Mr. *BRADFORD*'s
SERMON,
Preached at
St. Paul's,
May *the* 1*st*. 1699.

The Excellency of the Christian Revelation, as it teacheth us to know our selves, and our Duty.

A

SERMON

Preach'd in the

Cathedral Church of St. *PAUL*, *May* the 1st. 1699.

Being the Fifth, for this Year, of the Lecture, Founded by the Honourable

Robert Boyle, Esq;

By *SAMUEL BRADFORD*, Rector of St. *Mary le Bow*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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1 TIM. I. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners, ——

I Have been considering the intrinsick Evidence of this *saying*, which St. *Paul* recommends, from the apparent excellency of the Method in which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ hath obtain'd Salvation for us; to which purpose I have been treating of his *Mediatorial* Office, in the two great branches of it, *viz.* As he hath done whatsoever might satisfie Almighty God, in order to his being reconcil'd to Men; and also whatsoever was found necessary in the behalf of Men, in order to the reconciling them to God.

As to the latter of these, I reduc'd the Necessities of Fallen Men to these *four* Heads.

First, A suspicion and jealousie of Mind concerning God, and an alienation from him, as consequent thereupon.

Secondly, A Gross Ignorance of God, and of themselves, and of the several particulars of their Duty.

Thirdly, An indiſpoſition and inability to comply with the Divine Will, although it ſhould be clearly and fully reveal'd.

Fourthly, After all, an incapacity of removing thoſe other evil and miſchievous Conſequences, to which their Sins had expos'd them, and obtaining for themſelves that compleat Salvation, which they ſtood in need of.

Of the *firſt* of theſe I diſcours'd the laſt time, and enter'd upon the *ſecond*. I then conſider'd how groſs and univerſal the Ignorance of Men was, before the coming of our Lord, and began to ſhew how our *Mediator* hath provided for this neceſſity of Mankind, both by his *Doctrine* and his *Life*; by the former, as an *Inſtruction*; by the latter, as an *Example* to us, to make us throughly acquainted with all, that it is fit for us to know, as to the ſeveral particulars before-mention'd.

I began with the *Doctrine* of our Lord, and obſerv'd that whatſoever he hath taught may be reduc'd to theſe *two* General Heads; Either what God had before taught Men, by the Light of Nature and Reaſon; but they had in a great meaſure forgot: Or ſomething which it became farther neceſſary for them to know, upon account of their Apoſtacy from God, and in order to their recovery to him; and which they could not have known but by Revelation.

I then proceeded to conſider the Doctrine of our Saviour more diſtinctly;

I. Con-

I. Concerning Almighty God.
II. Concerning our selves.
III. As it gives us Rules for the direction of our Tempers and our Lives.

In each of these Instances I propos'd to make it evident, by God's assistance, that our Saviour's Doctrine is most worthy to be taught by God, and to be receiv'd by us, and consequently that upon this account, *It is a faithful saying*, &c.

I have done with the *first* of these, *viz.* our Saviour's Doctrine concerning Almighty God, and now proceed to the

II. *Viz.* What our Saviour hath taught us concerning our selves, which I shall dispatch in a few words, that I may come to that which is of main Consideration with respect to the Doctrine of Christianity, namely its Rules for our Tempers and our Lives.

Now with respect to our selves, as well as with respect to Almighty God, the Doctrine of our Saviour hath either illustrated and confirm'd to us what the Light of Nature and Reason, if duly us'd, might have discover'd concerning Humane Nature; or else hath added something beyond what we could have known that way.

Thus for Instance, That we were produc'd into Being by God the Creator of all, and made such a kind of Creatures as we find our selves to be, *viz.* compos'd of Immaterial and Immortal Spirits, as well as Bodies of Flesh; that consequently we are

capable of, and deſign'd for a Future State, our Spirits not being obnoxious to Death from any Principles which we can diſcern in them, although as Experience tells us, our Fleſhly Tabernacles are liable to diſſolution; that we are intelligent and reaſonable Creatures, and for that Reaſon accountable to our Maker for our Behaviour. Moreover, that by ſome means or other we are diſorder'd in our whole frame, foraſmuch as we find, not only that we are expoſed to Diſeaſes of Body, and at laſt to Death it ſelf; but alſo that our Appetites and Paſſions are apt to rebel againſt our Underſtanding and Reaſon, which muſt needs be a corruption and degeneracy in our Nature, it not being at all credible, that ſo good a Being as God is, ſhould have originally form'd us in ſo diſorderly a ſtate. Such Apprehenſions as theſe the beſt of Men amongſt the Pagans were apt to entertain, from the meer Light of Reaſon; they inclin'd to think that this in general was the ſtate of Humane Nature; though, as it is very apparent by their Writings, their Apprehenſions of theſe things were very imperfect and uncertain.

But all this the Doctrine of our Saviour hath fully aſſur'd us of, in plain and expreſs terms, and ſuch as leave no room for doubt; adding thereunto, (if we take in what Chriſtianity always ſuppoſes and takes for granted, *viz.* the Revelation of God by *Moſes*,) a much more particular and exact account of Humane Nature, than we could poſſibly have receiv'd from meer Reaſon. The account indeed which we have of our ſelves, by the Jewiſh and Chriſtian Revelation join'd together, is ſuch as

as lets us into the perfect Knowledge of the Original, and the Design of our Beings; what we were, as we came out of God's hands; how we have abus'd our selves; and consequently what is necessary to be done either by or for us, in order to our Recovery.

Neither is there any thing therein, but what, if duly consider'd, will appear, after it is thus reveal'd, perfectly reasonable to be believ'd, so far from contradicting, that it exceedingly confirms and improves our natural Apprehensions concerning our selves.

Thus for Instance, That God having form'd this Earth, and furnish'd it with a great variety of Creatures, fitted for the use or delight of such Beings as we are, produc'd the first Man, appointing him and his Posterity to be the Inhabitants of this Region, and assigning to them the use and government of all the Creatures below them; that he form'd the Body of Man out of the Dust of the Earth, and breath'd into his Nostrils the Breath of Life, thus making him related, by the two constitutive parts of his Nature, both to the upper and the lower World; that he form'd a Companion for him, like to him, making but one of each Sex, and joining them together by the strictest alliance, that they might be mutual Helps and Comforts to each other, and might become the common Parents of Mankind, who, by thus descending from the same Stock, might be taught to look upon themselves as near of kin; that this first Man and Woman were plac'd in easie and happy Circumstances, endued with the Image of God, both in the Intellectual and Moral

Powers

Powers of their Souls, and enjoying his Favour, bleſs'd with Innocence of Mind, and Health of Body, naturally diſpos'd and greatly oblig'd to obey the Commands of their great and good Creator; but that being tempted and deluded by a malicious Enemy both to God and them, and giving way to their Appetites and Paſſions, without duly conſulting the Reaſon of their Minds, or invoking the aſſiſtance of Heaven, they diſobey'd their Maker, and render'd themſelves obnoxious to his juſt Diſpleaſure; that theſe firſt Sinners were upon this diſmiſs'd from that happy place and ſtate, in which they had been created, and turn'd out into a World of Miſery and Sorrow; that having weaken'd and deprav'd their own Nature by miſuſing it, they convey'd the Weakneſs and Corruption to their Poſterity, the Blood which their Off-ſpring deriv'd from them being tainted in its original; that partly as the natural Conſequence of what they had done, and partly by the juſt Appointment of their offended Maker, Sickneſs, and Pain, and Death, were the effects of their Diſobedience, and this their firſt Sin was the Beginning of all thoſe Evils, to which they and their Poſterity have been ſince expos'd, and the Occaſion of all that Diſorder which is to be found in this lower World; and conſequently, that if ever we hope to be happy, it muſt be by having the Image of God repair'd in us, by being reſtor'd to his Favour, by having our Souls recover'd to their due Temper by the communication of Divine Grace, by having our Bodies alſo, after their diſſolution, re-united to our Spirits by the Almighty Power, that ſo we may be perfect and entire, according

cording to our primitive Constitution; and finally, by having perfect Health and Vigour restor'd to the whole Man.

This is plainly the substance of what the Christian Doctrine teacheth us concerning our selves, whereby, as it greatly illustrates and confirms what was before but imperfectly and confusedly guess'd at by Men of the best Understandings and Morals; so it adds several particulars of great moment, which, although they are either what we had lost the tradition of, or what we could not certainly have known without Revelation, yet being reveal'd, can I think by no means shock the Reason of any serious Deist. On the contrary, as this Scheme is infinitely more rational, than any thing that has been produc'd upon this Subject by the Authors of any other Religion; so it is exceedingly agreeable to all the present Phænomena of Humane Nature, yielding the most satisfactory account of the Original, the present Condition, the Design and End of Mankind, and laying a good foundation for those Rules which the Christian Doctrine hath given us for the government of our selves; and this brings me to the next particular I propos'd to be consider'd, *viz.*

III. Those Rules which the Doctrine of our Saviour hath laid down for the management of our Tempers and our Lives; which, as I am now to shew, do yet farther recommend to us the Method in which our *Mediator* hath obtain'd *Salvation* for *Sinners*.

Had the Christian Institution fail'd in this point, there

there had lain an unanſwerable Objection againſt it, eſpecially ſince it pretends to bring us the laſt and fulleſt Revelation of the Divine Will, and to correct or perfect whatſoever went under the name of Religion before: but this we Chriſtians juſtly glory in, that it hath fully made good this Pretence, and that even its Adverſaries cannot plauſibly object any thing againſt it upon this account, unleſs it be that its Rules ſeem to them too ſtrict, too perfect for the preſent ſtate of Humane Nature; which, whether it be a reaſonable Objection, will fall under Conſideration hereafter.

In confirmation of this Point, I might inſiſt upon thoſe paſſages of our Saviour, which I had occaſion juſt to recite in a former Diſcourſe; as where our Lord replies to the Lawyer, asking him, *Which was the great Commandment in the Law? Jeſus ſaid unto him*, as it follows in the Text, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind; This is the firſt and great Commandment: and the ſecond is like unto it; Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thy ſelf. On theſe two Commandments hang all the Law, and the Prophets.* Where our Lord not only explains the Law both of *Moſes* and of Nature in their full extent; but alſo plainly enough inſinuates, that theſe two great Rules ſhould be the fundamental Laws of his own Inſtitution; for in the place parallel to this in St. *Mark*'s Goſpel, upon the *Scribes* approving this Anſwer of our Lord, and repeating it in other words, 'tis ſaid, that *when Jeſus ſaw that he anſwer'd diſcreetly, he ſaid unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.* For which Reaſon in that admirable

Mat. 22. 36, &c.

Mark 12. 34.

rable Discourse upon the Mount, where in express terms, and most solemn manner, he deliver'd his Precepts to his Disciples, he plainly tells them, that *he came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them*, πληρῶσαι, one way of doing which was, as I before observ'd, and as appears undeniably from the Discourse immediately following those words, by interpreting them in their fullest extent; and accordingly in the prosecution of that Argument, he commandeth his Disciples to aim at the highest degree of Virtue and Goodness, even *to be perfect as their Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* Mat. 5. 17, &c. Ver. 48.

I might add to this, the Declaration which St. *Paul* makes of the general design of the Gospel-Institution, *viz.* that *it teacheth all men, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World*; this being, as he says, the very end of our Saviour's *giving himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purifie to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* Tit. 2. 11, 12, 14.

I might in the last place alledge that comprehensive Exhortation of the same Apostle, *Finally Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* Phil. 4. 8.

These general Rules and Precepts are so very full, as evidently to include the whole of Morality; insomuch that a Christian may fairly challenge a Philosopher, or a Jew, or any other person whatsoever, who seriously believes a God, and embraces

the Principles of Natural Religion, to name that Virtue which is not comprehended under them. And whoſoever will carefully peruſe the New Teſtament, ſhall find not only many more ſuch general and comprehenſive Rules therein contain'd; but alſo abundance of particular Directions and Precepts agreeable thereunto. So that although there be not, throughout the Writings of the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles, a ſyſtem of Morality drawn up according to the Model of the Schools; (which had not been ſuitable to the nature and deſign of thoſe Writings, nor adapted to the uſe of thoſe for whom they were intended;) yet a Man that way diſpos'd might eaſily form from thence the moſt perfect and admirable Scheme of Moral Diſcipline, that ever yet was produc'd.

But for the rendering this more evident, it may be proper to deſcend to particulars, and to view the Precepts of Chriſtianity, according to the uſual diſtinction, as they concern our demeanour towards God, our Neighbour, or our ſelves, in doing which, I ſhall not ſtand to cite particular Texts, but only give the ſum of the Chriſtian Doctrine, upon each of theſe Heads.

1. As they concern our demeanour towards Almighty God.

Here the Precepts of true Religion ſhould begin, the Authority of God being the great Baſis of all particular Laws of Religion, and our Reverence and Love towards him being the genuine Principles of every other Grace or Virtue. And accordingly here our Chriſtian Inſtitution lays the Foundation, endea-

endeavouring to raise up our Thoughts to the supream Being, and to possess our Minds with the deepest sense of him. This therefore is the sum of the Precepts left us by our Lord, and his Apostles, with respect to God; That we should fear and reverence him as the greatest and best of Beings; that we should excite and cherish in our Souls a pious Affection towards him as our Heavenly Father; that we should depend constantly upon him for whatsoever we stand in need of; that we should be deeply sensible of his Goodness to us, in all the Blessings we enjoy, and put our trust in him, for whatsoever he shall see truly good for us; that we should willingly resign our selves to him, and perfectly acquiesce in all the dispensations of his Providence towards us; that we should esteem his Image as our highest Perfection, and his Favour as our chief Happiness, and therefore above all things endeavour to resemble him, and to be accepted of him; that we should make his Glory our ultimate end, and subordinate all our other designs to that of bringing Honour to his Name; that as we should be thus inwardly affected towards God, so we should take all Opportunities of expressing the sense of our Minds, both by our Words and Actions; that we should therefore frequently address our selves to him, as to our God and Father, offering up our devout Acknowledgments of his Infinite Perfections, and of our entire dependance upon him, our unfeigned Thanks for all the expressions of his Goodness, and our humble Petitions for a supply of all our Wants; and above all, that we should testifie our regard to him, by readily obeying all the Intimations

mations of his Will, which he hath any way given us; thus worſhipping and ſerving him all our days, with Integrity of Heart and Life.

All that I have hitherto mention'd are Inſtances of Natural Religion towards God, and ſuch as will be approv'd by every one, who ſeriouſly owns ſuch a Being. For as for thoſe few who call themſelves Deiſts, and yet place the Almighty at ſuch a diſtance from his Creatures, as to reckon it below him to concern his Providence about their particular affairs, and to account it an Indignity offer'd to God, and an impertinent Preſumption in Men, for ſuch inconſiderable Creatures as they are to make their applications and addreſſes to him upon all occaſions, I think them hardly worth our conſideration in this caſe. They contradict the ſenſe not only of the generality of Mankind, but of the wiſeſt and ſobereſt of Philoſophers among the Pagans; they err from not conſidering the Nature of God and Man; and I ſhall take no farther notice of them, than by propoſing to them this ſingle Conſideration, which I have in a former Lecture already ſuggeſted, That it cannot be unworthy of God, to concern himſelf for every Creature which he hath given Being to, according to its Nature; and that it is certainly fit for every Creature to demean it ſelf towards its Maker, according to the Nature which he hath been pleas'd to give it. I ſhall therefore take it for granted, that whoſoever acknowledges a God, and knows what he means by that acknowledgment, and at the ſame time conſiders the ſeveral Faculties with which Mankind are endow'd, will allow that all the above-mention'd Inſtances, are parts of Natural Religion.

Religion. And that they are more particularly and fully expreſs'd and urg'd by the Chriſtian, than ever they were by any other Inſtitution, cannot be denied by any who have read the New Teſtament.

To which I might add, that the Goſpel farther teacheth us, unfeignedly to repent of all our Offences committed againſt God, and to expreſs this our Repentance by an humble acknowledgment, an hearty ſorrow, firm reſolutions and faithful endeavours of amendment; all which, upon ſuppoſition of our being Sinners, are farther Inſtances of Natural Religion towards God; and they are what the Chriſtian Revelation, upon that ſuppoſition, very much inſiſts upon, withal encouraging us to hope for the Mercy and Favour of God, through the Mediation of our Redeemer, upon theſe terms.

And here is the tranſition from *Natural* Religion to *Reveal'd.* Chriſtianity comes in here to the relief and aſſiſtance of Nature. For whereas from the Light of meer Reaſon, we could only have thought it our Duty to repent of our Sins, and ſo to have thrown our ſelves upon the undeſerv'd, but infinite Goodneſs and Mercy of our Maker; but muſt have remain'd utterly uncertain how far, or in what way and manner he would have accepted our Repentance: the Goſpel hath taught us to addreſs our ſelves to the great Father of all, in the Name, and through the Mediation of his only begotten Son, cloath'd in our Nature, dying for our ſakes, and living with him to make interceſſion for us. It hath eas'd our Minds in their ſearching after ways of expiating our Tranſgreſſions, and looking for Mediators to introduce us into the Preſence and

Favour

Favour of our offended Creator. It hath declar'd, that no other Expiation is neceſſary, but that which our Redeemer hath made for us; no Sacrifice for Sin acceptable, but that which he offer'd up upon the Croſs once for all; and no other Interceſſion to be made uſe of, but that which he continually makes in Heaven on our behalf. It aſſures us, that all that is expected from us, is Repentance; and ſincere, though imperfect Obedience; and that upon the exerciſe of theſe, we may ſurely depend upon the Mercy of God through this great *Mediator*. It accordingly enjoins us hence-forward to offer up all our Services, and to make all our Addreſſes in his Name, and to expect all good things from the Hands of our Heavenly Father, by the Mediation and Interceſſion of his Son Jeſus Chriſt. After which our Religion hath throughly diſcharg'd us from all thoſe external, ritual, and burdenſome obſervances, which either the Law of *Moſes* had enjoin'd the Nation of the *Jews*, or the Superſtition of the reſt of Mankind had impos'd upon themſelves, commanding us to *worſhip God*, who is *a Spirit, in Spirit and in Truth*, and appointing only two external Rites, both of them plain, eaſie, and I had almoſt ſaid natural, being ſuch as may be comply'd with, without the leaſt difficulty, and are at the ſame time very proper to the purpoſes for which they were inſtituted; *viz.* one of them, the waſhing with Water in the Name of the Bleſſed Trinity, at our admittance to the Chriſtian Profeſſion, repreſenting that inward Purification which we profeſs to aim at; and the other, partaking of Bread broken, and Wine pour'd out, as a perpetual

John 4. 24.

Memorial

Memorial of the great Sacrifice which our Mediator offer'd up for the remission of our Sins.

Thus the Gospel hath instructed us, as to our demeanour towards God; and all these its Instructions I dare venture to recommend to the serious Consideration of any one who in earnest pretends to the Religion of Nature and Reason; for altho', as I have already own'd, Christianity hath exceeded the bounds of meer Natural Religion; yet all its Precepts are highly reasonable with respect to our present circumstances, since our Apostacy from God, as I think will fully appear from a due reflection upon what I have formerly urg'd, as to the necessity and use of a *Mediator* between God and fallen Men.

I proceed in the next place,

2. To those Rules which the Christian Revelation hath given us, as to our demeanour towards our Neighbour; that is, towards all of the same Nature with our selves; for so far our Lord hath extended the signification of that word. Luke 10. 36.

Now as to this point, the Gospel having enjoin'd, as I have already observ'd, *the loving our Neighbour as our selves*, it enjoyns by a necessary consequence, whatsoever can be expected from one Man towards another, according to St. *Paul*'s way of arguing upon this Subject; *He that loveth another hath fulfill'd the Law; for whatsoever Commandment there is, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.* Rom. 13. 8, 9. Gal. 5. 14. And therefore lest any one should vainly pretend to love his Neighbour, without shewing his Love by the

the natural effects of it, our Lord enjoin'd his Disciples the Act, in as plain and extensive terms, as he did the Principle; *All things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them*; telling them, that *this is the Law, and the Prophets.* We may add, *This is the Gospel* likewise.

Matth. 7. 12.

For if we should run through the whole New Testament, we should find no Precepts more plainly, or more plentifully dispers'd throughout every Book of it, than those which require the strictest Truth, the most exact Justice, and the most enlarged Charity of all kinds. There we are particularly instructed how to carry it to each other, in all the variety of Conditions and Circumstances of Humane Life, in every Relation and Capacity which we can be in; as Superiours, or Inferiours, or Equals; as in a private or in a publick Station; as Friends, or even towards those who will be without cause our Enemies; in all which Instances, we are taught to behave our selves both inoffensively and usefully; doing no manner of Evil; but all the Good that lyes in our Power. And though I will not say that the Christian Institution hath herein impos'd upon us any thing new, any thing but what is truly natural, and therefore reasonable, if all things be duly consider'd; yet it must be own'd that it hath rais'd our Duty towards our Neighbour to an heigth, above what has been thought necessary under any other Institution whatsoever. For through Weakness or Prejudice, the generality of Mankind, even those of the wiser and better sort, before the Revelation of the Gospel, did not discern the extent of our Obligation to some kinds of Charity,

Charity, as is evident in the Instances of bearing Affronts, forgiving Injuries, loving of Enemies, and doing Good for Evil, in which the Gospel is so very express, and of which we meet with so little said to the purpose, even by the greatest Moralists. Nay, even the Jewish Law it self, though given by God, yet did not so expressly declare his Will, in these Instances, as the more perfect Law of Christ hath done; 'tis certain the *Jews* had not that sense of their Duty in these cases, which our Saviour endeavour'd to give them. For thus the Divine Author of our Religion discourseth to them upon this Argument; *Ye have heard that it hath been said,* Matth. 5. 38, *An Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth: But I* 39, *say unto you, that ye resist not evil.* Again, *Ye have* 43, *heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thine Enemy: But I say unto you, Love* 44, *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:* And all this, *That* 45, *ye may be the Children of your Father which is in Heaven; for he maketh the Sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth Rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect* (or *merciful*) *even as* 48. *your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* Here is Charity rais'd to its just heigth, even to a resemblance of that which is in God himself, whom to imitate must needs be the Perfection of a reasonable Creature.

To conclude this Head, Let any one carefully read over the Writings of the Evangelists and the Apostles, and he will find, that every particular Man is there taught to look upon himself as a

Member of the universal Body of Men, and as in the first place to make the Glory of God his ultimate end, so next to that to aim at, and to promote as much as in him lyes, the Good of Mankind; always to prefer the Publick Interest to his own Private Advantage; to entertain all possible Good-will, and to exercise all possible Kindness towards every Person of the same Kind and Nature with himself. All which Precepts so evidently tend to the benefit of the World, and the advantage of every particular Man, as well as to the peculiar satisfaction and comfort of those who comply with them, that they must needs recommend the Institution which enjoins them; as would appear to all the World beyond dispute, if we might once see them exemplified in a general Practice. But to render this Argument compleat, I proceed to consider,

3. The Rules which the Christian Revelation hath given us, with respect to the due government of our selves; and if these likewise prove as reasonable and useful as the former, we shall have a farther confirmation of our Christian Faith.

Now the sum of these is, that we should make it our daily care to improve our Spirits, and in order to that end should keep our Bodies in due subjection to them; that we should reduce our Appetites and Passions under the direction and government of Understanding and Reason; that we should be modest and humble, as it becomes Creatures and Sinners; meek and patient, not apt to be discompos'd with Events which are out of our power to appoint, or to be dissatisfied, and very uneasie, under any

any Circumstances in which Providence shall think fit to place us; but to maintain a chearful, at least a contented temper of Spirit, in every state and condition of Life; that we should be temperate and chast, as those who are sensible that our Perfection and Happiness doth not consist in sensual Enjoyments, but in those which are spiritual; that we should entirely abstain from all the unnatural and unlawful Pleasures of Sense, and should be moderate in the use of such as are natural and allowable; that we should eradicate all our corrupt Inclinations, resisting the first motions within us to Evil, and never in the least allowing that desire, which it is unlawful to bring into act; that we should disentangle and loosen our Affections from this lower World, and all its Enjoyments, and raise them up by degrees to the things which are above, the Enjoyments of that superiour World for which we are principally design'd; that to this purpose we should frequently exercise our selves in acts of Self-denial and Mortification, by this means subduing our Flesh, and refining our Spirits, and so preparing and qualifying our selves for the Company, the Employments, and the Pleasures of the Heavenly Regions.

All these are so evidently the Precepts of Christianity, with respect to the management of our selves, that whosoever is conversant in the Holy Scriptures must be sensible that they are so. And indeed the Adversaries of our Religion are so far from denying it, that some of them, as I took notice, make it their grand Objection against the Christian Profession, that it obligeth all who adhere to it, to such strict Rules, which, as they imagine, are too severe

for Humane Nature, restraining and confining it within too narrow bounds, and not permitting it to enjoy its natural and reasonable Liberty. This they object in general against the Christian Precepts of Temperance and Chastity, especially of Self-denial and Mortification; and I question not but this is at the bottom the most prevailing Reason, why in a loose and corrupt Age so many have gone over to the part of Infidelity, namely, because they cannot perswade themselves heartily to comply with the Rules, which they plainly see the Gospel lays down in these Instances, and therefore judge it to be more decent before the World, as well as more easie to themselves, to reject this Revelation at once, than to live in open contradiction to what they should profess to believe.

There is one notorious Instance of this kind, which it may be proper here to take notice of, I mean the Christian Precepts which relate to Marriage, whereby one Man is restrain'd to one Woman, and these two join'd together in so strict an Union, that it may not be allow'd to either of them to forsake the other upon any Reason, but the Violation of Conjugal Faith. This some Men esteem a great Hardship; or, to speak in the Language of a Prophet of their own, *a cursed confinement*, pronouncing boldly that *Polygamy was no Sin*, till it had the hard fortune to be *made* so, at the very same time *when Priest-craft began*. But I think it no hard matter to give a full Answer to this whole Objection.

Vid. *Absalom and Achitophel*. Pt. I.

As to the Christian Precepts of Temperance and Chastity in general, I doubt not to affirm, that they are really for the Good of Mankind even in this

this Life, as well as in order to the next, Experience sufficiently testifying, how much they conduce to the Health and Vigour of the Body, as well as the Ease and Satisfaction of the Mind, insomuch that a Wise Man, if *he loves Life, and would see good Days*, would chuse to be managed by them as convenient Rules of Life, although they were not back'd by any Divine Authority.

As to the exercises of Self-denial and Mortification, which we find so frequently enjoin'd us by the Gospel, these also must be own'd to be sometimes absolutely necessary, very often highly expedient in this present state, in order to the rendering us Masters of our selves. For considering the violence of some Mens Appetites and Passions, which they have rais'd to an exorbitant degree by long indulgence, it will be impossible for them ever to keep them within tolerable bounds, without offering some Violence the other way. And therefore the best Moralists amongst the Pagans, do in the main agree with Christianity in this Point, making it the part of a wise and good Man, to govern his Appetites and Passions, and to use all fit and proper means to that end, placing the very essence of Virtue in so doing.

And if the Christian Institution hath carried this matter farther, or press'd it closer, than the Moralists have ordinarily done, if it speaks of *crucifying the Flesh with the Affections and Lusts*, of *cutting off a right-hand, and plucking out a right-eye*, of being *dead* to the World and its Enjoyments, in fine, not only of *denying our selves* in general, but of *taking up our Cross, and following our Lord*, if it insists frequently and with some vehemency upon these Subjects;

jects; it still justifies it self fully, by founding these Practices upon such Principles, as will thorowly support them.

For it proceeds upon such suppositions as these following, *viz.* That the Soul of Man is undoubtedly immortal; that there will be certainly another Life infinitely more considerable than this is; that this is our state of tryal, in which we are to be train'd up, and fitted by degrees for that state to which we are passing; that the true way of preparing for the Future Life, is by improving our Spirits, subduing our Flesh, and loosening our selves from this vain World; that we shall be fully recompenc'd hereafter for whatsoever pains it may cost us in thus managing and disciplining our selves here; that *it*
Matth. 5. 29. *is profitable for us, that one of our Members should perish, and not that our whole Body should be cast into Hell*; that as on the one hand, it *cannot* in the least
Mark 8. 36. *profit a Man, though he should gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul*; so on the other hand, *Whoso-*
Mat. 19. 29. *ever shall have forsaken Houses, or Brethren, or Sisters, or Father, or Mother, or Wife, or Children, or Lands, for Christ's sake, shall inherit everlasting Life*; that
Rom. 8. 18. *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compar'd with the Glory which shall be reveal'd*; and to add no more, that according to our Difficulties, such also shall be the Assistance we shall receive
1 Cor. 10. 13. from Heaven; that *God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the Temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it*; that *his Grace is sufficient for us,*
2 Cor. 12. 9. *and his Strength* will be *made perfect in* our *Weakness.* Now these things being taken for granted, I dare appeal

appeal even to the Adversaries of our Religion themselves, to judge whether any thing can be more reasonable, than to comply with the Rules and Precepts which the Christian Institution hath given us, in the Instances I am now upon.

As to that part of the Objection, which more particularly relates to Marriage, a plain Answer may likewise be given to it, upon the Principles of Christianity. For supposing the History of our first Parents being form'd, and join'd together by God himself, as *Moses* relates it, to be true, which the Christian Revelation takes for granted, we have a plain Argument, that our Maker from the beginning design'd and appointed all that the Gospel requires in this Instance. Our Saviour urgeth this Argument in the case of Divorce, when the *Pharisees* ask'd him, *Whether it were lawful for a Man to put away his* Mat. 19. 3.
Wife for every cause; He immediately referr'd them to the primitive Institution of Marriage, which may as well be urg'd against *Polygamy*, as against *causeless Divorce*. *Have ye not read*, saith he, *that he who* 4.
made them at the beginning, made them male and female; and said, For this cause shall a Man leave Father and Mother, and shall cleave to his Wife, and they 5.
twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more 6.
twain; but one flesh. Thus the Argument runs; God at the first made *one Man*, and *one Woman*, and he himself join'd them together in so strict an Union, as to declare them thence-forward to be but *one*. Why did he make no more Wives for *Adam*, than *one*; but that he intended it as a Pattern to all Posterity? And why did he so expresly declare the strict Union of these two; but in order to the preventing

venting either the taking in a third, or the causeless separation of these?

And therefore 'tis remarkable, that *Lamech*, of the Posterity of *Cain*, is the first Man taken notice of as a Polygamist, it being said of him as a thing observable, because singular, that *he took unto him two Wives*. Neither is it unlikely, that this was the beginning of degeneracy in the Family of *Seth* likewise, which seems to be intimated in that passage of *Moses*, *The Sons of God saw the Daughters of Men, that they were fair, and they took them Wives of all which they chose*. The Posterity of *Seth*, who had hitherto been worshippers of the true God, and adher'd to his Institutions, now broke loose, and join'd themselves in affinity with the Posterity of *Cain*, chusing them Wives as their humour and fancy led them, for their Beauty, not their Virtue, and probably more than one, forsaking in this, as well as in other Instances the ancient Rule; upon which immediately follows a farther account of their degeneracy into all manner of wickedness.

Gen. 4. 19.

Gen. 6. 2.

And hence we may learn the true Reason, why Polygamy prevail'd so generally throughout the World; namely, because the generality of Mankind were unacquainted with this ancient History of *Moses*; and the Tradition of the Primitive Institution of Marriage, was soon lost after the Flood. The *Jews* indeed had it in their sacred Records, transmitted from *Moses*; but they did not thorowly consider it; and *Moses* on account of *the hardness of their Hearts*, their untractableness that is, and utter indisposition to comply with the Design and Law of God in Nature, did not particularly insist upon it.

Matth. 19. 8.

Tho'

Tho' after all, the Prophet *Malachi* seems to refer them to the Pattern of Marriage in Paradice, when he accuses them of being unfaithful to the Conjugal Vow; *Did not he make one*, saith he, *yet had he the residue of the Spirit: and wherefore one? that he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your Spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the Wife of his youth.* This, after all the Interpretations of the *Hebrew* Text, seems the most natural and easie one, and accordingly to contain this plain sense; That God, who could as easily have made more Wives for *Adam*, yet gave him but One, that their mutual Affection and Care of their Off-spring might be the greater; and that he design'd this as a Pattern for Posterity.

Mal. 2. 15.

Vid. *Dr.* Pococke, *Comment. on* Mal.

But however that may be, our Blessed Saviour, who *came to fulfil the Law*, by giving it its true sense and full scope, reviv'd this Sacred Institution, and reduc'd it to what it was *from the beginning*, obliging his Disciples thence-forward to comply with it.

And indeed there is another plain Intimation of the Divine Pleasure concerning this matter, and that is the near Equality of the number of Males and Females born into the World, according to the best Observations that have been made, the advantage, (tho' not great) being on the side of the Males; which being a meer act of Providence, a matter that can be order'd by no other than Divine Appointment, seems a standing Declaration of the Will of God against Polygamy, and a confirmation of the Primitive Institution, as interpreted and urg'd by our Lord.

Besides all this, let but any Man weigh impartially, how much it conduces to the Felicity of Humane Life, that this Institution, both with respect to a

single and indissoluble Marriage, should be observ'd, he will need no farther Argument to convince him. Nothing certainly can equally contribute to that entire Friendship and Confidence, which ought to be between a Man and his Wife, and the Comfort and Satisfaction which follows from thence, nothing so much to the careful and wise Education of their Off-spring, nothing so much to the Peace and good Order of the whole Family, and consequently nothing so much to the Welfare of the Publick, which is begun in and founded upon that of each Family in particular.

To conclude this whole Argument. There is no Precept which the Gospel gives us relating to the good government of our selves, but what is either apparently reasonable at the first view, or must necessarily appear so, as soon as ever the Suppositions and Principles of Christianity are taken in and consider'd.

Doth it, for Instance, require a greater degree of Humility, Meekness, Contentedness and Patience, than other Institutions of Religion, or than meer Philosophy hath done? 'Tis because at the same time it makes us more thorowly sensible of our own meanness and vileness; because it more fully represents to us the vast difference between this Life and that which is to come; because it more undoubtedly assures us of our entire dependance on the Divine Providence, and the certain and particular care it takes of us. Doth it again carry its Rules of Temperance and Chastity, of Self-denial and Mortification, to a greater height? 'Tis because it more effectually convinceth us, that our Happiness consists in Spiritual Improvements and Entertainments, and more

more plainly sets in our view the Pleasures and Enjoyments of the Future Life. Doth it finally lay a greater Restraint with respect to the Conjugal Bed, than the generality of Mankind have hitherto apprehended necessary or expedient? 'Tis because it hath given a fuller account of the Designation of our Creator in this Instance, and because moreover it designs, whilst we are passing through this State, to prepare us for another, in which *we shall neither marry, nor be given in Marriage, but be as the Angels of God.* So that the true Reason why any Man objects against these Precepts must be, because he considers things by halves, and does not take in the whole Scheme of Christianity at once. If we would but join its Principles and its Precepts together, we should be forc'd to acknowledge that all its Precepts, whether relating to God, our Neighbour, or our selves, are *holy, just, and good,* reasonable in their own Nature, fit for us in our present Circumstances, apparently conducive to the Good of Mankind in general, as well as to the Benefit and Satisfaction of every particular Man, both in this Life, and in order to that which is to come.

Matth. 22. 30.

May we, who profess to own their Authority, take care also to make them the standing Rules of our Tempers and our Practices. So shall we resemble our great Lord and Master, whose *Life,* as it was *a Pattern* for our Instruction and Imitation, will fall next under Consideration; and by this means also we shall most effectually recommend our holy Profession to Unbelievers, forcing them, upon observing the good Fruits of it, to confess, to the Honour of God and our Mediator, that *This is a faithful saying,* &c.

F I N I S.

The Heads of the Sermons.

The First SERMON.

The Qualifications requisite, towards the Receiving a Divine Revelation.

The Second SERMON.

Apostate Men fit Objects of Divine Care and Compassion.

The Third SERMON.

The Nature of that Salvation, which the Gospel offereth; and the Method of obtaining it, by a Mediator.

The Fourth SERMON.

The Excellency of the Christian Revelation, as it Removes the Guilty Fears of Sinners, and their Ignorance of God.

The Fifth SERMON.

The Excellency of the Christian Revelation, as it teacheth us to know our selves, and our Duty.

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