man ſuppoſed, it is more reaſonable to think, becauſe it is far more honourable to God, that he ſhould deſtroy the Power of Sin by communicating a new Principle of Holineſs, in order to the Salvation of the World, than that he ſhould honour Sin ſo far, as to render Sinners both glorious and immortal. Since then there can be no Redemption, but either by deſtroying Sin, or by granting Happineſs to Sinners, unreformed Sinners, it is eaſy to judge which Method is moſt ſuitable to the Wiſdom of God, who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity.

It will be one Means of ſhewing the Neceſſity of Grace, to ſhew the Effects aſcribed to it in Scripture. For the Spirit of God is certainly given for the ſake of thoſe Effects, which were to be produced by it in true Believers: And he that can prove that the ſame Effects generally are, or may be, attained by the mere Strength of Nature, will give the beſt Argument againſt the Neceſſity of Grace in order to Salvation. For, if Men are naturally inclined to Virtue and Holineſs, they will not want Grace to make them ſo.

But

But this has never yet been the Caſe; and if we may judge of thoſe who ſhall be after us, by ourſelves, and thoſe who have lived before us, this never will be the Caſe.

Now the Works of the Spirit are deſcribed to us in many Places of Scripture. They are in the Text ſet forth to be *pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocriſy.* The Apoſtle to the *Galatians*, Chap. v. 22. reckoning up the Fruits of the Spirit, places them in this Order; *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-ſuffering, Gentleneſs, Goodneſs, Faith, Meekneſs, Temperance*; and continuing his Account, though varying his Style, he adds, *And they that are Chriſt's have crucified the Fleſh, with the Affections and Luſts.*

Were the Manners of any People to be deſcribed in this Language, there is no one ſo little acquainted with human Nature, but that he would ſuſpect the Truth of the Relation. Where muſt we go, to the Eaſt or to the Weſt, to find a People pure and peaceable, full of Mercy and good Works, without Partiality, without Hypocriſy, crucifying the Fleſh, and the Affections and Luſts thereof? No Hiſtory yet has preſented us with

ſuch an Idea of Mankind. But, if we look into the Account which the ſame Apoſtle gives of the Works of the Fleſh, we ſhall find too great a Correſpondence between them, and the hiſtorical Accounts of all Nations: They are, *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanneſs, Laſciviouſneſs, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Hereſies, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenneſs, Revellings, and ſuch like.* Theſe Works we know where to find, and are ſure of not miſtaking in what Country ſoever we ſeek them. You ſee the Difference between the Works of Nature and Grace: And tell me, Was it a Work unworthy of God to ſend his Spirit to make the Difference? If you think it not yet ſo ſufficiently made as to anſwer the Pretenſions of the Goſpel, yet you muſt own that here is a Work worthy of God to undertake; and that if we have not the Spirit already to produce theſe Effects, it were much to be wiſhed that we had: So that natural Reaſon ſhall be forced to give this Teſtimony to the Goſpel, that the Help it propoſes is the Thing in the World the moſt to be deſired, the moſt honourable for God to give, the moſt advantageous for Man to receive. If you aſk us what

what Evidence we have to ſhew, that we have received this Promiſe of the Goſpel; it were well indeed if we had more Evidence than we have, and that every Man naming the Name of Chriſt were a living Teſtimony of the Spirit of God working in him; and yet, I truſt, we have enough to ſhew that the Promiſes of God are not in vain. The Spirit is given to be a Principle of Religion, and not of Force and Mechaniſm; and conſequently it muſt be maintained to be conſiſtent with the Freedom of Man's Will, without the Suppoſition of which it is impoſſible to have any Notion of Religion: And if many, who by their Profeſſion of Chriſtianity are entitled to the Promiſe of the Spirit, do ſhew no Signs of the Power of God working in them, they will be ſo many Proofs indeed, that the Grace of God is not irreſiſtible: But no better Argument can be drawn from their Caſe to ſhew, that the Pretences to Grace are mere Fiction, than may be drawn from the unreaſonable Actions of the Generality of Men to ſhew, that Reaſon itſelf is a Fiction, and that there is no ſuch governing Principle in Mankind.

We have indeed the fulleſt Proof, that there is ſuch a Thing as Reaſon and natural

Underſtanding

Underſtanding in Men; and therefore the Abuſe of Reaſon creates no Suſpicion againſt the Being of it: But the Deiſt ſees no Proof of the Reality of Grace in any; the Effects we aſcribe to it, and which are the only viſible Evidences for its Reality, are no other than what Reaſon preſcribes; and whereever they are found, he claims them as the Work of Reaſon, and demands of us to ſhew upon what Ground we aſcribe them to any other Principle. If Men are meek, and charitable, and good, void of Partiality and Hypocriſy, they are but what their Reaſon tells them they ſhould be; and ſince theſe Virtues flow from the Dictates of Reaſon, by what Right do we impute them to another Principle? The Apoſtle to the *Romans* has taught us the Reſolution of this Difficulty: *I delight*, ſays he, *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. O wretched Man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the Body of this Death! I thank God, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* That the Dictates of Reaſon are juſt and right, St. *Paul* acknowledges; but right as they are, we gain little by them

but

but the Conviction of Sin and Guilt; for there is another Principle in the Members warring againſt this Principle of Reaſon, or Law of the Mind, which brings us under the Slavery of Sin. This State afforded him ſo little Comfort, notwithſtanding the Goodneſs of his Reaſon to diſtinguiſh rightly between Virtue and Vice, that he exclaims in the Bitterneſs of his Soul, *O wretched Man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the Body of this Death!* Under theſe Agonies he ſaw no Help in Nature, no Aſſiſtance to be had from Reaſon; and therefore he flies to the Arms of Chriſt for Shelter, and owns him for his only Redeemer from this Captivity to Sin: *I thank God, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* And having found this ſafe Retreat, he goes on in another Strain: *There is therefore now no Condemnation to them who are in Chriſt Jeſus, who walk not after the Fleſh but after the Spirit: For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made me free from the Law of Sin and Death.*

You ſee how the Apoſtle founds the Neceſſity of Grace: Not in this, that we want Reaſon to ſhew us the Difference between Good and Evil, and to direct us in our Duty; but in this, that the Light of Reaſon

is too weak a Reſtraint upon the Inclinations to Evil, which are become natural to Man. Theſe Inclinations overpowering Reaſon, bring in the Slavery of Sin and Death. We become Slaves by departing from the Law of Reaſon; we are freed from Slavery by Grace: Grace therefore is given to reſtore us to the Obedience of Reaſon. So far is it from being an Objection to the Reality of Grace, that the Works of Grace are Works of Reaſon, that the very beſt Evidence we can have that the Grace of God is in us, is this, that we live up to the pure and ſincere Dictates of Reaſon. We aſcribe it not to Grace, that we know our Duty; but this we aſcribe to it, that we are able to perform it. And upon this State of the Caſe it appears, that the Evidence which Chriſtians can make to themſelves and others, that the Spirit of God dwelleth in them, muſt ariſe from their Works of Love and Obedience.

This Trial, though it may prove in the End a ſevere one, ſince the Love of many is grown cold, we can by no means refuſe. For how ſhall we refuſe to ſtand Trial by the Rule laid down by our Saviour, *By their Fruits*, ſays he, *you ſhall know them*; and by his Apoſtle St. *John*, *This is the Love of God*,

that

that we keep his Commandments? To the ſame Purpoſe our Lord ſpeaks in the fifteenth of St. *John*, comparing himſelf to a Vine, and his Father to an Huſbandman: *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. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit, ſo ſhall ye be my Diſciples.*

Unbelievers may have many Objections to make againſt the Operations of the Holy Spirit, which need not affect or diſturb the Faith and Hope of a Chriſtian. But when they object to us the Want of Evidence in the Works of Chriſtians, they raiſe a Difficulty, which every Believer is bound to anſwer for himſelf, or to quit his Pretenſions to the Hopes and Promiſes of the Goſpel. The Confidence of ſome, that they have the Spirit of God, though they have nothing but their own Confidence to alledge in Proof of it, is a Conceit, unknown to the Churches of God: The Goſpel is a Stranger to it, and it was taught in ſome other School than that of Chriſt.

If you would know whether the Spirit of Chriſt be in you of a truth, you have a plain Rule in the Text to examine yourſelf

by. The Apoſtle St. *James* ſpeaks of two ſorts of Wiſdom, the one *earthly, ſenſual, deviliſh*; the Fruits of which are, *Envyings, Strife, Confuſion, and every evil Work:* The other heavenly, which is *pure and peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, without Hypocriſy.* It is no hard Matter for a Man to know to which Claſs he belongs; the Characters are bold, and eaſily diſtinguiſhed; the Difference is ſo great between Confuſion and Peace, Strife and Gentleneſs, Envy and Mercy, every evil Work and every good Work, that we cannot eaſily miſtake in applying theſe Marks. Search therefore your own Hearts, for thence muſt come the Reſolution, whether the Spirit of Chriſt dwell in you or no. How the Spirit cometh, or how it goeth, we know not. Our Saviour, in his Diſcourſe with *Nicodemus*, compares the Influence of the Spirit to the blowing of the Wind, *Thou heareſt the Sound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; ſo is every one that is born of the Spirit.* How the new Birth and Regeneration is performed, He only can tell who performs it; but the Effects of it every Man may ſee, they are as diſcernible as the Noiſe of the Winds,

Winds, though in their Cauſe and Spring as ſecret, and altogether as far removed from human Sight.

As the Fruits of the Spirit are the only Evidence we can have of the Spirit, ſo the End of giving the Spirit is the producing theſe good Fruits. Sanctification, Regeneration, and all other Terms by which the Operation and Work of the Spirit in Believers are denoted, ſignify to us that the Spirit is given to redeem us from Sin, and to render us a People acceptable to God, zealous of good Works. And ſurely it is no ſmall Commendation of the Goſpel, that the Things in it, which ſeem moſt myſterious, have the plaineſt Uſe, and are introduced to promote ſuch Ends, as muſt appear to the moſt prejudiced Mind to be honourable to God, and advantageous to Mankind. We offer you, upon the Terms of the Goſpel, the Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt: In virtue of this Offer we call you to Holineſs and Obedience. What Deſign or Contrivance have you to ſuſpect? If any thing is to be gained by your being virtuous, the Advantage will be all your own. Nay, ſuppoſe that you are deceived into Goodneſs, yet for you at leaſt it will be an happy Deceit; and, I think, no unhappy

unhappy one for the reſt of the World. Who will ſuffer by Men's becoming gentle and peaceable? If there were more of this Spirit in the World, it would be a much happier Place than it is: For the Strife and Confuſion, and all the Miſeries which we ſee and hear, have their Riſe from that Wiſdom which is earthly and ſenſual.

From what has been ſaid ariſes this plain Concluſion: That the true Way of judging, whether the Spirit of God be in us, is to conſider our own Deeds. Righteouſneſs and Holineſs are the only certain Marks of Regeneration. Other Diſtinctions which Men have invented are rather Marks of their ſpiritual Pride, and of their Separation from the Body of Chriſtians, than of their Union with Chriſt the Head. Take heed therefore that you adorn the Faith with a Meekneſs and Quietneſs of Spirit, that you may have the Comfort and Conſolation of knowing that you have not believed in vain.

DISCOURSE XIII.

MATTHEW V. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

PRACTICE is the End of all Precepts and Exhortations: Laws are therefore enacted, that Subjects may obey: Exhortations are therefore added, that they may be encouraged to do their Duty. It muſt then be a very great Abſurdity to make any thing, in its own Nature impracticable, the Subject-matter either of Command or Advice. And does not the Text ſeem liable to this Objection? Is there any thing which Men have more Reaſon to think impoſſible to them, than to arrive at the Perfections of the Deity? Why then are we

commanded or exhorted to be perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect, ſince nothing but Diſappointment can be the Iſſue of our ſtrongeſt Endeavours after this Perfection, from which we ſtand excluded by the unalterable Laws of Nature? This Difficulty is too obvious to eſcape any one's Notice. Some therefore tell you, that the Text contains only Matter of Counſel or Advice, but not of Precept or Command, and with this Softening they think the Difficulty may be digeſted; as if it were more reaſonable, or more becoming an inſpired Teacher, to adviſe than to command Impoſſibilities: Whereas the only Difference in the Caſe is, that in Matters of Command we muſt either obey or ſuffer, in Matters of Counſel only we have a greater Latitude allowed us; ſo that with reſpect to ourſelves it is more tolerable to be adviſed than to be commanded to Things impracticable: But, with reſpect to the Lawgiver, it is one and the ſame Thing, and his Reaſon and Equity can be no more juſtified in adviſing, than in commanding Impoſſibilities. Others tell you, that it is not Equality, but Quality of Perfections that is enjoined in the Text; that is, we are commanded to aim at the ſame Perfections with God, though not in the ſame Degree; that,

that, as God is juſt, and righteous, and merciful, ſo muſt we endeavour to be juſt, and righteous, and merciful, though not to the ſame Degree or Extent that God is. This Expoſition avoids the Difficulty complained of; for there is nothing extraordinary in commanding Men to imitate the Perfections of God in a Degree ſuitable to their own Nature and Ability. But then this is an Expoſition, not ariſing from the Circumſtances of the Text, which lead us to a more extenſive View.

In the 43d Verſe our Saviour ſays, *Ye have heard that it hath been ſaid, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thine Enemy.* In the 44th Verſe he corrects the Partiality of this Law; *But I ſay unto you, Love your Enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you.* In the 45th and 46th Verſes, he confirms his own Precept from the Example and Authority of God: *That ye may be the Children of your Father which is in Heaven; for he maketh his Sun to riſe on the Evil and on the Good, and ſendeth Rain on the Juſt and on the Unjuſt. For, if ye love them which love you, what Reward have ye? Do not even the Publicans the ſame?* And

in the 48th Verſe he concludes this Argument in the Words of the Text; *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* From whence it is evident, that the Quality or Temper of Mercy and Compaſſion was not the Thing recommended to us by our bleſſed Lord from the Example of God, for that he told them even the Publicans had in ſome Degree, for they loved thoſe who loved them; but it is the Extent of this Mercy and Compaſſion which was diſcernible in the Works of Providence, which he preſſes from this Example: Your Father in Heaven is bountiful to the Evil as well as the Good; to the Unjuſt, as well as the Juſt: Go ye therefore and do likewiſe, and learn from hence to love your Enemies, as well as your Friends; to do good to thoſe who hate you, as well as to thoſe who love you. This certainly was recommending not only the Temper of Mercy, which is natural to the Deity, but alſo that extenſive Exerciſe of it, that Perfection of Goodneſs, which ſhone forth in all his Works.

Since then we can have no Relief from Expoſitions of this kind, we muſt conſider the Text in another View, and ſee what Aſſiſtance we can have from the Circumſtances

ſtances of the Context, or the general Reaſon in which the Precept is founded. And theſe two Inquiries will take in what is neceſſary to be known upon this Subject. For, if we conſider this Precept as Part of the Goſpel Doctrine, it will be ſufficient to know, how far it may be extended upon the Authority of the Goſpel: Or, if we conſider it as a general Maxim and Rule of Religion, which had a Foundation in Reaſon antecedent to the Promulgation of the Goſpel, it will be ſufficient to underſtand, how far the Reaſon of the Command goes, and how it may be applied to the ſeveral Duties of Religion and Morality.

Firſt then, Let us examine the Text as it ſtands limited by the Circumſtances of the Context.

It is evident from what has been already obſerved, that the Precept of the Text ſtands applied to the particular Caſe of Charity and Mercy. Had it been otherwiſe, had our Saviour intended, in every Inſtance of our Duty, to refer us to the Perfection of God, as the proper Rule and Meaſure of our Obedience, this Precept ſhould have ſtood at the Cloſe of his Sermon, which might have given it a Reference to all that had gone before,

and not been confined in the Middle of his Diſcourſe to a particular Duty. It is farther to be obſerved, that the Inſtance of Duty to which this Precept is annexed, is illuſtrated by a particular Mention of God's dealing with Men in like Caſes. We are bid to love our Enemies, and are told how merciful and compaſſionate God is to the Evil and Unjuſt; the natural Application of the Example lies in the Exhortation of the Text, that we ſhould aim at that Perfection of Mercy and Goodneſs, which we may every Day ſee exerciſed by God towards us all. But, in other Inſtances of Duty mentioned in this Sermon, the Example of God is not propoſed; and, conſidering the Connexion between the Example and the Application, there can be no Reaſon to carry the Application to other Caſes, in which the ſame Example is not propoſed. Nay farther, there are ſome Points of Duty explained and enforced in this Sermon on the Mount, to which neither the Example nor the Exhortation can be applied. Such are the Duties ariſing from the Relations which are peculiar to Man, and nowhere elſe to be found: As in the Caſe of Afflictions and Perſecutions, which we ought to bear patiently, not in Conſideration of the

Example

Example of the Deity, whom no Afflictions can approach, but in Conſideration of his Goodneſs and Power, who thinks fit to inflict them on us. In the Inſtance of Mercy and Forgiveneſs, to which the Exhortation in the Text ſtands applied, there can be no greater or properer Motive to Obedience than the Example of our heavenly Father; it cuts off all the Pretences which Men have for Anger or Revenge. Has your Enemy abuſed or affronted you? What then? Are you greater than God, who bears with ſo much Lenity the perpetual Abuſes and Affronts of wicked Men? Or are you provoked to revenge the Iniquities you behold, and to extirpate the Prophane and Ungodly? Believe at leaſt that God is not unconcerned for his own Honour; and therefore, even in this Caſe, you cannot be more ſafe or ſecure than by following the Example which he ſets you in the daily Adminiſtrations of his Providence.

Suppoſing then that this Example is confined to the Exerciſe of Love and Mercy; yet ſtill, can we pretend to be as good and as merciful as God is, or does our Saviour require it of us? If not, where is the Limitation to be placed? It muſt be placed un-

doubtedly where our Saviour himſelf has placed it. He tells you how imperfect the old Doctrine was, becauſe it required of us only to love our Friends, and permitted us to hate our Enemies: But God, ſays he, loves and does good to his Enemies, as well as his Friends. This is perfect Love, not reſtrained by Partialities. When therefore it follows, *Be ye perfect, as your Father*; the preciſe Meaning is, let your Love be univerſal, unconfined by Partialities, and, with reſpect to its Objects, as large as God's is: Not that our Love either to Enemies or Friends can be ſuppoſed in other Reſpects, and as to the Effects of it, to bear any Proportion to the Divine Love.

But, as in this Caſe of extending our Love the Example is proper, and therefore alſo the Exhortation to follow it; ſo in others it would be very injurious to the Deity to ſuppoſe, that any Example could be drawn from his Perfections. In our preſent State of Corruption, it is a great Part of Religion to govern our Thoughts well, and the inward Inclinations of our Hearts; but it would be as reaſonable to bid us govern the World as God governs it, as to govern our Thoughts as he governs his: He is liable to none of the Imperfec-

tions,

tions, which make the Government of our Thoughts to be a neceſſary Duty in us: He has told us, *My Thoughts are not as your Thoughts:* And where is no Similitude in the Caſes, no Example can be drawn from the one to the other. So that in this, and in many other Inſtances which might be given, we have a Duty incumbent on us, towards the due Performance of which we can draw no Example from the Divine Perfections. Since then the Exhortation to imitate the Divine Perfections cannot reach to all Parts of our Duty, I ſee no Reaſon why it ſhould be extended to any upon the Authority of our Saviour, to which he himſelf has not extended it; and as the Uſe of it is peculiarly reſerved in Holy Writ to the Caſe of Mercy and Forgiveneſs, it ought by no means to be drawn into a general Precept, to the perplexing as well the Underſtandings, as the Conſciences of the Weak. St. *Paul*, in his Epiſtle to the *Epheſians*, exhorts them to be *Followers of God as dear Children:* But then it is with regard to this very Caſe; for he had ſaid immediately before, Chap. iv. 32. *Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven you*; and, with reference to this

this Duty, he adds, ver. 1ſt of the next Chapter, *Be ye therefore Followers of God, as dear Children*; to which he ſubjoins, *And walk in Love, as Chriſt alſo hath loved us, giving himſelf for us*, ver. 2. So that his Exhortation to follow God ſtands incloſed on both Sides with the Precepts of Love and Charity, as if he intended to ſecure it from being applied to any thing elſe. And if our Saviour meant any thing more in the Text, if he had a View to any other Duties or Commands than that of Love and Mercy only, when he placed before us the Example of our heavenly Father, St. *Luke*, I am ſure, has done him great Injury in reporting his Doctrine. He, in the ſixth Chapter of his Goſpel, gives us the Sermon on the Mount; when he comes to the Topic of Love and Forgiveneſs, he introduces the Example of God, *who is kind to the Unthankful, and to the Evil.* He concludes alſo with an Exhortation referring to the Example, as St. *Matthew* does: But inſtead of the general Phraſe uſed by St. *Matthew*, *Be ye perfect, as your Father is perfect*; St. *Luke* has it only, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father alſo is merciful.* The two Evangeliſts are giving an Account of the ſame Sermon, and of the

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ſame Paſſage; and if they are conſiſtent, St. *Matthew*'s, *Be ye perfect, as God is perfect*, can relate only to that particular Perfection of Mercy and Forgiveneſs, which our Saviour had been recommending, and is of no greater Extent than St. *Luke*'s, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father alſo is merciful.* The Holy Writers often require of us that we ſhould be perfect and blameleſs; that is, as St. *Paul* expreſſes it in the fourth of the *Coloſſians*, and twelfth Verſe, that we *ſhould ſtand perfect and complete in all the Will of God:* But it is one thing to be perfect in all the Will of God, and another to be perfect even as he is perfect. The Will of God, however manifeſted to us, is the proper Rule of the Perfection we ought to aim at; but the tranſcendent Perfections of the Deity are to be reverenced and adored, but never attained to by any Creature.

It is true, that as the moral Perfections of the Deity afford us the trueſt Image of Holineſs and Purity, ſo are they the beſt Patterns to place before our Eyes for the Conduct of our own Lives. It is praiſe-worthy to imitate a Perfection as far as we are able, though we can never hope to come up to the great Original: And though there is no

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room to exhort Men to be perfect as God is perfect, yet it is reaſonable to preſs them to imitate their heavenly Father. For neither he who adviſes the Imitation, nor he who attempts it, go upon the Suppoſition, that it is either neceſſary or poſſible to be as perfect as He: But this they both agree in, that the nearer any one can come to the Pattern, the more perfect he will be; and therefore the Imitation of God has not for its End the attaining to the Perfections of God, but the attaining to the greateſt Perfection we are capable of. In this Senſe St. *Peter* exhorts us to be holy, becauſe God is holy: *For as he*, ſays the Apoſtle, *which hath called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of Converſation*, 1 Pet. i. 15. And St. *John* in his firſt Epiſtle, Chap. iii. 3. to the ſame Purpoſe: *Every Man that hath this Hope in him, purifieth himſelf even as he is pure.* The Notion we have of the Purity and Holineſs of God is a very powerful Motive to us to be holy and pure, ſince nothing but Holineſs and Purity can recommend us to the Favour and Protection of a Being, who is holy and pure. A Conformity therefore to the Divine Nature in the moral Perfections of it, is the utmoſt Excellence and Happineſs of human Souls, and

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that which we ought to labour to attain with the greateſt Ardor and Contention of Mind. It is a noble Subject for the Entertainment of our Thoughts; but it has had the Misfortune to owe more to the Power of Imagination than to the Light of Reaſon; and has had ſo great a Place allowed it in ſome enthuſiaſtical Writers, as to be leſs cultivated than it deſerves by ſoberer Inquirers. And yet this Conformity to the Divine Nature was a Leſſon taught by ſome few wiſe Heathens, who found, by the Light of Reaſon and Nature, wherein the true Dignity and Happineſs of Man conſiſted: For the Imitation of God is not a new Principle introduced into Religion by the Revelation of the Goſpel, but has its Foundation in the Reaſon and Nature of Things.

And this was the Second Thing I propoſed to conſider.

That we ſhould endeavour to be perfect, even as God is perfect, in the ſtrict Meaning of the Words, is no more the Direction of Reaſon than it is of Revelation: He knows but little of himſelf, and leſs of God, who is capable of ſuch a Thought. But that we ſhould aim at the Reſemblance of the Divine Perfections, as far as our preſent State will

permit, is but the natural Conſequence ariſing from the Knowledge we have of God, and the Obligation we are under to cultivate and improve our own Minds. God is a rational Being, and ſo are we, though at a great Diſtance from him. As we are thus far made in the Image and Likeneſs of God, ſo are we capable, by the Enlargement of our Faculties, of a nearer Approach to him: For the moral Perfections of all rational Minds are in Kind the ſame, however vaſtly they differ in Degree. Were it otherwiſe, the Perfections of the Deity could not be ſo much a Pattern for us to follow. Were Holineſs, Righteouſneſs, Juſtice and Mercy, of a different Nature conſidered in God, from what they are when conſidered in Man, it is plain, that the Holineſs or Goodneſs of God could be neither the Example nor the Motive of Holineſs in Men: And it would be abſurd to ſay, as the Scripture does, *Be ye holy, for I am holy*; unleſs Holineſs in both Caſes, as applied to God, and as applied to Man, denoted a moral Perfection of the ſame Kind, proper to both as rational Beings, though attainable by us only in that Proportion which our weak Nature will allow. Since then the Perfections which are eſſen-

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tial to God, conſidered as a rational Being, are the very ſame which we, as rational Beings, ought to aſpire to, ſince they are in him in the utmoſt Perfection alſo; to ſay, that we ought to conform ourſelves to the Divine Nature, and to imitate the Excellencies of it, is no more than to ſay, that we ought to endeavour after thoſe Perfections, which are natural and proper to rational Minds; and which belong to us in Conſequence of that Image and Likeneſs of our Maker, which was ſtamped upon us at our firſt Creation.

But though the Example of God be in itſelf a very ſtrong Motive and Argument for Holineſs; yet, in the Nature of the Thing, Example is but a ſecondary Argument, and ſuppoſes an antecedent Obligation to the Duty, the due Performance of which we learn from the Example ſet before us. It is no Reaſon for me to endeavour to do this or that, becauſe I ſee another do it; for it may be fit for him to do, and yet very unfit for me to attempt; and therefore Example can have no Place, till the Rule of Duty is firſt ſettled. It would be very abſurd to think, that every thing that God does, yields a proper Example for us to follow; and therefore

we are to ſearch for a Reaſon, why ſome of his Perfections are proper Examples, and others not ſo; that is, we are to ſearch for their primary Rule of Duty, which obliges us to endeavour after ſome of the Perfections diſcoverable in the Deity, and not the others.

In all Inquiries of this kind, the laſt Reſort muſt be to the Light of our own Minds; from hence ariſes the Obligation we are under to moral Virtue. We are a Law to ourſelves, and ſuch a Law as no Power whatever can abſolve us from the Obedience due to it, as long as we continue to enjoy the ſame Powers and Faculties of Reaſon which at preſent we are endowed with. From this Light of Nature we learn both the Law and the Example which we are now inquiring after, that is, we learn our own Obligation to Holineſs, and we learn to know God, who is perfect Holineſs. Did Reaſon diſcover to us the moral Perfections of the Deity, without ſhewing us, at the ſame time, any Obligation incumbent on us to follow after the like Perfections, the Holineſs of God ſo diſcovered would be no more an Example for our Imitation than his Power is. It is therefore from the Light of our own Minds, that we diſcover the Difference of moral Good

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and Evil, and the Obligations conſequent upon that Difference; it is from the ſame Light that we find the moral Perfections to be poſſeſſed by the Deity in their utmoſt Beauty: So that the ſame Reaſon and Nature, which holds forth to us the Rule of our Duty, holds forth alſo the perfect Example of it. Now, ſince no Example is a good one, which does not teach the ſame Doctrine with the Rule of Duty, and the Rule of Duty in this Caſe being the Light of our own Minds; it muſt neceſſarily follow, that to obey the Dictates of Reaſon, and to imitate the Example of God, is in the End one and the ſame Thing.

That it muſt be ſo, will appear by conſidering, that we can no other Way trace the Perfections of the Deity, but from thoſe natural Notions of Perfection which we find in our own Minds: We ſhould not aſcribe to God Holineſs, Juſtice and Mercy, did not the Light of Reaſon diſcover to us the Excellencies of theſe Attributes. Now the Holineſs, Juſtice and Mercy, which the Light of Reaſon diſcovers, are the moral Virtues which we are obliged to follow after; they are alſo the Perfections which we aſcribe to the Deity: So that whether we follow the

Dictates of Reaſon in endeavouring after theſe Virtues, or whether we look up to the Deity, and copy from the Perfections of his Nature; it is evident, that in both Caſes we follow the ſame Virtues, though placed before us in a different View. For, ſince our Notion of the Perfections of the Deity muſt be formed from ſuch natural Notions of moral Perfection, as Reaſon and the Light of Nature can ſupply; whether we conſider theſe Perfections as inherent in the Deity, and endeavour to copy after the Firſt and Great Original, or whether we take our natural Notions of moral Virtue, as Principles and Rules of Religion, which ought to influence and direct our Lives, the Iſſue will be the ſame with reſpect to our Practice. It is eaſier for Men, when once they have a Notion of a perfect righteous Being, to conſider, in particular Caſes, what ſuch a Being would do or approve, than to run up in an abſtracted way of Reaſoning to firſt Principles and Maxims for Direction. But whichever Way you take, the Inquiry is the ſame, namely, what is fit and reaſonable to be done in this or that Caſe: And let the Method of Inquiry be what it will, the Judgment muſt be ſuch as our preſent Share

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of Reaſon will enable us to make. And therefore the Imitation of God is a Principle of Religion ariſing from, and depending on, the right Uſe and Exerciſe of Reaſon, as much as any other whatever. And this may ſerve to ſhew upon what Foundation the Imitation of God ſtands in Natural Religion, and how we may apply this Principle for our Direction in particular Caſes. It may ſhew alſo what is to be underſtood by being perfect, as God is perfect: It is abſurd to aim at the Meaſure of his Perfection; but we are then, to all the Purpoſes of Life and Religion, perfect as He is perfect, when we do nothing but what He will approve: For to ſtand approved in the Eye of an All-perfect and Holy Being, is the true Perfection of every Creature. This is the Chriſtian Excellency, as deſcribed by St. *Paul* in the Words once already quoted, and with which I ſhall conclude this Diſcourſe, *That we may ſtand perfect and complete in all the Will of God.*

DISCOURSE XIV.

JOHN iii. 19.

This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil.

MAN being a reaſonable Creature, and endued with Faculties to judge and chuſe for himſelf in all Caſes, it is contrary to Nature to ſuppoſe, that there ſhould be any Thing abſolutely or neceſſarily good to him; ſince the Advantage to be drawn from any Thing whatever, depends on the right Uſe and Application of that Thing to its proper Ends and Purpoſes. Wholeſome Food is good for the Sound, but if taken in

undue Meaſure it grows into a Diſeaſe. Phyſic is proper for the Sick; but if the Patient will not ſubmit to proper Regulations, that which might have been his Cure will certainly be his Deſtruction.

As it is with reſpect to the Body, ſo is it likewiſe with reſpect to the Mind; there is no ſuch thing as an abſolute or neceſſary Cure for the Frailties and Infirmities of it, but the propereſt Method for attaining that End muſt ſtill depend on the proper Uſe and Application of it. The beſt Inſtructions are of no Uſe whilſt not attended to; and the greateſt Helps and Aſſiſtances yield no Profit, as long as they are rejected and deſpiſed.

Were the Caſe otherwiſe, that is, were there any Syſtem of Religion pretending, in virtue of ſome uncontrolable Power, to make Men righteous, ſuch a Syſtem might be valued as a good Piece of Spiritual Mechaniſm; but it could never be conſidered as a Rule of Virtue and Morality, ſince the Operation of the Will being excluded, the Morality of all human Actions would be excluded with it.

And hence it follows, that the utmoſt that can be done for us in Religion, is ſo to inſtruct us, that we may not err for want of Know-

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ledge of our Duty, and ſo to aid and aſſiſt us, that it may be in our Power, whenever it is in our Will, to obey. Any thing beyond this is inconſiſtent with Reaſon and Freedom, and therefore can have no Part in a Religion deſigned for the Government of rational free Agents. And this being the Caſe, that muſt in the Compariſon be judged to be the beſt Religion, which does moſt fully enlighten our Underſtanding, and which does in the moſt perfect Manner reſtore us to our Liberty and Freedom, by removing the Impediments which ariſe from the Weakneſs and Corruption of our Nature. All who live under the Influence of ſuch a Religion as this, as they have a certain Way to Happineſs marked out for them, if they chuſe to walk in it, ſo are they certainly doomed to Condemnation upon their Diſobedience. For there are but two Sorts of Men who can hope to eſcape Pudiſhment, the Righteous, who have no Reaſon to fear Judgment, and the Sinners, who offending through Ignorance or Weakneſs, have ſome Plea to make for Mercy and Forgiveneſs. But the Sinners, who knew their Duty, and were ſo aſſiſted as to have been able, had they been but willing, to perform it, have

nothing to expect but Condemnation. What the Apoſtle therefore in the Text has declared to us, is no more than a natural Conſequence drawn from the Excellency of the Goſpel, and the Perverſeneſs of Men, conſidered together: *This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil.* Were the Goſpel leſs perfect than it is, or leſs known to the World, Sinners would have more to plead in their own Behalf: But ſince they want no Light to direct them, no Aſſiſtance to ſupport them in doing their Duty, they are left without Excuſe for their Diſobedience. The Goſpel, which was given to them for Life and Salvation, will be their Judgment and Condemnation; and the Fault is all their own: They have as little Reaſon to complain of the Goſpel Religion upon this Account, as the dying Patient has of the Phyſician, whoſe wholeſome Medicines he wantonly abuſed to his own Deſtruction. Were the Goſpel merely a Matter of Advice, which Men might follow, or let alone, as they found moſt convenient for their own Purpoſes, they would then have leſs to anſwer for, if they neglected it. But the Goſpel is a Law proceeding

ceeding from the beſt and higheſt Authority, given by God to his Creatures; and we are bound at our Peril to take notice of it: If we will not walk in the Light of God's Law, when it ſhines ſo brightly before our Eyes, we ſhall be condemned for chuſing Darkneſs rather than Light. This is the Meaning of the Text, which I ſhall therefore, in the firſt place, endeavour to confirm from other Paſſages of Holy Writ; and ſhall then ſhew you, that there can be no Reaſon aſſigned, why Men make this perverſe Choice of continuing in Darkneſs rather than Light, but this only, *becauſe their Deeds are evil.*

When our bleſſed Lord commiſſioned his Apoſtles to preach the Goſpel throughout the World, he declared at the ſame time, that *he that believeth, and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.* Which Declaration having manifeſtly a Reference to the Precept foregoing, of preaching the Goſpel in all the World, it is evident that the Believers and Unbelievers, here ſpoken of, are ſuch only as have had the Goſpel preached to them. And therefore this Text adminiſters no Occaſion to inquire into the Circumſtances of ſuch as have never had

had the Goſpel publiſhed to them; much leſs does it determine peremptorily any thing concerning them: But as to thoſe to whom the Grace of God has been tendered by the preaching of the Miniſters of Chriſt, their Caſe is fully ſtated and determined by our bleſſed Lord; *He that believeth, and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.*

To the ſame Purpoſe ſpeaketh St. *Paul* in his Sermon to the Men at *Athens*, in which he thus declares his Senſe with regard to the Times before the Goſpel, and the Times ſince; *And the Times of this Ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all Men everywhere to repent.* Where the Command to repent being oppoſed to God's winking at the Times of Ignorance, plainly ſhews, that from the going forth of the Command to repent, God will no longer wink at the Ignorance of the World; and therefore it is at every Man's Peril, if he refuſes to hearken to the heavenly Call.

In like manner does the ſame Apoſtle deliver himſelf in his Epiſtle to the *Romans*, Chap. i. *The Goſpel*, he tells us, *is the Power of God unto Salvation to every one that believeth.* He tells us alſo, *That the Wrath of God*

God is revealed from Heaven againſt all Ungodlineſs and Unrighteouſneſs of Man. So that the Revelation, as it affords all Help and Aſſiſtance to ſuch as are willing to do the Works of Righteouſneſs, and embrace the Offers of Peace, ſo does it render all Ungodlineſs inexcuſable, leaving Men no Pretence, either from Ignorance or Weakneſs, to cover their Iniquity.

Out of the many Texts of Scripture which ſpeak to the ſame Purpoſe, I ſhall ſelect but one Teſtimony more, and ſhall go back for that to the early Dawnings of the Goſpel. When our Lord ſent forth his twelve Apoſtles to preach to the *Jews* only, he thus inſtructs them: *When ye come into an Houſe, ſalute it. And if the Houſe be worthy, let your Peace come upon it: But if it be not worthy, let your Peace return to you. And whoſoever ſhall not receive you, nor hear your Words, when ye depart out of the Houſe or City, ſhake off the Duſt of your Feet. Verily I ſay unto you, it ſhall be more tolerable for the Land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for that City.* In which Words our bleſſed Lord ſo plainly ſpeaks his Mind, with reſpect to thoſe who neglect and deſpiſe the Goſpel, that they will hardly admit of any farther Explication.

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Upon the whole it appears, that it is not left to every Man's Choice, whether he will be ſubject to the Goſpel or no; for ſubject he ſhall be, ſo as to be entitled to the Rewards of it for his Obedience, or to the Puniſhments of it for his Diſobedience. And this is not a Circumſtance particular to the Goſpel only, but common to all Laws founded on ſufficient Authority. No Man is at Liberty to chuſe whether he will be governed by the Laws of the Realm; and it would be to little Purpoſe to plead to an Indictment, that you never intended to be governed by the Law, but chuſe to act by other Rules; and therefore deſire that the Law may have no Place in the Judgment, but that you may be tried by thoſe Rules by which you chuſe to live. The Authority of the Lawgiver cuts off ſuch Pleas; and ſince you owed Submiſſion to ſuch Authority, your refuſing to pay it will be juſtly taken as the Aggravation, not as the Excuſe of your Crime. If this be the Caſe in human Laws, it is much more ſo in thoſe of divine Original: For the greater the Authority of the Lawgiver is, the more abſolute muſt our Obedience and Submiſſion be. And if this be juſt Reaſoning, it may appear perhaps, that

that the Pretence for Deiſm, which at preſent ſeems to be the moſt plauſible, will in the End be its greateſt Aggravation. For though, when Men diſcard the Goſpel out of a Zeal to preſerve the moral Law of Reaſon and Nature, they may ſeem to act with great Regard to Virtue and Holineſs, yet do they manifeſtly reject the Authority of God, and deliberately refuſe that Obedience, which Reaſon teaches to be due to the great Lawgiver of the World. But theſe Pretences, conſidered in themſelves, will be found to have little Weight; ſince, the Goſpel being the trueſt Light to direct us, Men can have no Reaſon to forſake it, but this only which is aſſigned in the Text, *becauſe their Deeds are evil.*

The avowed Deſign of our bleſſed Saviour's coming into the World was to deſtroy the Works of the Devil, and to reſtore Religion, both as it reſpects God and Man, to its native Purity and Simplicity. The firſt great Leſſon he taught the World was Repentance from dead Works, in order to qualify them to become Members of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Laws of his Goſpel are declaratory of the original Law of Reaſon and Nature, and contain the faireſt Copy

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of it, purged from all the Corruptions that darkened and obſcured its Beauty. All the Myſteries and ſecret Purpoſes of God, which are revealed to us, are intended only to give us the Comfort and Aſſurance of God's Mercy and Pardon of our paſt Tranſgreſſions, and to raiſe us to a lively Hope of Life and Immortality through Faith and Obedience. All the Inſtitutions of the Goſpel, ſuch as Baptiſm, the Lord's Supper, and the like, are ſet before us, as the proper Means to enable us to make our Calling and Election ſure, by continuing ſtedfaſt in the Works of Holineſs. And what is it that can tempt a Man to reject a Religion ſo excellently well adapted to ſerve all the good Ends of living in this World, and to ſupport the Hopes of living happily in that which is to come? Is it your Concern to reform Mankind, and to reſtrain thoſe evil Inclinations, which make this World a Scene of Miſery? Is it for this Purpoſe that you ſearch the inward Sentiments of Nature, and from thence ſet forth the Hopes and Fears of a future Judgment to be a Bridle upon the unruly Paſſions of Men? Search the Goſpel, and you will find all the Hopes and Fears of Nature diſplayed in their fulleſt Light, and ſupported by the expreſs Revelation of

God, who raiſed his own Son from the Dead, to give us the Aſſurance of a Reſurrection either to Life or Death eternal, according to the Things done in the Body. You cannot therefore pretend to forſake the Goſpel, in order to ſecure an Obedience to the moral Law by better Hopes, or ſtronger Fears; ſince the Goſpel has taken in all the Hopes and Fears of Nature, and confirmed them by the irreverſible Decree of God, *who hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World by the Man Chriſt Jeſus.*

Is it for Inſtruction that you recur to the Light of Nature? Would you thence learn the true Notions of Virtue and Juſtice, and ſee the Image of Holineſs in its native Purity, ſtripped of the falſe Ornaments and Diſguiſes of Superſtition and Ignorance? Would you know what is the pure and acceptable Service to be paid to the Great Creator, or what are the juſt Bounds and Limits of the relative Duties between Man and Man? Look into the Goſpel, and there you will find all the moral Duties fairly tranſcribed, and deduced from the two great Principles of Nature, the Love of God, and the Love of your Neighbour. There you may be inſtructed how to worſhip God in Spirit and Truth, and

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how to love your Brother without Diſſimulation. There is no Precept of Virtue laid down in the Goſpel which Nature can reject; there is none which Nature teaches, that the Goſpel has not explained and enforced. You cannot therefore forſake the Goſpel, in hopes of finding a purer Religion elſewhere.

Many have complained that the Terrors of the Lord, ſet forth in the Goſpel of Chriſt, are too rigid and ſevere, and hardly reconcileable with the Benignity of the Divine Nature; and have therefore ſought to ſkreen themſelves under a milder Sentence, denounced, as they think, by the Voice of Reaſon and Nature: But did you ever hear that any one rejected the Goſpel, that he might ſecure the Practice of Virtue upon a Foundation of better Hopes and Fears, that ſhould with a more powerful Influence ſubdue the Minds of Men to the Obedience of Holineſs? Many have lamented the Strictneſs of the Goſpel Morality, the Laws of which require ſo great Perfection, that Man muſt hardly hope to attain to it; and have therefore recurred to the Law of Nature, not as a more perfect, but as a more equitable Rule of Juſtice; hoping to find, under the Protection of Nature, that Liberty and Allowance to their Infirmities,

Infirmities, which the Goſpel has precluded. But do you know the Man that ever deſpiſed the Goſpel for the Immorality of its Precepts, or left it that he might be more chaſte, more temperate, more charitable, than the Laws of Chriſt required he ſhould be? If not, let any one judge what Purpoſes a Man ſerves, when he endeavours, on one Side, to bring down the Precepts of Morality from the Strictneſs of the Goſpel, and to give greater Liberty and Freedom to the Inclinations of the World; and, on the other Side, to weaken the Reſtraints laid on the Paſſions by the Terrors of the Chriſtian Law, by diſcarding the Fears of perpetual Puniſhment. Is the Cauſe of Religion to be thus ſupported? Will the World be better, when leſs Holineſs is required of them, and when even what is required becomes leſs neceſſary to be performed, by removing the Danger of tranſgreſſing? Is it for the ſake of Virtue that Men plead the Cauſe of Libertiniſm, and endeavour to make void thoſe Laws of Chriſt, which are moſt uneaſy to Fleſh and Blood? Is it to make Men better than they are, that you tell them the Danger of Sinning is leſs than they apprehend, much leſs than the Rigor of the Goſpel declares it to be? And yet

theſe are the Views upon which thoſe act, who retreat from the Goſpel with the greateſt Shew of Reaſon and Moderation: Theſe are the Pretences of ſuch as would not be thought to throw off all Regard to Religion, but only to ſeek a better, I doubt they mean an eaſier Form. And what is it that creates the Averſion to the Light which is held forth to them, and makes them chuſe to retire, if not to the total Darkneſs of heatheniſh Ignorance, yet to the Shades of Natural Religion, if not this which the Text has aſſigned, *becauſe their Deeds are evil?* You may think perhaps that I have forgot one great Objection which ſuch Men have againſt the Goſpel, and which may be entertained without ſuppoſing their Deeds to be evil; namely, that they cannot be reconciled to the Myſteries of the Goſpel, or to thoſe Inſtitutions of it, which are upon no Foot of Reaſon any Part of true Religion. In anſwer to which I can only ſay at preſent, that thoſe who make the Objection are either not in earneſt, or elſe they are unacquainted with the Power of the Goſpel. It is true, the Goſpel has taught us Things, which by Nature we could not know; but they are all deſigned to confirm and ſtrengthen our Hope in God, and to give

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us the fulleſt Aſſurance of his Mercy. It is true alſo, that there are in the Goſpel ſome Inſtitutions, which in their own Nature are no conſtituent Parts of Religion; but then they are ſuch only as are neceſſary to enable us to do our Duty by conveying new Supplies of ſpiritual Strength to us, for want of which we were unable, in the State of Nature, to extricate ourſelves from the Bonds of Iniquity. Theſe are the Additions which the Goſpel has made to Religion. Our bleſſed Saviour ſaw that the Hopes of Nature were obſcured, and therefore he did, by wonderful Revelations, bring Life and Immortality to Light again: He ſaw that her Powers were decayed, ſo that ſhe could not reſiſt Evil, and therefore he ſupplied the Defect by the Aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit. If you are not willing to reap the Benefit, at leaſt forgive his Kindneſs; and do not think the worſe of him, or his Religion, becauſe of the great Proviſion he has made in it for your Security. But I haſten to a Concluſion, and ſhall but briefly apply what has been ſaid on this Subject.

What I would chiefly ſuggeſt to your Conſideration is this: That the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt being recommended to you, as founded

in the expreſs Revelation of God, carries with it ſuch an Authority, as cannot with Safety to yourſelves be deſpiſed or neglected. It is not an indifferent Matter whether you receive it or no; for if the Goſpel be truly what it is ſaid to be, whether you will receive it, or whether you reject it, you ſhall moſt certainly be judged by the Tenor of it. I do not propoſe this Conſideration as neceſſarily determining your Choice to the Goſpel, ſince the Pretences of the Goſpel to Divine Authority ſtill lie under your Examination: But thus far the Conſideration goes, to ſhew you how neceſſary it is to deal in this Matter with all Sincerity and Truth, and to try the Cauſe impartially; ſince, if the Goſpel be the Word of God, it is Death to forſake it. It is Want of Reflection that makes Men think Religion is a Thing ſo perfectly in their own Power, that they may chuſe where and how they pleaſe, without being accountable for the Choice they make, provided only they live up to the Terms of it. For, in truth, Religion, properly and ſtrictly ſo called, admits of no Choice: It does not lie before you to conſider whether you ſhall love God or no, or whether you ſhall love your Neighbour or no: You have no Choice

whether

whether you will be ſober, temperate and chaſte, or otherwiſe; for in theſe eſſential Parts of Religion you muſt either obey, or periſh. But the Weakneſs and Corruption of Man making it neceſſary for God to interpoſe by a new Declaration of his Will, the only Diſpute is of the Truth and Authority of this new Declaration. If it indeed comes from God, it cannot be ſafe to reject it: And whether it does or no, it is abſurd to reject it without weighing its Merit. This therefore is, of all others, the moſt weighty and ſerious Matter, and requires the Exerciſe of your moſt compoſed Thoughts. For, if you wantonly or perverſly refuſe the Gift of God, this will be your Condemnation, *That Light is come into the World, and you loved Darkneſs rather than Light.*

DISCOURSE XV.

JOHN V. 44.

How can ye believe, which receive Honour one of another, and ſeek not the Honour that cometh from God only?

THE chief Exerciſe of Reaſon conſiſts in diſpoſing and regulating our Actions, ſo as to render them ſubſervient to the End or Happineſs which we propoſe to obtain. And though perhaps, with reſpect to the great Numbers of Men in the World, but few in compariſon chuſe well for themſelves, and fewer ſtill purſue wiſely and ſteadily the Good they chuſe; yet all Men have ſomething which is the Object of their Deſires, and are endeavouring to attain their Wiſh by ſome Means

or other. When we chuſe ill for ourſelves, the more Wit and Dexterity we have to compaſs our Deſigns, the nearer we are to Ruin, the more inevitable is our Deſtruction. Our beſt Actions, when directed to ill Purpoſes, become criminal, and leave nothing behind them, but the foul Stain of Hypocriſy upon our Conſciences.

This general Truth might eaſily be illuſtrated by many particular Inſtances from common Life. There is nothing more commendable than a Spirit of Beneficence, and an Inclination to do good to our Fellow-Creatures: But when the Air of Beneficence is aſſumed merely to carry on private Views, when an Inclination to do good is profeſſed only to promote our own Deſigns, and to make our Way the eaſier to Wealth or Honour, what is it but Fraud and Deceit?

If civil Virtue thus loſes its Name and Nature by being miſapplied, Religion does ſo much more. The Man who aims at Reputation and Intereſt under the Diſguiſe of Religion, affronts God, and abuſes the World, and lays up for himſelf certain Ruin, the juſt Reward of thoſe who have *the Form of Godlineſs, denying the Power thereof.*

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But there are Degrees in this Vice, as in moſt other, and Men oftentimes act under the Influence of it, without being conſcious to themſelves of ſo much Baſeneſs, as deſerves to be branded with the Name of Hypocriſy. Pride, Vanity, and Self-love, naturally give a Tincture of Hypocriſy to Men's Behaviour; they lead them to conceal whatever the World diſlikes, and to make a Shew of whatever the World honours and admires. In the common Affairs of Life, where Virtue and Morality are not directly concerned, it may be very right perhaps to comply with the World: But when our Vanity, and Love of Praiſe and Reputation, come to influence us in Matters of Religion, they will ever give a wrong Turn to our Minds, and diſable us from doing Juſtice to our own Reaſon in judging between Truth and Falſhood.

This was the Caſe of thoſe to whom our Saviour in the Text applies himſelf: He had *done among them ſuch Works as never Man did*; to theſe he appeals as an Evidence that he came from the Father: *The Works which the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame Works that I do, bear Witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me.* He appeals likewiſe to the antient Scriptures, thoſe Oracles of God, committed

mitted to the *Jews: Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which teſtify of me.* If ye ſuſpect that I have any Views or Deſigns of my own, and that I ſpeak in the Name of God without his Commiſſion, look to the Works which I do; the Blind receive their Sight, the Dumb their Speech, the Sick and Lame are made ſound, the Dead are reſtored to Life. His Servant I am, whoſe Works theſe are; and do ye yourſelves judge from what Hand theſe mighty Things do proceed. If you think that I come to pervert the Law and the Prophets, let the Law and the Prophets judge between us; I claim no more Authority than they give me: Search therefore the Scriptures and ſee. A fairer Iſſue could not be propoſed; ſo fair it was, that it had its full Effect upon many of the firſt Rank among the *Jews.* St. *John* tells us, that *among the chief Rulers many believed on him*; but they made a Secret of their Conviction, and kept it to themſelves, for fear of being put out of the Synagogue; *For they loved the Praiſe of Men more than the Praiſe of God.* Which laſt Words are parallel to thoſe of the Text, and expreſs the ſame Senſe. A Concern to be well with the People made ſome incapable of

of Conviction, and made others, notwithſtanding the Conviction they were under, diſſemble their real Sentiments, and reject the Authority to which in their own Minds they could not but aſſent.

If we conſider the Nature of Religion, it will appear to us why this is, and muſt be the Caſe. Religion ariſes from the Relation we bear to God, and him only it does reſpect; and therefore when it is made to regard other Objects, it neceſſarily becomes either Idolatry or Hypocriſy. He who ſerves any other than the God who made him, is an Idolater: He who ſerves God with a Deſign to pleaſe Men rather than God, is an Hypocrite. And, ſince the End we propoſe to ourſelves will always influence us in the Choice of the Means, whoever propoſes to pleaſe the World by his Religion, will certainly chuſe ſuch a Religion as the World approves. Such an Inquirer can have no Regard for Truth, for he takes his Direction from the Opinion of the World: He concerns not himſelf to know, whether Jeſus Chriſt be a Prophet approved of God; he conſiders only whether he is approved by the People. It is an old and a very common Obſervation, that the Zeal and Piety of Chriſtians

Chriſtians fell into Decay, when the Empire became Chriſtian. I am willing to think that the Obſervation is not quite juſt, and to hope that thoſe who were before pious Believers, continued ſo after this great Change, and that the Church has, in all Ages ſince, had many faithful Members. But true it is, that, when the Powers of the Empire were converted to Chriſt, true Believers had a calmer Paſſage through the World, and left not behind them ſuch ſhining Examples of their Zeal, as the Times of Perſecution always afforded. But the great and viſible Alteration was, that when the Powers of the World came into the Church, they were followed by all ſuch as *loved the Praiſe of Men more than the Praiſe of God.* Whoever profeſſed himſelf a Chriſtian in the Times of Trial and Perſecution, gave to others great Evidence of his being a ſincere Believer, and had great Ground of Confidence in himſelf, that his Heart was right with God: But, ſince the Days of Proſperity, Profeſſion is become a leſs certain Sign of true Faith; and Men, not being called to the Proof by others, nor very readily calling themſelves to a ſtrict Account, have leſs Reaſon for Confidence and Aſſurance in themſelves. The Time

therefore

therefore may be profitably employed in finding ſome Rules by which Men may examine themſelves, and judge, whether they receive Honour one of another, or do ſeek the Honour which cometh from God only. In order to this, I ſhall inquire,

Firſt, In what Senſe *the receiving Honour from Men* is condemned in the Text.

Secondly, What is meant by *ſeeking the Honour which cometh from God only.*

Thirdly, What are the Marks by which Men may try themſelves upon theſe Articles.

Firſt, I ſhall inquire in what Senſe *the receiving Honour from Men* is condemned in the Text.

The Apoſtle St. *Paul* has given it for a Rule, that we ought to *render Honour to whom Honour is due:* And, as ſome Degree of Honour and Reſpect is due to all Men, St. *Peter* has given the Precept in general Terms, *Honour all Men.* Since then all Men are obliged to pay this Due, moſt certain it is, that all to whom *Honour is due* may very innocently receive it; nay farther, they may very juſtly expect and require it. A Father from his Son, a Maſter from his Servant or Scholar, a King from his Subjects, all who are in Authority from thoſe under them, have a Right

a Right to demand the Reſpect and Honour that is due to their reſpective Stations and Characters. Beſides, Men who ſtand in none of theſe Relations to us, have often a juſt Title to Reſpect and Honour from us upon Account of their preſent Qualifications; as Learning, Virtue and Wiſdom, ought to be reſpected where-ever they are found. Since then all Honour that is due muſt be paid, and may be received, it is evident that the Honour, mentioned in the Text, is ſuch as is due to no Man, and which for that Reaſon ought never to be paid, nor received.

It is very evident, that in the Text, and in the parallel Place of St. *John* already quoted, there is an Oppoſition between the Praiſe of Men, and the Praiſe of God; and that the *Jews* are condemned, as preferring the Praiſe and Good-will of Men to the Praiſe and Good-will of God. Now certain it is, that no Honour can be due to Man, that is inconſiſtent with the Honour which we owe to God; and we cannot be innocent, whilſt we ſacrifice the Good-will of God to the Vanity of being well ſpoken of in the World. When Men act contrary to the Truth, and their known Duty, in Compliance with the World, it is plain they are more

concerned

concerned for their Intereſt with the World, than for their Intereſt with God; and this is, in the Language of our Saviour, *to receive Honour one from another, and to neglect the Honour which cometh from God only.* We have an Inſtance of this Conduct in the twenty-fourth of the *Acts*; *As Paul reaſoned of Righteouſneſs, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled, and anſwered, Go thy way for this Time; when I have a convenient Seaſon, I will call for thee.* You ſee the natural Working of Conſcience, and the Power of Conviction: A ſober, ſerious Diſcourſe upon the great fundamental Points of Religion threw the Governor into a Fit of trembling, and made him unable to bear the Preſence of his Priſoner. Had this Light been cheriſhed and encouraged, what noble Fruits might it have produced? But the Love of the World prevailed: The Governor often communed with St. *Paul*, but it was in hopes of getting Money of him for his Releaſe. When this Hope failed, he permitted the Preacher of Righteouſneſs, Temperance, and Judgment to come, to continue in Priſon two Years; and, when he left the Government, *he left Paul bound, being willing*, as the Text expreſſes it, *to ſhew the Jews a Plea-*

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ſure. You ſee what Place the Honour of God had in this Man's Affections: He would have ſold both God and the People for Money; but, when no Money was to be had, he choſe rather to pleaſe the People than God; and therefore ſacrificed his innocent Priſoner, whom in Juſtice he ought to have ſet free, to the Prejudices and Reſentments of the *Jewiſh* Nation. Many denied Chriſt, for the ſame Reaſon that *Felix* left St. *Paul* bound, *that they might ſhew the People a Pleaſure,* and thereby become acceptable to them. Truth and Juſtice muſt always ſuffer, as long as Men determine their Choice by Conſiderations of their temporal Intereſt. Theſe Conſiderations are ſo apt to overbear the Judgment, that our Saviour ſpeaks of them in the Text, as if they put Men under a moral Impoſſibility of acknowledging the Truth: *How can ye believe, who receive Honour one of another, and ſeek not the Honour that cometh from God only?*

Secondly, We are to inquire what is meant by *ſeeking the Honour which cometh from God only.*

Them that honour me, I will honour, ſaith the Lord; *and they that deſpiſe me, ſhall be lightly eſteemed.* The only Way therefore to

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ſeek Honour from God, is by paying to God the Honour that is due to him. A ſincere Regard to Truth and Juſtice is the trueſt Honour, indeed the only Honour we can pay to God. All external Signs of Regard to God, though expreſſed in the very Method preſcribed by himſelf, become empty Shews, unleſs they proceed from an honeſt Heart. Under the Law, Circumciſion was the Seal of the Covenant; and under the Goſpel, Baptiſm ſucceeds in its place. They were both ordained by God; yet of the firſt St. *Paul* has ſaid, *He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that Circumciſion, which is outward in the Fleſh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and Circumciſion is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter; whoſe Praiſe is not of Men, but of God.* And of the ſecond St. *Peter* has ſaid, *Baptiſm doth now ſave us; not the putting away the Filth of the Fleſh, but the Anſwer of a good Conſcience towards God.* But this Matter is directly conſidered and ſettled by our bleſſed Lord in his Sermon on the Mount. In treating on the great Duties of Religion, Almſgiving, Prayer, and Faſting, he expounds to us what it is to ſeek the Praiſe of Men, and what to ſeek the Praiſe of God, and ſets before us

the Conſequences on both Sides. *Take heed*, ſays he, *that you do not your Alms before Men, to be ſeen of them; otherwiſe ye have no Reward of your Father which is in Heaven. Therefore when thou doeſt thine Alms, do not ſound a Trumpet before thee, as the Hypocrites do, in the Synagogues, and in the Streets, that they may have Glory of Men: Verily I ſay unto you, They have their Reward. But when thou doeſt Alms, let not thy left Hand know what thy right Hand doth, that thine Alms may be in ſecret; and thy Father which ſeeth in ſecret, himſelf ſhall reward thee openly.* The like Injunctions he gives us with reſpect to Prayer and Faſting; and ſhews us in every Inſtance, that to have Regard to Men, and the good Opinion of the World, in the performing of religious Duties, will entitle us to no higher a Reward than the Praiſe of Men. God will not hold himſelf obliged, nor can he in Juſtice be thought obliged, to reward thoſe Works, which are offered up as an Incenſe to the World, without Regard or Reſpect to himſelf. If we ſeek the Praiſe of God, we muſt conſider only what will pleaſe him, and put the World quite out of the queſtion.

As it is in practical Duties, ſo is it in Faith likewiſe: He who profeſſes to believe in

Chriſt

Chriſt, merely becauſe the World about him is in the ſame Profeſſion, may obtain perhaps the Eaſe, the Honours, or the Riches which he aims at; and let him make the moſt of them, he has his Reward; for his temporal Faith will procure him no Praiſe or Honour from God. If you chuſe a Religion with an Intention to ſave your Soul, you muſt chuſe that which will render you moſt acceptable to God, however it may expoſe you to the Frowns of the World. Thus it is you muſt *ſeek the Honour which cometh from God only.*

How differently Men will act in Matters of Religion, when they ſeek the Praiſe of Men, and when they ſeek the Praiſe of God, may eaſily be collected from the Knowledge we have of God and the World, and the Meaſures that are neceſſary to pleaſe them; but I chuſe to place it before you in ſome Inſtances recorded in Scripture. We read in the ſeventh of St. *John*, that *many of the People believed on Jeſus, and ſaid, When Chriſt cometh, ſhall he do more Miracles than theſe, which this Man hath done?* The Phariſees were alarmed at this Defection of the People; and to prevent the Growth of the Evil, they with the Chief Prieſts ſend Officers to ſeize

our Lord: But the Officers, inſtead of bringing their Priſoner, return full of Admiration of him and his Doctrine, and tell their Maſters, *That never Man ſpake like this Man.* The Phariſees found their Officers were become Believers, and they reproved them, ſaying, *Are ye alſo deceived?* But the only Argument they gave them was this, *Have any of the Rulers, or of the Phariſees, believed on him? But this People, who knoweth not the Law, are curſed.* What Conviction this Argument produced we know not: Silence it produced at leaſt, for we hear of no Reply that the Officers made. In the twelfth of St. *John* we read, that among the Chief Rulers many believed on Chriſt, but they did not confeſs him; and here the Reaſon is given, they were afraid *leſt they ſhould be put out of the Synagogue.*

On the other Side, when the Apoſtles *Peter* and *John* were in Cuſtody, and under Examination of the Chief Rulers, and were commanded to teach no more in the Name of Jeſus, they anſwered boldly, *Whether it be right in the Sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* This Difference of Behaviour is plainly accounted for in the Text. *Peter* and *John* conſidered what

what was right in the Sight of God; the believing Rulers thought on their Intereſt in the Synagogue, and conſidered what was right in the Sight of Men: One ſought the Praiſe of God, the other the Praiſe of Men. How different were their Principles and their Actions; how different alſo their Rewards! The Diſſimulation of the *Jews* preſerved to them a Place in the Synagogue; the generous Confeſſion of the Apoſtles will give them a Place that ſhall abide for ever in Glory and Immortality. I proceed now to conſider,

Thirdly, How we may examine ourſelves upon this Subject, and know whether we receive Honour from Men, or ſeek the Honour that comes from God only.

All Times do not afford the ſame Trials of Faith and Sincerity, yet there is no Time but has ſome. If Perſecution ceaſes, Proſperity has its Temptations; and it is perhaps as hard to deny ourſelves the Honours and Glories of the World, as it is to ſubmit to the Afflictions of it. St. *Paul* tells us, that *there muſt be Hereſies among us, that they which are approved may be made manifeſt.* When the Heathens could no longer exerciſe their Cruelty againſt Chriſtians, the external Peace of the Church was followed by internal Di-

viſions and Contentions. The great *Arian* Controverſy aroſe much about the Time that the Empire became Chriſtian, and it yielded as ſevere Trials to Chriſtians, as they had ever before experienced. The Powers of the Empire were ſometimes on one Side, and ſometimes on the other Side of the Controverſy. What Influence it had on the Faith of the World, a Man of very moderate Experience in the World may eaſily collect. I will not carry this Obſervation into particular Inſtances, or bring it any nearer to our own Times, than by reminding you, that every Age has afforded this Trial to Chriſtians; and there always is, and will be, Reaſon for Men, who would guard the Sincerity of their Hearts, to inquire how far they lean to the World, and court its Favours, by the Opinions which they embrace and profeſs under the Appearance of Religion. Whether your Opinion be true or falſe, yet if you maintain it in Compliment to the World, you know your Reward, the World muſt pay you: Your Father, who ſeeth in ſecret, has no Reward for ſuch Believers. What the Portion of thoſe muſt be, who are reſolved, at all adventures, to be well with the World, and to give no Offence either to the Great or

to

to the Wicked by their Virtue or Religion, our Saviour has plainly told us, *Wo unto you, when all Men ſhall ſpeak well of you.*

But farther: Times of Eaſe and Proſperity, though attended with no other Evil, yet naturally abound in Vice, and a Neglect of the Things pertaining to Salvation: And it is counted a very wiſe Thing to ſit ſtill, and give way to the Torrent, and not to create ourſelves and others Trouble by oppoſing a general Corruption: And perhaps it may be wiſe. But, I beſeech you, is it Wiſdom towards God, or Wiſdom towards the World? Is it ſeeking that Honour which comes from above, or the Honour which comes from Men? Can you imagine that the Man, who has not Courage enough to venture a little of his Eaſe and worldly Tranquillity by expreſſing his Reſentment at the Corruptions that ſurround him, would have Reſolution enough to expoſe his Life in a Day of Trial for the ſake of the Religion which he profeſſes?

Let us examine ourſelves on this Head: If we think it an happy Choice to ſacrifice the Honour of God, and of Religion, to a corrupt Generation, and to ſkreen ourſelves from the Indignation of the World by a profeſſed Indifference, is it not directly preferring the

Good-will of Men to the Good-will of God? And can we complain, if we are left to ſeek our Recompence from the World, whoſe Servants we are?

In a word: Whenever Men act in Oppoſition to the Truth, or diſſemble the Truth in Compliance with the World; when they wink at Iniquity, and make a Way for it to eſcape with Impunity; when they give Credit to Vice and Irreligion by a profeſſed Indifference, and help to eſtabliſh Iniquity by affecting to ſeem eaſy and contented under the Growth of it: In all theſe Caſes, the Words of the Text belong to them; *They receive Honour one of another, and ſeek not the Honour which cometh from God only.*

DISCOURSE XVI.

MARK viii. 38.

Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and ſinful Generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.

AT the thirty-fourth Verſe of this Chapter our Lord, having called the People and his Diſciples to him, declares openly to them upon what Terms the Profeſſion of the Goſpel was to be undertaken. He allures them not by the Hopes of temporal Proſperity, nor promiſes any Countenance or Aſſiſtance from the Great and Powerful; but foretels them of the Evils and Calamities that ſhould

ſhould attend his Followers, and of the Sufferings prepared for them in this Life; againſt which the Providence of God ſtands not engaged for their Protection, ſince his Will is, that all the Faithful ſhould, after the Example of the Author and Captain of their Salvation, be made perfect through Suffering. *Whoſoever*, ſays our Lord, *will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his Croſs, and follow me.* How ſtrong the Expreſſion of *denying himſelf* is, and how much it includes, we learn from the next Verſe, where our Saviour himſelf extends it even to the parting with our Lives for his and the Goſpel's ſake: *Whoſoever will ſave his Life, ſhall loſe it; but whoſoever ſhall loſe his Life for my ſake and the Goſpel's, the ſame ſhall ſave it.*

You ſee, by comparing theſe Paſſages together, that the Text immediately relates to the Times of Perſecution, and expreſſes the Duty of a Chriſtian to reſiſt even unto Blood in Maintenance of his holy Religion, whenever the Providence of God calls him to ſuch Trial. This indeed is not our Caſe at preſent, and therefore I ſhall not ſpend the Time in fortifying your Minds againſt Terrors, removed, I hope, at a great Diſtance from us:

But

But it muſt be owned, that an adulterous and ſinful Generation has more Ways than one of making Men aſhamed of Chriſt, and of his Words. Though our Eyes have not beheld any frightful Scenes of Perſecution, yet we have ſeen, and daily ſee, many who are aſhamed of Chriſt. If the Temptation to this Crime be now leſs than in Times of Diſtreſs, the Guilt is certainly greater, and in Equity the Puniſhment muſt be ſo too. Which Reaſon will bring the Threatening of the Text home to every Man, who, in Compliance with a corrupt Age, does either wickedly reject, or baſely diſſemble the Faith of the Goſpel.

But that we may not raſhly accuſe either the Age in general, or any Men in particular, of this great Crime, but rather open a Way by which Men may eaſily examine their own Conſciences upon this Head, and avoid the like Evil for the future; let us,

Firſt, Inquire into the Nature of the Crime *of being aſhamed of Chriſt and of his Words*; and,

Secondly, Into the ſeveral Temptations that lead to it.

The Duty oppoſed to this Crime is expreſſed in the Language of Scripture by *confeſſing*

confeſſing Chriſt before Men; and therefore to be *aſhamed of Chriſt and of his Word*, is to deny or diſown Chriſt and his Doctrine before Men. In this Language both Parts are expreſſed in the tenth of St. *Matthew*: *Whoſoever*, ſays our Lord, *ſhall confeſs me before Men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father which is in Heaven. But whoſoever ſhall deny me before Men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in Heaven.*

If we were under no Obligation to confeſs Chriſt before the World, there would be no Iniquity in diſſembling our Knowledge of him, we might keep our Faith and our Religion to ourſelves, and by ſo doing avoid many Inconveniencies to which the open and ſincere Profeſſors of the Goſpel are oftentimes expoſed. There have not wanted ſome, in all Times, to juſtify the Prudence of concealing our religious Sentiments, and to encourage Men to live well with the World, in an outward Compliance with the Cuſtoms and Opinions of thoſe about them, provided their Hearts be right with God, and ſincere in the inward Belief of his Truth. To ſupport this Doctrine, we are called upon to remember that Religion is, in the Nature of the Thing, internal, and has its Seat and

Reſidence in the Heart, and not in the Lips or Tongues of Men: That our Virtue and Obedience will be eſtimated by our Integrity, and not by the outward Shews and Profeſſions which we make: That God, who knows the Heart, will judge us by it at the laſt: That, conſequently, the only Concern of Religion is to purify the Heart; and, ſince the World has nothing to do with our Hearts, we owe it no Account of our Religion; and may lawfully keep from them all Knowledge in a Matter where they have, where they can have, no Cognizance.

To this Plea, another is likewiſe added, That to ſuppoſe it neceſſary for Men to own the religious Sentiments of their Hearts at the Peril of their Lives, is making God a very hard Maſter, requiring of us a Service of no Value, at the Expence of all that is dear and valuable to us in this World. What does our Confeſſion avail Him, who has a ſurer Way of judging us than by the Words of our Mouth? Or what does it avail the World, thoſe eſpecially to whom it is to be made, who are hardened and paſt Conviction, and ſtand with the Sword uplifted to deſtroy us the Moment we confeſs the Truth?

It is no Wonder that Fleſh and Blood ſhould furniſh ſome plauſible Excuſes for declining

declining a Duty ſo very hard to practiſe, when it comes to the Caſes of the laſt Extremity: But yet theſe are but Excuſes, and founded in Ignorance of the Nature of Religion, and of the great Ends to be ſerved by it.

Were we to eſtimate our Religion by the Service or Benefit done to God, we might part with it all at once: He gets no more by the Sincerity of our Hearts, than by our outward Profeſſions; and therefore upon this View we may bid adieu to both. If you think, however, that there is ſomething in inward Sincerity that is agreeable in his Sight, that renders Men acceptable to him, I wonder, at the ſame time, you ſhould not think Hypocriſy and Diſſimulation with the World odious in his Sight, and ſuch Vices as will render us deteſtable to him. To ſuppoſe inward Sincerity conſiſtent with an external Hypocriſy toward the World, is itſelf a very great Abſurdity. For what is Hypocriſy? Is it not profeſſing one thing, and meaning another? And is not this the very Caſe, when a Man, ſuppoſed to be right in his Faith towards God, denies his Faith before the World? Yes, you will ſay; but this is only diſſembling towards the World, and not towards God. I beſeech you, whence this Diſtinction?

Diſtinction? What is diſſembling towards God? Was ever any Man ſo fooliſh, as to imagine that he could indeed deceive God by any kind of Diſſimulation? No Hypocrite can have this Notion. If he is an Atheiſt, he has no Thought of deceiving God, whoſe very Being he denies. If he is not an Atheiſt, he muſt needs know ſo much of God, as to know it to be impoſſible for him to impoſe on God. Hypocriſy therefore has no higher Aim than to deceive the World; and whoever denies the Religion he believes in his Heart, or profeſſes one which he does not believe, is a formal Hypocrite, and ſubject to all the Charges and Penalties brought againſt Hypocriſy in Holy Writ. So that ſuppoſing a Man obliged to ſay any thing about his Religion, he muſt neceſſarily ſay the Truth, or be liable to the Pains of Hypocriſy and Diſſimulation.

But it may be farther aſked perhaps, How comes it to be neceſſary for a Man to ſay any thing about his Religion? How comes Confeſſion with the Mouth to be made a Term of Salvation in the Goſpel? Is not Religion a Tranſaction between God and every Man's own Soul; how come the reſt of the World then to be concerned about my Religion?

What Right have they to inquire about it? Or where is the Reaſon, why I ſhould be bound to inform them concerning it by an open Profeſſion of my Belief?

To come to a clear Reſolution of this Queſtion, we muſt conſider the Nature of Religion, and the Ends propoſed to be ſerved by it. For, if Religion be nothing elſe but a ſecret Tranſaction between God and the Soul of Man, no Reaſon can be aſſigned why we ſhould publiſh to the World an Affair in which they have no Concern. But the Caſe is otherwiſe; for though nothing is properly Religion but as it reſpects God, yet, generally ſpeaking, the Duties of Religion regard this World, and have a very great Influence upon the Well-being of it. We muſt have a very ſtrange Notion of God, if we can imagine that he requires any Duty of us merely for his own ſake. What can he get by our Service? What additional Glory and Honour can accrue to the eternal Godhead from our Prayers or Praiſes?

When God made us reaſonable Creatures, he made us capable of knowing and obeying him. The great Character in which he appears to us of Governor of the World, is that which demands our Obedience: And conſequently

conſequently Religion is a Principle of Obedience to God, as Governor of the World. It cannot therefore poſſibly be a mere ſecret Concern between God and every Man's Conſcience, ſince it reſpects him in ſo public a Character, and muſt extend to every Thing in which God, as Governor of the World, is ſuppoſed to be concerned. To deny a Prince's Authority in his own Dominions is a Degree of Treaſon; and if Religion does in truth reſpect God as Governor of the World, to own his Authority in the World muſt needs be the principal Article of it. For ſurely it is impoſſible to pay the proper Reſpect and Obedience which is due to the Governor of the World, whilſt we deny him, in the Face of the World, to be the Governor of it. Thus from the Nature of Religion it appears, that to profeſs our Belief and Faith in God as Governor of the World is an eſſential Article, without the Obſervance of which we can by no means pretend to be religious.

But farther: If any religious Obedience be due to God as Governor of the World, it muſt principally conſiſt in promoting the great End of his Government. We can never be obedient Subjects to any Government, whilſt we endeavour to diſturb all the Ends

and Deſigns which ſuch Government was ordained to promote. Now ſuppoſe the End of God's Government of the World, with reſpect to the rational Part of it, to be whatever your Reaſon ſhall ſuggeſt to you, certain it is, that whoever teaches and encourages Men to deny God to be Governor of the World, and this every Man does who refuſes to own him as ſuch, does, in the moſt effectual Manner, diſturb the End of his Government: And this is abſolutely inconſiſtent with Religion, if Religion be a Principle of Obedience to God as Governor of the World.

Again: If it be really, as it is, impoſſible for us to do God any private Service by which he may be the better, it is very abſurd to imagine that Religion can conſiſt, or be preſerved by any ſecret Belief or Opinion, how cordially ſoever embraced. What Thanks can be due to you for ſilently believing God to be the Governor of the World, whilſt you openly deny it, and in your Actions diſclaim it? Even this Principle, which is the Foundation of all Religion, has nothing of Religion in it, ſo long as it is inactive, and conſiſts in Speculation, without bringing forth Fruits agreeable to ſuch a Perſuaſion: Much leſs can it be Religion, whilſt you openly deny

deny it, and in Words and Actions diſclaim it. We can no otherwiſe ſhew our Love or Obedience to God, than by loving our Brethren; for which Reaſon all Duties of Religion, though performed with the greateſt Regard to God, have the Good of the World for their immediate Object. Which is true, even of thoſe Duties, which ſeem moſt directly to reſpect the Honour and Glory of God: For, when the Honour of God is promoted in the World, happy is it for the World, for the Benefit and Advantage will all be their own; and God ſeeks to be honoured, that his Creatures may be happy: His own Happineſs wants no Advancement. Now if this be the true Spirit of Religion; if we have no Way of doing Honour to God, but by teaching his People to know and to obey him, that they may become acceptable in his Sight, and happy in his Favour and Protection; how is it that you conceive that there can be any Religion in a ſecret Opinion, in a diſſembled Faith, contradicted by an open Denial of God; which truly is a Diſhonour to him, as it tends to make his People forget him, and render themſelves miſerable?

Laſtly, If it be any Part of Religion to promote Religion and the Knowledge of God's

Truth in the World, it cannot be conſiſtent with our Duty to diſſemble, or to deny our Faith. We ſee how infectious Example is; and if we wanted Evidence, this Age ſhould witneſs how catching the Spirit of Libertiniſm is. The Man who hides his own Religion cloſe in his Heart, tempts others, who ſuſpect not his Hypocriſy, to throw theirs quite out; and whilſt he rejoices in this Sheet-Anchor of a pure inward Faith, he ſees others who ſteer after him make ſhipwreck of their Faith and their Salvation. And if he can in the mean time think himſelf innocent, and void of Offence towards God and towards Man, his Underſtanding is as unaccountable as his Faith.

Theſe Reaſons, I think, will entitle me to conclude, that it is Part of every Man's Religion to own the Faith and Hope that is in him: That it is abſurd to have any Reliance upon a ſecret Faith, which is of no Uſe to him who has it, as long as it is kept ſecret; and whenever ſuch Faith is openly contradicted or denied, it may aggravate, but never can atone for the Hypocriſy.

I have hitherto ſpoken in general of denying God, and his Truth; and have reaſoned upon the Nature of Religion in general, in order

order to come at my Concluſion. The Text indeed ſpeaks particularly of being aſhamed of Chriſt, and of his Word; but then it ſpeaks to ſuch as believe in Chriſt, for others are not liable to the Charge of being aſhamed of him: The very Nature of the Crime here mentioned ſuppoſes a Faith in the Goſpel. Now, to every Believer in Chriſt, and in his Words, the Arguments already uſed are directly applicable. If we believe him to have received all Power from the Father, and that he is our Governor, and ſhall be our Judge, there is the ſame Reaſon to profeſs this Faith, the ſame Danger in diſſembling it, as our Faith in God, conſidered as Governor of the World. If we receive the Words of Chriſt, they are to us the Truths of God, and muſt be profeſſed with the ſame Conſtancy, or denied with the ſame Hazard of our Salvation.

Under this Head I have one Thing more to obſerve to you, That there are in this Vice, as indeed in moſt others, very different Degrees. While ſome were contented to hide themſelves, and diſſemble their Acquaintance with Chriſt, St. *Peter* openly denied him, and confirmed it with an Oath, that he knew not the Man. Thus ſome for Fear in former Ages, thoſe Days of Perſecution, denied

their Lord; and ſome in theſe Days, ſuch is our unhappy Caſe, are ſo vain and conceited, as to be aſhamed of the Lord who bought them. Among theſe, ſome openly blaſpheme him; others are content to make a Sport of his Religion; whilſt a third Sort profeſs a Pleaſure in ſuch Converſation, though their Hearts ache for their Iniquity, but they want the Courage to rebuke even by their Silence the Sin of the Scorner. All theſe are in the Number of thoſe who are aſhamed of Chriſt: To all theſe it ſhall be one Day ſaid, *I know ye not*. For, if this great Woe be threatened to all ſuch who, to ſave their Lives, deny their Lord, and have the Extremity of their Caſe, the Cruelty of their Enemies, and the natural Infirmities of Men, to plead in their Behalf; what muſt be their Lot, who, for the ſame Iniquity, have little more to alledge, than that they did it to pleaſe an idle Companion? But this Conſideration will meet us again under the other Head, which is,

Secondly, To inquire into the ſeveral Temptations, which lead Men to this Crime of being *aſhamed of Chriſt, and of his Words*.

The Fountain from which theſe Temptations ſpring is plainly enough deſcribed in the Text, *This adulterous and ſinful Generation*.

And

And we know full well, that there is not a natural Fear lurking in the Heart of Man, but the World knows how to reach it; not a Paſſion, but it has an Enchantment ready for it; no Weakneſs, no Vanity, but it knows how to lay hold of it: So that all our natural Hopes and Fears, our Paſſions, our Infirmities, are liable to be drawn into the Conſpiracy againſt Chriſt, and his Word. Now you ſee the Source of theſe Temptations, it is eaſy to conceive how many, and in their Kinds how various they are. But there is one Diſtinction to be made, with reſpect to theſe Temptations, well worth our obſerving: Some there are which purſue us, and ſome there are which we purſue: To the one Sort we unwillingly reſign our Faith and our Religion, driven thereunto by Fears and Terrors, or by Pains and Torments, which we are not able to endure. This is the Caſe of ſuch as fall in Times of Perſecution; and we, who are Men of like Paſſions, cannot but commiſerate their Condition, and plead in their Behalf the common Excuſe, which belongs to the whole Race, of Weakneſs and Infirmity. But the other Kind of Temptations come upon our Invitation: We make our Faith a Sacrifice to the great Idol, the World,

when we part with it for Honour, Wealth, or Pleaſure. In this Circumſtance Men take Pains to ſhew how little they value their Religion, and ſeek Occaſions to diſplay their Libertiniſn and Infidelity, in order to make their Way to the Favour of a corrupt and degenerate Age. This Behaviour admits of no Excuſe. Theſe are they, who, properly ſpeaking, love the World more than God and his Chriſt; and let us not envy them the Love of the World, for they will find it a dear Purchaſe at the laſt.

But whenever Infidelity grows into Credit and Repute, and the World has ſo vitiated a Taſte, as to eſteem the Symptoms of Irreligion as Signs of a good Underſtanding and ſound Judgment; when there is ſo little Senſe of ſerious Things left, that a Man cannot appear to be in earneſt concerned for his Religion without being thought a Fool, or ſuſpected to be a Knave; then there ariſes another Temptation to make Men aſhamed of Chriſt, and of his Word. No Man likes to be deſpiſed by thoſe about him; and he who wants perhaps neither Riches nor Honour, wants however to live in Credit, and in good Eſteem with his Acquaintance, and to preſerve at leaſt the Character of a Man of Senſe

and

and Underſtanding. How this general and almoſt natural Inclination muſt work, whenever the Age is ſo far debauched, as to eſteem Irreligion a ſure Sign of a good Underſtanding, is eaſily conceived. Thoſe who have a large Share of Vanity will be drawn in to approve and encourage, to admire and imitate the much celebrated Freedom of thinking; for ſo it is called, though, properly ſpeaking, it might more truly be ſtyled a Freedom of talking. Others will be tempted to ſit ſtill, and give way to the Humour of the World; and will carefully hide their Faith in their Hearts, for fear any Signs of it ſhould appear to the utter Diſcredit of their Underſtanding. This is, this always will be, the Caſe in ſuch Circumſtances. But what muſt be done? may ſome ſay: Muſt we ſeclude ourſelves from Converſation, or muſt we ſet up to reprove and rebuke every idle Word we hear? If we do, our Company will ſoon leave us, though we leave not them. Wonderful Difficulties theſe! So hard, it ſeems, it is to refrain from the Company of thoſe, who make a Mock of Sin! An Hardſhip which a good Man would chuſe, and which every bad one muſt chuſe, if ever he intends to forſake the Error of his Ways.

There is a Contagion in ill Company, and he who dwells with the Scorner ſhall not be guiltleſs. But, ſince theſe Difficulties appear ſo great, compare them with the real Hardſhips that ſurrounded the Chriſtians of the firſt Ages: They lived in Perils, on all Sides were Terrors, within were Fears, without was Death. In theſe Circumſtances they were called to confeſs Chriſt in the Face of an enraged and cruel World; and the Rule given them to go by was, Not to fear thoſe, who could kill the Body only, but to fear Him, who could deſtroy both Body and Soul everlaſtingly. If this was their Rule under ſuch real Difficulties, what muſt be yours under ſuch pretended ones? If they were not permitted to fear the Rage of Kings and Princes, ſhall you be excuſed for fearing the Scorn or the Reſentment of a light Companion? If they were called to brave the Sword, and to look every Image of Death boldly in the Face; ſhall you find Pity, becauſe you were afraid perhaps of being laughed at, and deſpiſed by thoſe who are void of Underſtanding?

But not to inſiſt upon this, which may perhaps be too high a Degree of Virtue for the Times we live in, let us come lower: If

you

you care not to be a Reprover or Rebuker of this Iniquity, yet ſurely there is no Neceſſity for you to be an Admirer or Encourager of it: It is no great Sacrifice you make to Chriſt, when you reſign your Share of the Applauſe, which belongs to thoſe who perſecute and blaſpheme him. In a word: Conſider with yourſelves that Religion is, of all others, the moſt ſerious Concern. If its Pretenſions are founded in Truth, it is Life to embrace them, it is Death to deſpiſe them. We cannot in this Caſe ſtand neuter: We cannot ſerve two Maſters; we muſt hold to the one, and deſpiſe the other. If we confeſs Chriſt before Men, he will alſo confeſs us before God, and his holy Angels: If we deny him before Men, he will deny us at the laſt Day, when he ſhall come in the Glory of his Father to judge the World.

Had our Lord been merely a Teacher of good Things, without any ſpecial Commiſſion or Authority from the great Creator and Governor of the World, it would have been highly abſurd to aſſume to himſelf this great Prerogative of being owned and acknowledged before Men. Several have from the Light of Reaſon taught many good Leſſons to the World: But are we bound to take

every

every reaſonable Man, who recommends the Practice of Virtue, for our Maſter? to own his Authority at the Peril of our Lives? No Man ever thought ſo. *Socrates* taught many great Things to the *Greeks* before Chriſt came into the World. If he followed Reaſon, he did well; and we ſhall do well to follow it too, and farther we have no Concern with him. But, if there be any Truth at all in the Goſpel, the Caſe is far otherwiſe with reſpect to our bleſſed Redeemer; we muſt own his Authority, we muſt confeſs him before the World, be the Danger of ſo doing ever ſo great or extreme. Whence ariſes this Obligation? It cannot reſt merely upon this, that he was a Teacher of Reaſon and good Morality; for in that Caſe it would be ſufficient to ſubmit to the Reaſon and the Rules of Morality which he taught, without concerning ourſelves with his Authority, which was no more than what Reaſon and Virtue give every Man. But the Caſe with us is otherwiſe; Our Lord requires of us, that we ſhould confeſs him before Men; and has declared, that if we deny him before the World, he will deny us in the Preſence of God and his holy Angels, when he comes to judge the Quick and the Dead. Conſider what manner

of

of Perſon is this, who requires ſo much at our Hands. If he is indeed the Son of God; if all Power in Heaven and Earth is given him by the Father; if he is conſtituted by God Judge of all Men, there is a clear Reaſon to juſtify his Demand, and our Obedience: But if he was only a mere Teacher of Morality and Religion, how is he to be juſtified in pretending to be the only Son of God, in pretending to have all Power given him in Heaven and Earth, and to be appointed Judge of all Men? You muſt either own him under theſe Characters, or you muſt condemn him as an Impoſtor for claiming them. How far thoſe who are willing to admit Chriſt to be a good Teacher, but refuſe to acknowledge him in any other Character, are chargeable with ſeeing this Conſequence, I know not; nor can I ſee, if they conſider it, how they can avoid it.

When therefore we read that our Lord requires of us to confeſs him before Men, the true Way to know what we are to confeſs, is to reflect what he confeſſed himſelf; for it cannot be ſuppoſed that he thought it reaſonable for himſelf to make one Confeſſion, and for his Diſciples and Servants to make another. Look then into the Goſpel,

and

and ſee his own Confeſſion: He confeſſed himſelf to be the only Son of God; to come from the Boſom of the Father to die for the Sins of the World; to have all Power given to him in Heaven and Earth; to be the Judge of the World. When you have weighed theſe Things, read his Words, and judge what your Duty is: *Whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and ſinful Generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.*

DISCOURSE XVII.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 10, 11.

We muſt all appear before the Judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, that every one may receive the Things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Knowing therefore the Terrors of the Lord, we perſuade Men.

IT is the Privilege and diſtinguiſhing Character of a rational Being to be able to look forward into Futurity, and to conſider his Actions, not only with reſpect to the preſent Advantage or Diſadvantage ariſing from them, but to view them in their Conſequences through all the Parts of Time in which himſelf may poſſibly exiſt. If therefore we value the Privilege of being

reaſonable Creatures, the only Way to preſerve it, is to make uſe of it; and by extending our Views into all the Scenes of Futurity, in which we ourſelves muſt bear a Part, to lay the Foundation of ſolid and durable Happineſs.

By the Exerciſe of this Power of Reaſon, the Wiſeſt among the Heathens diſcovered, that there was Ground for Men to have Expectations beyond this Life. They ſaw plainly that themſelves, and all Things that fell under their Obſervation, were dependent Beings on the Will and Power of him who formed them; and when they ſought to find him, they were led by a neceſſary Chain of Reaſoning to the Acknowledgment of a ſupreme, independent, intelligent Being. They ſaw in every Part of the Creation evident Marks of his Power, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs: They diſcerned that all the inanimate Parts of the World acted perpetually in Submiſſion to the Law of their Creation; the Sun and all the Hoſt of Heaven were conſtant to their Courſes; and, in every other Part, the Powers of Nature were duly and regularly exerted for the Preſervation of the preſent Syſtem: Among Men only they found Diſorder and Confuſion. That they had

Reaſon,

Reaſon, was plain; that they were intended to live according to Reaſon, could not be doubted; and yet they ſaw Virtue often diſtreſſed and abandoned to all the Evils of Life, Vice triumphant, and the World everywhere ſubject to the Violence of Pride and Ambition. How to account for this they knew not: This only they could obſerve, that Man was endowed with a Freedom in acting, which the other Beings of the lower World wanted; and to this they rightly aſcribed the Diſorders to be found in this Part of the Creation. But though this accounted for the Growth of Evil, yet it rendered no Account of the Juſtice or Goodneſs of God in permitting Vice oftentimes to reign here in Glory, whilſt Virtue ſuffered in Diſtreſs. Upon theſe Conſiderations they concluded, that there muſt be another State after this, in which all the preſent Inequalities in the Adminiſtration of Providence ſhould be ſet right, and every Man receive according to his Works.

This was, this is the Ground of our natural Expectation of a Life after this. But upon this Ground of Truth many Fables and Stories were raiſed, by Fear and Superſtition, and by the Power of Imagination: So that

the general Belief, though right in its Foundation, yet in almoſt all the Particulars of it was rendered ridiculous and abſurd. Hence it is, that among the Writers of Antiquity, we ſometimes find wiſe Men ridiculing the Follies and Superſtitions of the People, and bad Men always arguing from theſe Follies againſt the very Notion itſelf, and calling in queſtion the Reality of any future State.

Under theſe Circumſtances of the World, our bleſſed Lord appeared to bring to Light Life and Immortality through the Goſpel. Let us then conſider how this fundamental Article of Religion now ſtands upon the Foot of the Goſpel Revelation.

As to the principal Point, there is no Difference between the Hopes conveyed to us in the Goſpel, and the Expectation built upon natural Reaſon: For, as the wiſeſt Men thought there muſt be, ſo the Goſpel aſſures us there will be, *a Day in which God will judge the World in Righteouſneſs, and render to every Man according to his Works.* Thus far then the Doctrine of the Goſpel and the Dictates of natural Reaſon muſt ſtand or fall together. If this Doctrine has had a larger and more extenſive Influence through the Authority of the Goſpel, than it could have had

had by the mere Force of ſpeculative Reaſoning, the World has received an Advantage by the Encouragement given to Virtue, and the Reſtraint laid upon Vice by theſe Means, which ought ever to be acknowledged with Thankfulneſs.

But the Goſpel has added to this Doctrine, and communicated to us the Knowledge of ſome Circumſtances, which were not diſcoverable but by the Means of Revelation; and they are principally theſe: That there ſhall be a Reſurrection of the Body; That Chriſt ſhall be Judge of the World; That the Rewards and Puniſhments in another Life ſhall be in Proportion to our Behaviour in this.

I ſhall ſpeak briefly to theſe Particulars, and ſhew for what Purpoſe they were revealed.

Firſt, The Reſurrection of the Body was revealed to give all Men a plain and a ſenſible Notion of their being ſubject to a future Judgment. Death is the Deſtruction of the Man; and ſure we are that the lifeleſs Body is no Man; and whatever Notions ſome may have of the Soul in its State of ſeparate Exiſtence, yet a mere Spirit is not a Man; for Man is made of Soul and Body: And therefore to bring the Man into Judgment to

anſwer for his Deeds, the Soul and the Body muſt be brought together again. This Doctrine, eſtabliſhed upon the Authority of the Goſpel, does not remove all Prejudices of the Caſe, when examined by the ſhort and ſcanty Notions we have of the Powers of Nature; but it effectually removes all Difficulties that affect this Belief, conſidered with reſpect to Religion and Morality. For the ſingle Point in which Religion is concerned, is to know whether Men ſhall be accountable hereafter for their Actions here. Reaſon tells us they ought to be ſo: But a great Difficulty ariſes from the Diſſolution of the Man by Death; a Difficulty followed by endleſs Speculations upon the Nature of the Soul, of its ſeparate Exiſtence, of its Guilt in this ſeparate State with reſpect to Crimes committed in another, and in Conjunction with the Body, and by other Difficulties of the like kind. But take in the Declaration of the Goſpel, that Soul and Body ſhall be as certainly united at the Reſurrection as they were divided by Death, and every Man be himſelf again; and there is no more Difficulty in conceiving that Men may be judged for their Iniquities hereafter, than there is in conceiving that they may be judged here, when they offend againſt the Laws of the Country.

But ſtill there are Prejudices remaining: To ſome it is incredible that the Dead ſhould be raiſed. To theſe we anſwer, upon the Foot of the Goſpel Evidence, That the Dead have been raiſed; upon the Foot of Reaſon, That it is altogether as credible, that God ſhould be able to raiſe the Dead to Life a ſecond Time, as that he was able to give them Life at firſt. There is no Difference in the Caſes; they are Acts of one and the very ſame Power.

But we are farther aſked, What Body ſhall be raiſed, ſince no Man has exactly the ſame Body two Days together? New Parts are perpetually added by Nutrition, old ones carried off by Perſpiration: So that in the Compaſs of a few Years an human Body may be almoſt totally altered, and be no more the ſame than a Ship which has been ſo often repaired, that no Part of the original Materials is left. But this Objection, as plauſible as it may ſeem, has nothing to do in the preſent Caſe; for Religion is concerned only to preſerve the Identity or Sameneſs of the Perſon, as the Object of future Judgment; and has nothing to do with that kind of Identity againſt which the Objection can be ſuppoſed

to have any Force. Were the Caſe otherwiſe, the Difficulty would be really as great in human Judgments in this Life, as in the divine Judgment hereafter. Suppoſe a Man ſhould commit Murder when he was twenty, and not be diſcovered till he was ſixty, and then brought to Trial; would common Senſe admit him to plead that he was not the ſame Perſon who committed the Fact; and to alledge, in Proof of it, the Alterations in his Body for the laſt forty Years? Suppoſe then that, inſtead of being diſcovered at ſixty, he ſhould die at ſixty; and ſhould riſe either with the Body he had at ſixty, or twenty, or in any intermediate Time, would not the Caſe be juſt the ſame with reſpect to the future Judgment? Evidently it would be the ſame: Which ſhews that the Article of the Reſurrection, as far as it is a Support of Religion, and of a future Judgment, ſtands quite clear of this Difficulty.

But the Prejudices which affect Men moſt, when they conſider this Article of the Reſurrection, ariſe from the weakeſt of all Imaginations, that they can judge from the ſettled Laws and Courſe of Nature, what is or is not poſſible to the Power of God. It is very true, that

that all our Powers are bounded by the Laws of Nature; but does it follow that his Power muſt be ſo bounded, who appointed theſe Laws of Nature, and could have appointed others, if he had thought proper? We cannot raiſe a dead Body; our Hands are tied up by the Laws of Nature, which we cannot ſurpaſs. Neither can we make or create a new Man; but we certainly know, from Reaſon and Experience, that there is One who can: And what can induce us to ſuppoſe that He cannot give Life to a Body a ſecond Time, who we certainly know gave Life to it at firſt? Theſe Prejudices therefore we may ſafely refer to the Power of the Almighty, to which all Nature is obedient, and upon which we may ſecurely depend for the Performance of divine Promiſes, how unpromiſing ſoever the Circumſtances may ſeem to be which attend them. When the Sadducees denied the Reſurrection, our Saviour told them, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of God:* Intimating plainly, that for the Security and Certainty of our Reſurrection we muſt truſt to Scripture, and the Declaration of God's Purpoſe contained therein; and for the Method and

Means of bringing this great Work to paſs we muſt rely on the Power of God.

But whatever Difficulties of this kind may remain, yet this Article has removed all which lie in the Way of our conſidering ourſelves as accountable Creatures, and ſubject to the future Judgment of God. Whatever you may imagine to be the State of ſeparate Souls; whatever Difficulties may ariſe in conſidering a mere Spirit as accountable for the Actions of this compound Being Man, they are all out of the queſtion. It is not a mere Spirit, but the Man himſelf, who is to be brought to Judgment; and plain Senſe muſt ſee and acknowledge the Reaſonableneſs of judging a Man hereafter for the Crimes committed in this Life; as evidently as it ſees the Reaſonableneſs of judging him here, when his Crimes happen to be detected. So that the Revelation in this Particular has brought Faith and common Senſe to a perfect Agreement.

Secondly, The Goſpel Revelation has made known to us, that Chriſt ſhall be Judge of the World.

Our Saviour tells us, that *the Father judgeth no Man, but hath committed all Judgment*

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to the Son, John v. 22. And again: *The Father hath given him Authority to execute Judgment, becauſe he is the Son of Man*, ver. 27. And St. *Peter* declares, that the Apoſtles had it expreſsly in their Commiſſion to publiſh this Doctrine to all the World: *He commanded us to preach unto the People, and to teſtify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of Quick and Dead*, Acts x. 42. Accordingly St. *Paul*, in his ſhort Diſcourſe to the Men of *Athens*, fully inſtructed them in this material Point: *God hath appointed a Day in the which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs, by the Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given Aſſurance unto all Men, in that he hath raiſed him from the Dead*, Acts xvii. 31.

I will not multiply Texts to this Purpoſe, though many more there are which ſpeak the ſame Senſe, becauſe this Doctrine is very well known to Chriſtians, and is Part of the Creed which we daily rehearſe.

But it is material to obſerve, that this Authority is given to Chriſt, *becauſe he is the Son of Man*, as he himſelf has aſſured us; and that the Perſon ordained to be Judge is a Man, even *the Man whom God raiſed from*

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the Dead, as St. *Paul* aſſerts. How happy is it for us to have a Judge, I had almoſt ſaid ſo partial, but I may well ſay ſo favourable to us, that he was content to be himſelf the Sacrifice to redeem us from the Puniſhment due to our Sins? When we conſider ourſelves how wretched and weak we are, how perpetually doing wrong either wilfully or ignorantly, and contemplate the infinite Majeſty, Holineſs and Juſtice of God, what Account can we hope to give of ourſelves to him, whoſe Eyes are purer than to behold Iniquity? But ſee, God hath withdrawn his Terrors, and has given a Man to be the Judge of Men. So that we may ſay of our Judge, what the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* ſays of our High-Prieſt; *We have not a Judge, which cannot be touched with the Feeling of our Infirmities; but was in all Things tempted like as we are, yet without Sin.*

You may think perhaps that this is drawing Conſequences upon the Foot of vulgar Apprehenſions, and that in Reality there is no Difference, whether God be Judge himſelf, or commits the Judgment to the Son of Man: For, ſince Chriſt ſhall come not only in the Power, but in the Wiſdom and the Juſtice

Juſtice of God alſo to judge the World, what Difference can there be in the Judgment, ſince in both Caſes it muſt be guided and formed by the Wiſdom and Juſtice of God? True it is, that a mere Man is not qualified to be Judge of the World; the Knowledge of Hearts is neceſſary to the right Diſcharge of that Office; a Knowledge which no mere Man was ever endowed with. But ſtill, if the Man is to be Judge, the Sentiments, Notions, and Feeling of the Man, however guided and influenced by ſuperior Wiſdom, muſt preſide over and govern the whole Action; otherwiſe the Man will not be Judge. And hence we may anſwer ſome Difficulties, which ſpeculative Men have brought into the Subject of a future Judgment. Some have imagined that Juſtice, Mercy and Goodneſs in God are not of the ſame kind with Juſtice, Mercy and Goodneſs in Men; and therefore that we can never, from our Notions of theſe Qualities in Man, argue conſequentially to the Attributes of God, or to the Acts flowing from theſe Attributes. The Reſult of which is, that when we talk of God's Juſtice or Mercy in judging the World, we talk of ſomething which we do not underſtand. But

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if Men would conſult Scripture, theſe Difficulties would not meet them in their Way: For ſurely we know what Juſtice, Mercy and Goodneſs mean among Men; and ſince the Scripture aſſures us, that the Man whom God raiſed from the Dead is ordained Judge of the World, we may be very certain that the Juſtice, Mercy and Goodneſs, to be diſplayed in the future Judgment, will be ſuch as all Men have a common Senſe and Apprehenſion of; unleſs you can imagine that a new Rule is to be introduced, to which the Judge, and thoſe to be judged, are equally Strangers. Upon this Foot of Scripture then we may certainly know, what the Juſtice, Mercy and Goodneſs are by which we muſt finally ſtand or fall; and this Point being ſecured, the Speculation may be left to ſhift for itſelf.

And thus you ſee how this great and fundamental Article of Religion, involved in Darkneſs in former Ages, is made plain and ſenſible to Mankind by the Light of the Goſpel. That Men were accountable, they always knew; that there would be a future Judgment, was generally believed; but how Men were to appear in Judgment, or how mere unbodied Spirits were to be judged, how rewarded,

rewarded, or how puniſhed, they knew not. That the Right of judging Men was in God, was well known; but how he would exerciſe it, whether by himſelf or another, viſibly or inviſibly, they knew not. Infinite were the Diſputes upon this Subject: Inſtead of which the Goſpel has given a plain ſenſible Repreſentation, aſſuring us that at the Judgment we ſhall be what we now are, Men, real Men; and that the Man Chriſt Jeſus, who appeared in the World to redeem us, will appear again to judge us by that very Goſpel, and thoſe very Rules, which he has left us to govern and conduct ourſelves by.

Thirdly, Let us then go one Step farther, and view the Conſequences of this Judgment; this ſolemn Judgment, which every Mortal muſt undergo. If we conſult either Scripture or Reaſon, we ſhall find no Evidence of any farther Change to be made in our future State, after once Judgment has paſſed on us. That we are accountable, and ſhall therefore be judged, Reaſon ſays; but can ſee nothing relating to us after Judgment, except the Reward or the Puniſhment conſequent upon it: And therefore the only Concluſion to be drawn from this

this Information is, that the Condition of Man will be finally determined as to Happineſs or Miſery, and conſequently that Man muſt continue under the good or the bad Effects of the laſt Judgment.

As Reaſon can ſhew us nothing beyond Judgment, but that State and Condition which are the Effect of it; ſo the Holy Scripture has given us Reaſon to think that nothing elſe there ſhall be, by deſcribing the Rewards and Puniſhments of another Life, as having perpetual Duration. Life eternal is prepared for the Righteous, and everlaſting Puniſhment for the Wicked. The Fire prepared to receive them is never to go out, the Worm prepared to torment them will never die. Theſe Images carry great Terror with them, and have led ſome to a milder Interpretation of the Threats of Scripture than the Language of it ſeems to import. But even the mildeſt Interpretation, that allows any Meaning at all to thoſe Threats, ſuppoſes the Puniſhment to laſt as long as the Sinner laſts. So that in this, the loweſt View, our all depends upon the Judgment which ſhall be finally paſſed on us at the ſecond Coming of our Lord. There is then a Juſt-

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neſs of Thought, as well as great Charity to the Souls of Men, in what the Apoſtle adds, *Knowing the Terror of the Lord, we perſuade Men.* If the Chriſtian Revelation has cleared our Doubts, by *bringing Life and Immortality to Light through the Goſpel*; if it has given us Ground for Hope and Confidence by aſſuring us that we ſhall be judged by him, *who ſo loved us, that he gave himſelf for us*, and ſubmitted to die, that we might live; it has alſo given us Ground to be watchful and careful over ourſelves, and to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling. For it is a fearful Thing to be to anſwer for ourſelves before the Searcher of all Hearts; to anſwer to him who loved us, for deſpiſing the Love he ſhewed us; to anſwer to him who died for us, for having crucified him afreſh, and put him to open Shame; and for having accounted the Blood of the Covenant an unholy Thing. This will be the ſad Caſe of every wilful Sinner. The View of this Miſery and Diſtreſs, which Sinners are calling upon themſelves by their Iniquity, moved the Apoſtle, and muſt ever move thoſe who ſucceed to his Office, to warn Men *to flee from the Wrath that is to come.* We know

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the Terror of the Lord, and therefore *perſuade Men.* Happy would it be, if Men, knowing and conſidering theſe Terrors, would ſuffer themſelves to be perſuaded. Which God grant, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord: *To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be aſcribed all Honour and Glory, henceforth, and for evermore.* Amen.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.