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*Apostate Men fit Objects of Divine
Care and Compassion.*

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd in the
Cathedral Church of St. *P A U L*,
February the 6th, 169⁸.

Being the Second, for this Year, of the
Lecture, Founded by the Honourable
Robert Boyle, Esq;

By *SAMUEL BRADFORD*, M. A.
Rector of *St. Mary le Bow.*

L O N D O N,

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I TIM. I. 15.

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

TH E S E Words are the more remarkable to our present purpose, because they were written by one, who, as himself tells us, had been before a *Blasphemer, Ver. 13. and a Persecutor, and injurious*; that is, he had bitterly inveighed against the Christian Profession, and 'tis very probable had spoken ill of its divine Author; 'tis certain he had vex'd and persecuted the Disciples of Jesus in a most grievous manner: and yet after all this was thorowly convinc'd of the Truth and Excellency of the Christian Revelation, and was not only so honest as to own this his Conviction upon all occasions, but endeavour'd also to make what reparation he could to the honour of our Lord, and his injur'd Disciples, by a zealous preaching and promoting this Religion in the World.

Where by the way it may not be unseasonable to remark, that whatsoever injuries he had done to our Lord, his Doctrines, or his Followers, had been

been the Effect of *Ignorance and Unbelief*; nay, he
 Acts 26. 9. *verily thought with himself that he ought to do what*
 he did, being strongly prejudiced from the Prin-
 ciples he had imbib'd by his Education. He was
 not a man that acted against the present Judgment
 and Conviction of his own Mind: on the contra-
 ry, as he elsewhere tells the great Council of the
 Acts 23. 1. *Jews, he had liv'd in all good Conscience before God.*
 His Conscience indeed had been grossly misinform'd,
 with respect to the matter of Christianity, and in
 that respect not *good*; but what he means is, that
 he acted according to his then present Perswasion;
 and therefore he says, he obtained Mercy; *because*
 Ver. 13. *he did it ignorantly, in unbelief*; which I take no-
 tice of partly as an Admonition to all of us, to
 beware how we indulge any kind of Prejudices,
 whereby our Judgments may be byass'd in our In-
 quiries after Truth; seeing this otherwise well-
 dispos'd Man was, meerly from the force of Pre-
 judices unwarily receiv'd, kept off from embracing
 Christianity, nay put upon doing very unwarrant-
 able and evil things: but especially I mention this
 as a serious Warning to such, as shall in any
 degree act against their Consciences, those who
 knowingly and wilfully allow themselves in any
 Vice, presuming to contradict the plain Rules of
 Natural Religion, even such as they cannot but
 allow to be so. Had *St. Paul* done thus in his
 state of *Judaism*, we have reason to conclude, from
 what he says of himself, that in all likelyhood he
 had not obtain'd that *Mercy*, whereby he became
 a Christian. But to proceed.

St. Paul being a Person, on whom God thought it fit to bestow a Miracle, to conquer the Prejudices he lay under, and being by that means thoroughly convinc'd of his former Error, and of the Truth of Christianity, he had from that time forward a very warm sense of the Goodness and Mercy of God, both to himself in particular, and to Sinners in general, in appointing this admirable Method for our Salvation, which he expresseth very emphatically in the words of my Text, *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save Sinners; of whom, says he, I am chief.*

And were we all but as deeply sensible of the evil and danger of Sin, and of the wretchedness of our state consider'd as Sinners, as our Apostle was, we should have the very same apprehensions concerning the Salvation offer'd to us by Jesus Christ, which he had.

This is a faithful saying, πρὸς ὃ λόγος, 'tis a true saying, of which we have certain and unquestionable Evidence of various kinds; *and worthy of all acceptation, πρὸς ἁποδοχὴν ἀξιῶν,* that is, 'tis not only evidently true; but 'tis moreover what we ought to receive with all readiness and thankfulness, admiring and adoring the divine Goodness therein express'd towards the Children of Men, and congratulating one with another upon account of the Benefits we receive thereby, entertaining what God hath thus reveal'd to us with most grateful and joyful hearts. *That Christ Jesus came into the world, to save Sinners; This is the saying which*

the Apostle so highly magnifies, and recommends to our acceptance, and which is the summe of the Christian Revelation, that the only-begotten Son of God appear'd in Humane Nature, in order to the saving the apostate Children of Men; that is, to the delivering them from the guilt and the power of their Sins, and the conferring upon them all that Happiness which their Nature is capable of.

My business in treating on this Argument will be, by God's assistance, to make good this Assertion, by such Evidence as is fit to be offer'd to one who antecedently believes the Being of God, and his Providence, and hath his internal *sense exercised to discern Moral good and evil.*

Now the Truth of this *saying*, and its Worthiness to be receiv'd by us must appear, either by the intrinsick Evidence which it carries along with it, I mean the Credibility of the thing it self: or the external Attestation which hath been given to it, both which are included in this Expression, *Faithful, and worthy of all acceptance.* 'Tis highly worthy of God, and exceedingly Beneficial to us his Creatures, and upon both accounts credible: 'tis also sufficiently attested from without, which still increases its Credibility.

The Attestation it hath receiv'd from without, *viz.* from Prophecies compar'd with Events; from Miracles wrought in confirmation of it; from the surprizing success of its being publish'd to the World, is of great use, both for the exciting Men seriously to consider it, and the perswading them to believe it; and that the rather, because it must
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be own'd, that there are some particulars within the compass of the Christian Revelation, and some circumstances attending it, which we could not have thought of our selves, and which we are not able fully to comprehend or to account for, even after they are in part discover'd; but must submit our Faith to the Declaration of Almighty God, as it is very fit that a Creature should submit it self in all things to its Maker. Besides that there may be some Doctrines which may thwart the commonly receiv'd Prejudices of Mankind, and may therefore require something more than their meer internal Evidence, at least at first, to awaken Men to a thorow and impartial Consideration of them.

But yet forasmuch as I am verily perswaded, that God never did, and that he is so Good, that he never will or can give any external Attestation to what directly contradicts the Faculties he hath given us by Nature, nay not to any thing, but what if thorowly and impartially consider'd will in the main appear in its own nature reasonable and credible, I shall therefore begin with the intrinsic Evidence of the Assertion in our Text, shewing from the Nature and Reason of what is here affirm'd, that it is a *credible Saying*, every way worthy of God, and very fit to be most readily entertain'd by us, *that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.*

In doing this, the Text will lead me into a proper Method, by offering to our Consideration these *three general heads, viz.*

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- I. Who the Persons are, whom Christ Jesus came to save.
 - II. What kind of Salvation he proposeth to them.
 - III. In what way and manner he hath, by his coming into the World, wrought out this Salvation for them.

The *last* of these will take up a considerable part of my following Lectures, wherein I shall endeavour to shew the admirable contrivance and suitability of this Method of our Salvation. But as a foundation to this, I think it necessary to discourse first of the other *two*, and that as briefly and plainly as I can.

- I. I begin with the *first*, *viz.* to consider who the Persons are, whom Christ Jesus came to save.
 The Apostle calls them *Sinners*; that is in other words, They are Men, Creatures compos'd of reasonable Souls, and Bodies of Flesh, who were formed after the Image of God, and were innocent and upright as they came out of his hands; but had apostatized from their Maker, violating their Allegiance to him, and thereby disordering their Natures, and exposing themselves to the just displeasure of God, with the miserable effects and consequences thereof. Now I think it may very much conduce to our present Design, to shew that these Creatures were really fit Objects of that exceeding great Concern and Tenderness express'd towards them by their Maker, through his Son Jesus Christ; that considering their original Constitution,

stitution, together with the manner and the effect of their falling from it, it was highly becoming the good God thus to appear in their behalf.

It must be acknowledg'd, and why should we be shy of owning it? Nay we Christians justly glory in it, that the Method of our Salvation by the Gospel is the most surprizing thing that falls within the compass of humane thought. 'Tis what, before its Revelation, *Eye had not seen, nor Ear heard, neither had it enter'd into the Heart of Man.* 'Tis what *the Prophets*, before our Lord's Incarnation, *inquir'd and search'd diligently into.* 'Tis what, since the Incarnation, *the Angels* themselves with great curiosity and admiration *desire earnestly to pry into.* 'Tis what the meer *natural Man doth not receive*, and is not at all dispos'd to know; nay what he is apt to account *foolishness.* 'Tis what even to *the Saints*, or real Christians, hath its *breadth and length, and depth and height*, expressing and testifying a *Love which passeth knowledge.* We may as oft as we think of it, in a just sense of our infinite distance from God, well cry out with the Psalmist, *Lord! what is Man, that thou art mindful of him; and the son of Man, that thou thus visitest him!* The truth is, there is nothing which at first view renders Christianity so incredible, as the boundless and unconceivable Condescension and Love of God express't thereby.

But if on the other hand we take into Consideration, that the Goodness of God is infinite, like his other Attributes; if we remember that *his thoughts are not our thoughts, nor our ways his ways*: *but that, as the Heavens are higher than the Earth,*

so

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so

so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts; if we call to mind what he himself hath told us in his Word, and what our own Reason readily subscribes to, that *like as a Father* Pſal. 103. 13. *pityeth his Children, so the Lord pityeth us his Creatures*; that *he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust*; if we take in all that is proper to be thought of upon this Argument, both concerning God and Man, we shall then be forc'd to acknowledge, that *Sinners* were a proper Object of the Divine Care and Compassion in this extraordinary manner.

Let us therefore take a distinct view of the Persons to be saved by Jesus Christ, both as they are *Men*, and as they are *Sinners*.

1. As they are *Men*.

'Tis an unworthy thought of God, to suspect that he should disregard any thing which he thought fit to make. The giving Being to Creatures was without all doubt the effect of his meer Bounty, because *he is Good*, and taketh pleasure in *doing Good*; and the very same motive which induced him to make any Creature, must in all Reason be suppos'd to prevail with him, to take care of it according to the Nature he hath given it.

Now of all the Creatures in this lower World, there are none that pretend to vye with Man, for excellency and dignity of Nature: nay if we consider Humane Nature thorowly, we shall find it endued with such Faculties, as that we cannot conceive there are any Creatures more excellent in kind, though in degree there may, in the Regions above.

Men

Men have Bodies indeed form'd out of the Dust of the Earth, like the other Animals that dwell upon Earth, though in Shape and Portraiture more noble much than any of them : but with respect to their Souls, they are *made a little lower than the* Pfal. 8. 5. *Angels, being created in the Image, and after the* Gen. 1. 26. *likeness of God, as Moses expresseth it. And of this we may be satisfied, besides the Testimony of Moses and the Psalmist, by viewing our selves, and observing the present Ruins of a once more stately Fabrick.*

The Resemblance of our Maker appears evidently in our Natural Faculties, and much more in our Moral. Our Souls are invisible indeed, but evidently manifest their Being by their various Operations. They inhabit these Bodies in such manner, as to influence and govern every part of them. They do at pleasure move each Joint and Limb, nay the whole Body at once, without difficulty, in a moment, and by the power of a single thought. They not only manage the Tabernacles they dwell in, but by their means also have communication with a world of Beings without them. By the mediation of the Senses they take in continual Notices from all the material Objects within a certain Sphere. They see, and hear, and feel whatsoever makes a near approach to them, nay they reach to things at a vast distance from them. They do not confine their Observations to the Earth and Air; but view at once the vast circumference of the Heavens, and pry into the Bodies that are plac'd in those distant Regions. They not only receive and take in Notices by the mediation of the Senses; but

but form Ideas of their own of various kinds, inventing, compounding, dividing, either according to the nature of things, or at their own pleasure. They can reflect upon what is past, may recollect what they have forgot, and foresee things yet to come. They can stretch and extend their thoughts till they are quite lost in the oceans of Immensity and Eternity. They acquaint themselves not only with the material part of the World, but the immaterial also. From contemplating themselves, they enlarge their thoughts to other Beings of the same kind. They discern the Spirits of other Men through the veil of their Bodies, and find out and contemplate an unknown and innumerable number of Spiritual Natures, till at last they ascend to God himself, that infinite Spirit, who was the Maker and is the Preserver of all.

And here we are arrived at the top of their knowledge. Not that the Souls of Men are able to comprehend the Nature of that first and most excellent Being; but they can make such discoveries of his Divine Perfections, as will naturally produce in them an high Admiration, a profound Reverence, and an ardent Love towards the Deity, and will incline and dispose them to adore and serve him, to resign themselves to him, and to yield a ready obedience to his Commands.

And what those Commands are, the Soul is in some measure also capacitated to discern, infering its Duty from the consideration of its own nature, and the relation it stands in to God, and to its fellow-creatures.

And

And, which is yet an higher Perfection than meer Knowledge, the Souls of Men can perceive the Will of God, and consequently their own Duty, from certain secret inclinations and propensions which they feel within themselves, and of which they are apprehensive even in this degenerate state. That natural regard to God, and looking towards him upon all Emergencies, that approbation of Justice and Kindness between Man and Man, especially that gratitude for benefits receiv'd, and unavoidable commiseration towards miserable Objects, which are to be found in most Men, not debauch'd in a more than common degree, are plain and undeniable Instances of this kind, which will not be controverted by those to whom I am offering these Considerations, and for which I may be allow'd to appeal to the far greater part of Mankind. And I question not, but the like might be observ'd, as to most other plain and considerable instances of Moral Vertue. For which reason it is, that the Consciences of Men do so naturally and universally either accuse or excuse them, according as they contradict or comply with, not barely the reasonings, but the natural apprehensions and inclinations of their Minds.

And this indeed I take to be the Perfection of the Humane Soul, as it came out of the hands of God, that it had a capacity not only of knowing God, and it self, and of inferring its Duty by exercising its Reason: but that it was also made to resemble the Divine Nature in its inclinations and propensions to all that is good; which inclinations and propensions, had they been cherish'd and improv'd

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prov'd, as they might and ought to have been, would have fully discover'd the dignity of Humane Nature, and made Men to have appear'd, what God by their make design'd them to be.

There is yet one Ability more, with which the Humane Soul is endued, not to be pass'd over, when we are considering the excellency of its Nature, and that is Freedom or Liberty of choosing, and a Power consequently of acting according to such choice, without which its Liberty would have been given to it in vain.

But shall I call this a Perfection, or an Imperfection?

As it is a Power of freely choosing that which is good, and as freely pursuing that choice, it must be thankfully acknowledg'd to the praise of our bountiful Creator, that it is a Perfection, even whereby we are made to resemble God himself, who always freely chooseth and acteth according to the eternal and immutable Laws of Goodness. 'Tis a Talent of great worth, with which Mankind is entrusted, and which may be improv'd to very great advantage. It gives us an Ability of offering to God a free-will Offering, of voluntarily doing that which is acceptable to, and rewardable by our Maker. 'Tis that which indeed makes us, strictly speaking, capable of a Reward.

But then as Men can at the same time choose that which is Evil, and pursue the unhappy choice, it must be own'd to be an Imperfection; but such an one as seems necessarily to result from the condition of a Creature. Absolute Perfection belongs to God only; his Nature is too good ever to choose

or act amiss : but the condition of a Creature is to be defectible of its self ; so that if it be made capable of choosing aright, it must at the same time also be capable of choosing wrong. Liberty implies a Power to determine its choice one way or the other ; and there is no such absolute Perfection in a Creature, as can always necessarily oblige it to determine it self the right way. Experience and Use may produce strong and confirmed Habits of Virtue ; and the Grace of God may at any time put a Creature out of all Danger : but I cannot see, how 'tis possible to frame an Idea of a created Agent left at Liberty, but it must at the same time be fallible and mutable. But this may suffice to shew the dignity of the Humane Soul with respect to its Liberty, that it is made capable of choosing and acting freely by the same Rules by which God himself chooseth and acteth.

And had Men always acted, according to the design of their Beings, the excellency of their Nature would have plainly appear'd in a whole world of intelligent and reasonable Agents, exercising all the Faculties before-mention'd regularly and orderly ; acknowledging, adoring, magnifying, and serving their Maker ; admiring his wonderful Works, and rendering to him with one consent the Praises due upon the account of them ; living in perfect Amity one with another ; discharging readily all the Offices of Beneficence ; performing and enjoying all the Benefits and Pleasures of mutual Society ; and deriving from Heaven all those Blessings which would have render'd their abode

here perfectly easie and comfortable ; and if God should have thought it fit to have translated them to any superiour Regions, as a reward of their Obedience here, they would there also have spent a happy Eternity, in the Enjoyment of their Maker, themselves, and one another.

I mention their translation to some other Regions, because all those Powers of Soul which I have been discoursing of, imply nothing but what is immaterial and spiritual, and consequently immortal ; and if Men had used their Liberty aright in this state of tryal, it is not to be conceiv'd, that God would have permitted the corruption of the Body ; but rather have preserv'd for ever that Union which himself had given to the two constitutive parts of Humane Nature, and have assign'd them such places of residence as might have been fit for Men improv'd and confirm'd in Virtue and Goodness.

What I have hitherto been discoursing concerning the Nature of Mankind, appears to me in itself highly reasonable, and I think will do so upon serious consideration, to such a Deist as I am arguing with : and if so ; I would then proceed to ask, whether such Creatures as these are not fit Objects of the Divine Care ; and if they are fallen, of the Divine Compassion also, supposing any of them capable of a Recovery from their lapsed Estate ? Will it not appear very worthy of the infinitely good God, to concern himself in some extraordinary way, for the restoration and salvation of Beings, whom he had form'd after this excellent manner, to whom he had imparted so many
of

of his own Perfections in such a degree, and whom he had made capable of being for ever happy in his Favour?

But for the farther illustration of this matter, we may in the next place consider the Persons whom Christ Jesus came to save, as they are in their fallen state, *Sinners*, as our Text calls them, and see whether under that denomination also, they are not proper Objects of the Divine Compassion, even in such a degree as it is express'd by the undertaking of our Redeemer.

2.

The Method of our Salvation by Jesus Christ is so contrived (as I hope to shew hereafter) as not only to testify the Compassion of God towards Sinners; but also his Hatred of Sin: To make it appear therefore that such a Method was agreeable to the Divine Nature, we shall do well to consider the condition of Men, as *Sinners*; to which purpose it may be proper,

To take into consideration the nature of Sin.

1.

To observe the miserable consequences of it to Mankind. And,

2.

To inquire how Men were drawn into the commission of it.

3.

To take into consideration the nature of Sin.

1.

I doubt not but those, who undervalue our blessed Saviour's Undertaking for the recovery of Sinners, have at the same time very slight apprehensions of the evil of Sin. They are apt to account it a matter of no great consideration or consequence, for so inconsiderable a Creature as they would

would have Man to be, to gratifie (suppose) the inclinations of his fleshly part, though against the Dictates of his Mind, and the Laws of his Maker. But this proceeds from their want of a due sense of the nature and reason of things.

For to sin against God, is for a Creature to rebel against his Creator and Preserver ; 'tis to oppose his Will to the Will of the supreme Lord and Sovereign of the Universe ; 'tis to disturb that excellent Order, which is appointed and settled by him who made all things very good ; 'tis for a Man to assume to himself a Liberty of doing that which God will not allow himself to do, namely to vary from the eternal and unalterable Laws of Truth and Goodness, those Laws which result necessarily from the Nature of God, and the condition of created Beings ; 'tis resisting the highest Power ; contradicting unerring Wisdom ; disobliging infinite Goodness ; making disingenuous and ungrateful Returns to the most endearing Obligations ; 'tis in a word thwarting the true judgment and perverting the natural byas of a Man's own Mind, and acting contrary to the very frame and design of his Nature.

Now whatsoever is absurd or monstrous in Nature, we are apt to conceive an abhorrence at the first appearance of it : and whosoever is endued with Moral Principles ought in like manner to feel a detestation arising in his Soul, when he considers the nature of Sin, as I have here represented it.

Doth

Doth not every ingenuous and well-disposed Mind severely censure and detest the untoward behaviour of a graceless Child towards a wise and tender Parent? The unworthy carriage of a rebellious Subject, towards a just and kind Prince, one who is truly the Father of his Country? Especially when the Rebel not only dishonours his Superiors, but at the same time disturbs the Peace and good Order of the whole Community? Do not all Men of good sense and honest disposition abhor him who shall make spiteful or ungrateful returns to a Benefactor, or a Friend, to whom he has been extremely beholden? Who is there that does not despise the Man that degrades and vilifies himself, by doing things altogether unworthy of his Birth, and Education, or Profession?

Why all this, and infinitely more is in the nature of a Sin voluntarily committed against Almighty God.

And is it not credible then, that so holy and good a Being as God is, should be inclin'd to save such of his Creatures as are capable of Salvation, from so great an Evil? and that he should effect it in such a way, as may convince them at once both of his compassion towards them, and his abhorrence of their evil doings?

But to render this the more evident, we may in the next place observe the miserable consequences of Sin to Mankind; and that, either in any single Sinner apart, or in the mass and bulk of Mankind in general.

2.

The

The state of every particular Sinner is extremely miserable. A Man has no sooner consented to Iniquity, but he is naturally fill'd with great uneasiness of Mind, arising from Shame and Fear, from a consciousness of having done an unworthy act, and an apprehension of the Mischiefs that may follow.

The very first Act is a mighty Disorder, as being an abuse of that Liberty with which he was entrusted, and a contradiction to that natural inclination with which he was endued by his Maker."

By this means the tone of his Spirit is (as it were) immediately relax'd ; the Will corrupted ; the natural propension of the Soul towards God and Goodness weaken'd, and a contrary disposition perhaps introduc'd ; the Appetites and Passions, which were made to be rul'd, having once broke loose from the Government they were plac'd under, are apt thence-forward to become impetuous and arbitrary ; the Understanding having been once mislead or over-rul'd, is for the future less able to discern clearly, or to judge Impartially ; in a word, Innocency and Integrity are lost.

Every repeated Act strengthens the evil Habit, and increases the disorder which is thus unhappily begun in all the Faculties.

If the Man continues to be a Sinner only in a lower degree, he will find a perpetual struggle and conflict within his breast, his Understanding, and Reason, and Conscience directing and leading him

him one way, whilst his Appetites and Passions hurry him the other, *the Law in his Members warring against the Law in his Mind*, and for the most part *bringing him into Captivity*; he neither approving what he does, nor finding himself at all dispos'd to do what he approves; *wretched Man that he is!*

Rom. 7. 23.

And if he be grown a harden'd Sinner, he is still the more *wretched*, because more incurable; though at the same time less sensible of his evil condition.

And all this while he is exceedingly estrang'd and alienated from God, the Author of his Being, and the Fountain of all Good; he is ashamed and afraid to approach to him, upon whom he intirely depends, or to address himself to him whose aid he stands in need of every moment; he is conscious of having given him offence, and therefore justly apprehends his displeasure.

This is livelily represented by *Moses*, in the case of our first Parents, who immediately upon their disobeying the Command of God, hid themselves from his face, being ashamed and afraid to see or hear of him, whom just before they had convers'd with to their great satisfaction and comfort. And every Sinner, that is not past feeling, may find something very like this within himself.

Gen. 3. 8, 9, 10.

This is the natural state of Sin; besides the consequences which may also follow from the displeasure of Almighty God, who, we see, even in this World hath made us sensible of his displeasure,

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sure,

sure, by the many Evils we are necessarily expos'd to, during a short Life, such as Disappointments, Wants, Sickness, Pain, Sorrows and Miseries of various kinds ; and at last Death it self, with the very *fear* of which most Men are *all their life time subject to bondage*. All these Evils the Scriptures assure us are the results of Sin ; and even without Revelation, upon the meer Principles of Morality, I cannot see how we can judge otherwise.

And besides all this, the Soul (as I took notice before) being apprehensive of its own Spiritual and Immortal Nature, cannot but forebode the perpetual continuance of its present infelicity, with the addition of it knows not what Evils in some future state of things, the very forethought of which must be very terrible to it even in this Life.

And if we can observe so much Misery in the condition of a particular Sinner, how much more shall we discover, if we enlarge our thoughts to the whole mass of Mankind ?

If we might be allow'd to take our view from the History of *Moses*, it would give us a very melancholy prospect. The very first Man that was born into the World fell into no less a Crime, than that of imbruing his hands in the blood of his innocent Brother. From that time forward Wickedness of all sorts increas'd apace, till it seem'd good to Almighty God to cut off at once the whole race of Mankind, excepting *Noah* and his Family, declaring this as the reason of his severe

Gen. 4. 8.

vere proceeding, that God saw, that *the wickedness of Man was great in the Earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Gen. 6. 5.

In the sequel of that History we find that soon after the Flood, the World was again corrupted in a prodigious manner, in so much that in the time of *Abraham*, within little more than Four Hundred Years, Idolatry had spread it self so universally, as to have infected even the Family of *Shem*, so that God thought fit to call forth *Abraham* from his Country and his Kindred, in order to the preserving him and his Posterity in the Worship of the one true God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. And if Idolatry had thus prevail'd, we may conclude that other Crimes were no less rife; forsaking of God being the foundation of all other Evil.

If, laying aside the History of *Moses*, we should consider the state of Mankind, according to all other accounts given of it, it will still come to the same issue, namely that the generality of Men were soon degenerated into the most unreasonable and unnatural practices that can be thought of.

The representation which *St. Paul* makes of the Pagan World, was undoubtedly true, that *they were become vain in their imaginations, having their foolish hearts darken'd; that they had chang'd the glory of the uncorruptible God, into images made like to corruptible Man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* Rom. 1. 21.

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more to be detested, they pay'd their religious Adorations to Devils themselves; for, as St. Paul truly pronounces, *the things which the Gentiles sacrific'd, they sacrific'd to Devils, and not to God.* The Prince of the power of the Air, with all his accursed attendants, had assumed the Title and Stile of Gods, and so far tyrannized over the Children of Men, as to reduce them to a slavish dread, and vile Worship of these wicked and infernal Spirits. And what after this could be expected, but that as we are again told in the place before-cited, they should fall into the most unnatural and brutal Lusts also? *For this cause,* says he, namely their having thus forsaken God, *he gave them up to vile affections, &c.* We cannot better describe them, than in the elegant Expressions of the same Apostle; *They walk'd in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; Who being past feeling gave themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. They were, as he elsewhere says, foolish, disobedient, deceived; not only serving divers lusts and pleasures, but moreover, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.* This was the state of the Pagan World, when our Saviour appeared in it.

There were indeed some few to be found, even in the midst of all this Corruption, who had not forsaken God, and degenerated into Vice, in so heinous a degree; the Principles of natural Religion

gion having in some measure prevail'd with them : but these were very rarely to be met with.

There was, it's true, a small Body of Men, the *Jews* I mean, whom God had by an extraordinary Providence taken out of the mass of Mankind, in order to instruct and educate them in better manner. But even these were very hardly kept to the observance of those Laws which God had given them. They easily and frequently degenerated into Idolatry, and the other evil practices of their Neighbours; and when after a tedious Captivity they were at last cur'd of their Idolatry, yet after all they generally attain'd to but very mean apprehensions either of God, or of the nature of Religion; they contented themselves for the most part with the observance of the ritual part of their Law, whilst the *two great Commandments* both of their Law, and of all true Religion, *the Love of God and their Neighbour*, were grossly neglected by them; in so much that when our Saviour appear'd amongst them, he found the greater part of them as indispos'd to receive him and his Doctrine, as the Gentiles themselves were.

'Tis true, God had not left Mankind, not the rest of the World, much less the *Jews*, without various means proper for the preserving of them from these Corruptions. *He taught* all Men divers ways, as I shew'd in my former Discourse, though they did not *hear and learn* of him. But this was still an aggravation of their Misery, that all the Methods of Divine Providence for their good

good had been frustrated and render'd ineffectual by them.

And was not this a deplorable state, and such as might well move a God of infinite Goodness to find out and appoint some more effectual Method, for the recovery of this his ruin'd Creation? Could he, do we think, look on, and behold the great Enemy both of himself and his Creation, thus insulting and triumphing; the most excellent Creature he had in this lower Region thus abus'd and spoil'd; and as the consequence thereof the whole inferiour Creation in disorder and confusion; and not interpose in some extraordinary and surprizing manner? But this will still appear more becoming the Divine Nature, if we enquire, in the last place,

3. How Men were drawn into the commission of Sin.

The case, as represented by *Moses*, which is what the Christian Revelation takes for granted, was certainly very compassionate. That our first Parents were set upon, whilst they were as yet unexperienc'd, by a subtil and malicious Enemy, who made his attacks first upon the weaker Sex, and by her prevail'd upon the Man, inveigling them by a sly and false Suggestion, artificially represented, making use of their sensitive Powers to baffle their intellectual, imposing upon their Understandings by craft and confidence, and perswading them on a sudden, without consulting either God or their own Reason, to do a
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rash and dangerous Act, by which they expos'd both themselves and their Posterity to all the evil consequences, which either naturally or judicially follow'd.

But waving this (though without considering it as a Divine Revelation, it is most reasonable to suppose that the general Corruption of Humane Nature began in some such way) waving this I say, and taking Humane Nature as it appears, the circumstances of Sinners will still seem very compassionate.

For although Man was without Question made upright, yet being endued with Liberty, he must at the very best, (as I before observ'd) be fallible and mutable. His immaterial Spirit is join'd to a Body of Flesh, and plac'd in the midst of abundance of sensible Objects, that it may be capable of a Tryal; and though it might have many advantages in its uncorrupt state, which at present it wants, yet still it was lyable to be impos'd upon and drawn in.

Those who first sin'd may very well be suppos'd to have done it, before their good Habits were confirm'd by Experience and Use, and that consequently there was somewhat of surprize, as well as some degree of inconsiderateness and rashness in the action. And those who have since grown up, (as all but our first Parents must have done) from a state of infancy, are still in harder circumstances. Their Bodily Tempers, which have a great influence upon the Mind, can be no better than what their Parents could communicate.

cate. Their Senses are for many years busily exercis'd, before their Reason is thorowly awake. They are surrounded with all manner of Temptations ; and they see abundance of dangerous Examples in a degenerate World. They are for a long time weak and unexperienc'd ; and many of them over and above betray'd by an untoward or a careless Education.

'Tis true, not one of all these Considerations will excuse the Sinner, and that for this plain Reason ; because the first Sinner, whoever he was, being suppos'd to be made upright, 'tis not to be conceiv'd he could have fallen, but by neglecting to depend upon his Maker, and apply himself to him. For an intellectual Creature not to depend upon God, and apply it self to him upon all occasions, is an inexcusable fault ; and had those who first consented to Iniquity done but thus much, 'tis very reasonable to believe, that the God who made them, would have afforded them his assistance. Nay (as I hope to shew in the progress of these Discourses) even now, under all the disadvantages we are born into the World and brought up with, God hath made such provision through Jesus Christ, that nothing but a wilful and unaccountable neglect of God can ruin us. Here began the Apostacy and the Misery of Mankind, and in the same way they are still continued, *viz.* in Mens neglecting to depend upon and look up to that God who never forsakes any of his Creatures, till they first forsake him. So that what I have alleged under this last head, does

does not excuse the Sinner : but yet (which is what I alleged it for) it renders this case exceedingly compassionate to a God of infinite Goodness and Mercy.

The summe of all I have said upon this Argument is, that *this is a credible saying, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.* For if Sinners be such Creatures as I have represented them, both before and since their Apostacy, it cannot but be *credible*, that he who made them should appoint some way for their Recovery. And though we could not be fully assur'd of this without a Revelation, much less could have thought of the Method which it hath pleased God to take ; yet as we might naturally hope, that God would extend his compassion to us ; so we have all the reason in the World readily to accept a Revelation which assures us, that God hath done it.

What the Way and Method of our Salvation is, our Text tells us, and this will fall under Consideration in my following Discourses.

I am sensible there is one Objection, which, upon hearing the present Discourse may arise in the Minds of Men who think seriously, and are not dispos'd to cavil, *viz.* If the case of Humane Nature be so deplorable and compassionate, how comes it to pass, that so small a part of Mankind have receiv'd benefit even from the Christian Revelation ? This Difficulty I would have consider'd in this Lecture, if there had been room for it ; but being prevented, I shall not forget it ;

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but assign it some fit place, if God please, before my Lectures are finish'd, intending in my next, to proceed in considering the nature of that Salvation, which our Saviour hath wrought out for us, and the manner in which he hath done it, whereby the *Credibility* of this saying in the Text may yet farther appear.

F I N I S.
