

*CHRISTIAN CLASSICS ETHEREAL LIBRARY*

**Several  
Discourses  
Concerning the  
Terms of  
Acceptance with  
God.**

**Benjamin Hoadly**



*Christian Classics  
Ethereal Library*

---

## **Several Discourses Concerning the Terms of Acceptance with God.**

---

**Author(s):** Hoadly, Benjamin (1676-1761)

**Publisher:** Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library

# Contents

Title Page.	1
Sermons.	2
Sermon I. Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.	2
Sermon II. Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c	9
Sermon III. Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.	16
Sermon IV. Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.	24
Sermon V. Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.	33
Sermon VI. St. James ii. 10.	41
Sermon VII. Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.	49
Sermon VIII. Concerning the terms of Acceptance, &c..	57
Sermon IX. The Mistake, of relying upon Faith, considered, &c.	66
Sermon X. The Mistake of relying upon external Performances considered.	75
Sermon XI. The Power of Charity to cover Sins, considered.	83
Sermon XII. Of relying upon the Merits of Christ, for Salvation.	91
Sermon XIII. Mistakes about Man's Inability, and Gods Grace, considered.	99
Sermon XIV. Mistakes about Man's Inability, and God's Grace, considered.	106
Sermon XV. The true, and false, Notions of Repentance, considered.	114
Sermon XVI. The Example of the Thief upon the Cross, considered.	123
Sermon XVII. The Example of the Thief upon the Cross, considered.	132
Sermon XVIII. The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, considered.	142
Indexes	151
Index of Scripture References	152
Index of Pages of the Print Edition	154



This PDF file is from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org). The mission of the CCEL is to make classic Christian books available to the world.

- This book is available in PDF, HTML, and other formats. See <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hoadly/acceptance.html>.
- Discuss this book online at <http://www.ccel.org/node/4183>.

The CCEL makes CDs of classic Christian literature available around the world through the Web and through CDs. We have distributed thousands of such CDs free in developing countries. If you are in a developing country and would like to receive a free CD, please send a request by email to [cd-request@ccel.org](mailto:cd-request@ccel.org).

The Christian Classics Ethereal Library is a self supporting non-profit organization at Calvin College. If you wish to give of your time or money to support the CCEL, please visit <http://www.ccel.org/give>.

This PDF file is copyrighted by the Christian Classics Ethereal Library. It may be freely copied for non-commercial purposes as long as it is not modified. All other rights are reserved. Written permission is required for commercial use.

SEVERAL  
DISCOURSES

Concerning the

**Terms of Acceptance**

WITH

**GOD**

IN WHICH

- I. The Terms themselves are distinctly laid down; as they are proposed to Christians in the New Testament. And
- II. Several false Notions of the Conditions of Salvation are considered.

PARTICULARLY,

Of being saved by Faith.	Of Repentance.
Of trusting to External Performances.	Of the Example of the Thief on the Cross.
Of the Power of Charity to cover Sins.	Of trusting to a Death-bed Sorrow.
Of relying upon the Merits of Christ.	Of the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.
Of Man's Weakness, and God's Grace,	Of depending upon Amendment in time to come.

---

By BENJAMIN HOADLY, *M. A.* Rector of St.  
*Peter's Poor* (now Lord Bishop of Winchester)

---

The SIXTH EDITION,

---

LONDON,

Printed for JOHN and PAUL KNAPTON, at the  
*Crown* in *Ludgate Street*. MDCCLIV.



Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.

## SERMON I.

LUKE x. The latter part of the 25th Verse.

*Master, What shall I do to inherit eternal Life?*

THIS is the Enquiry of one of the Students and Interpreters of the *Law of Moses*: who, hearing of our Lord's Behaviour, and Pretensions to so great a Character as that of the *Messiah* sent by God to instruct Mankind in the right way to Happiness, came, amongst others, either out of Curiosity, or some worse Principle, to try what Answer he would give to so important a Question as this in the Text, *What shall I do to inherit eternal Life?* i.e. What are the great Points of Practice which can recommend me, who am a *Jew*, and adhere to the *Law of Moses*, to the Favour of God? For by our Lord's Answer it is plain, that this *Question* related to the chief practical Duties of Religion; and that it was not our Lord's Design to give the *Enquirer* a particular Account of the Conditions of Justification, and Terms of Acceptance, which *He*, and his *Apostles*, were in due time to lay open to the World. He appeals, We see, to the *Enquirer* himself, what the great Precepts of the *Law* were; and afterwards declares that an exact observance of those two comprehensive Duties, of loving God, and our Neighbour, would entitle him to *eternal Life* Duties; so comprehensive indeed, that to them may be reduced all that is good in any Religion in the World, and all that can possibly render us acceptable to God. But though this summary Declaration answered well our blessed Lord's Purpose at that time, as it was a sufficient Reply to the present *Enquirer*: yet it was the great Business of his Divine Mission to enter more particularly into this *grand Debate*; to promulgate to the World more expressly, and more fully, those *Terms* and *Conditions*, upon which Almighty God, for the sake of what he undertook to do and suffer in this World, will accept Mankind, and make those happy, who cannot pretend to a sinless and perfect Obedience to his Laws, but stand conscious to themselves of many past Transgressions of them. Since therefore, this was the professed Business of *Him*, in whom we believe: it becomes us all, if we have any thoughts of Happiness, to address ourselves to the same Person, with a very serious Curiosity; and to enquire what it is that expected at our Hands, in order to our Justification, and final Acquittance from the guilt of our Sins, at the great Day. This is the *Enquiry* which is of the: utmost importance to us.

BUT it will be proper here to observe; that, with respect to such as have been educated in any other false *Religion*, or *Worship*, and have contracted the guilt of many Sins, the first part of the *Enquiry*; and of the *Answer* to it, will be somewhat different from what it must be, with respect to such as have been educated in the knowledge and belief of *Christianity*,



and taken the Profession of it upon themselves; and after that contracted the guilt of wilful Sins: as may appear to any who seriously consult the *New Testament*. For the *first Enquiry* there made by such as were at any time touched to the Heart, and uneasy under the consciousness of their former Sins, was, how they should be saved from this guilt which they had already contracted; or what they should do to be acquitted from these Sins committed in their former State. And the *Answer* we find was, that their receiving Christ for their Master; their first Faith, and believing in him, should have that Efficacy with Almighty God, that all their past Sins, committed before this *Faith*, should be cancelled; and *they* looked upon as just persons, with respect to all that was past.

THIS matter of the *Heathen* and *Jewish* World being justified, or acquitted from all past guilt, by their *Faith*, or belief in Jesus Christ, having been strenuously asserted, and fully expressed by the *Apostles*, and especially St *Paul*; many weak and unstable Men have built such Notions upon this, as have been, and may be, of pernicious consequence to *Christians*, under the Gospel-State, and after they have receiv'd and professed this *Faith* in *Christ*: arguing as if a *Faith* or *Confidence* in *Jesus Christ*, and his Merits, would do all; acquit from all Sins; and render the wicked Christian spotless at last; and present him blameless before the Throne of God. Whereas it is manifest that, after this first *Justification*, and acquittance, was obtained by means of believing in Jesus Christ; this very believing, or *Faith*, brought the Believer under the most strict Obligations imaginable; more in Number, and severer in their Nature, than the Man was under before; and these bound upon him under the penalty of God's eternal Displeasure. This is as plain in the *New Testament*, as Words can make it. But of this Justification which professed *Christians* expect at any time to be wrought for them by *Faith*, or *Confidence* only, I, shall have occasion to speak more the farther prosecution of my present Design. At present I will only observe to you that, when it is enquired in the *New Testament*, *What shall we do to be saved?* and when it is answered to the *Enquirers*, or laid down, that *to believe* and to be *baptised*; or that *Faith* will save them, or the like, it is only meant, that they who do not believe already shall be acquitted from their past Sins, or saved from the Guilt of them, by believing, and coming into the *Terms* required by the *Gospel*; or that the first step to their Salvation, and that which will put them into a safe way, is *Faith*, or taking *Christ* for their Master, and being entered into his Religion. Or else, *Faith* is taken for the whole *Gospel-method*; for the whole of what is required in *that*: and so, it is the intent of these Expressions to signify that it is this method which only can save them; not the *Law* of *Moses*, or the Institutions of the *Heathen* World, in which they had before been educated. And it is plain that all this related to such only as had not before professed, or taken upon themselves, the belief of the *Gospel*; and toucheth not the *Case* in which we are concerned, who have been educated in this belief, or long professed it. *Christians* of later Ages are gen-



erally of this sort: and it is their own case and condition, not that of others, about which their *Enquiry* ought to be; and which it concerns the *Ministers* of the Gospel principally to consider.

THIS is my Design and what I propose to do as fully as I can: as well by laying down *positively* what is the true answer to this *Enquiry*; as by considering and refuting those false *Answers* which Men have framed to themselves, from their own vain Wishes, fortified with some mistaken and misapplied Passages in the Word of God. But, before I come to the main Design, it is very expedient,

I. To propose distinctly what the great *Question*, and *Enquiry* is, which concerns *Us*, who have taken upon ourselves the profession of the *Christian Religion*; and continue in that Profession: that so the *Answer* to it may be the better understood.

II. To consider the great importance of this *Enquiry*; and the hazard of mistaking in it: that we may be the more sollicitous to find out the only true account of this matter; and the more guarded against any Deceit, and Delusion in a business of such moment.

III. To shew the method of coming to a true Resolution of this *Question*; and where it is that we may expect such an account of this *Affair*, as we may safely, and securely, depend upon. Now,

I. THE great *Enquiry*, in which we are concerned, is this, What it is that the *Gospel* requires of Men, who believe in Jesus Christ, and profess his *Faith*, and own him for their *Master*; in order to their acquittance from the punishment of any wilful Sins, which they have at any time committed, during their profession of his Religion; and to their final Justification before God at the Day of Judgment; and to their eternal Happiness after this.

THAT many Christians do fall into great and wilful Sins after their *Baptism*; after their knowledge of the Truth; and after they have taken upon themselves the profession of their most holy Religion; is matter of daily Observation, and of daily Experience. That the very best have not, in every part of their past Lives, done exactly what they know they ought to have done; that, in some past Instances or other, of Thought, Word, or Deed, they have had experience of some sudden Passion, or some latent Weakness, which by a greater degree of constant Watchfulness, might have been prevented; is likewise evident: and by themselves always made matter of Confession and Humiliation. That there is a method of Reconciliation proposed in the *Gospel* to both these sorts of *Christians*; and *Terms* laid down in it, on which *Christian Sinners*, if I may so speak, shall be accepted and acquitted, is plain from many Exhortations in the *New Testament* to such Christians as had sinned; and from the Behaviour of the *Apostles* with respect to such; as well as from the Absurdities following from the contrary Supposition; which would render the Gospel a most ineffectual Institution, debarring every individual professor of it, upon one single, sudden, wilful Transgression, from all future Hopes of Happiness; (and *who then can be saved?*) or a most pernicious Institution, turning





every *Christian* into a desperate Sinner, by allowing no Hopes of any benefit from his recovering himself.

BUT whatever *Terms*, or *Conditions* are allowed us, after relapse into Sin, or continuance in it, we know they are granted for the sake of *Jesus Christ*; in consideration of what he did and suffered for this very purpose, that these *Terms* and *Conditions* might be granted to Christians. This therefore, I say, is the *Question* about which our greatest Concern is to be employed, What those *Terms* and *Conditions* are, on which, for the sake of *Jesus Christ*, God will acquit us of our Sins, and at last make us eternally happy. For tho' it be for the sake of *Christ*, that he will do this at all; yet he expects something at our own Hands: And it is upon such and such *Conditions* only, that for *his sake* He will accept us; without the performance of which He leaves us no room to hope for any Benefit from the Merits of *Christ*. All that *Christ* has done, and suffered, for our sakes, was only in order to the settling these *Conditions*: but what We are to do, according to this *Treaty* and *Compact*, in which he is the *Mediator*; This belongs to us chiefly to enquire after.

II. The importance of this *Enquiry* plainly appears from the account of it, which I have now given. Our acceptance with God; our Justification; our acquittance from the guilt of our Sins; our final and eternal Happiness, depend entirely upon our due Apprehensions, and effectual Sense, of this matter. If we employ our Minds seriously about it; and come to settle in them true Notions, and a just account of it: it will be the Fountain of all Happiness to us; by being the Foundation of such a Practice, and such a Conduct of our Lives, as will end in Glory, and Peace for ever. And the importance of it is enlarged, and heighten'd, when we consider the vast and unspeakable Danger of mistaking in this *grand Enquiry*; that if we do, through Prejudice; or Passion, or love to this World, or fondness for carnal Pleasure, entertain wrong Notions of this Affair, they will lead us into a wrong method of Action, and conclude us at last under inexpressible Misery: the Misery, not only of deprivation, or being debarr'd from the Happiness of Heaven, and the Communication's of God's Favour; but that of enduring positive Torments, the Wrath of God, and the Punishments threatened by his *Son* in the *Gospel*. The Consideration of this made our Lord so earnest to free the Minds of Men from all false Surmises about the great business upon which he came into the World; that neither *Unbelievers*, nor *Believers*, might mistake his Errand. The consideration of this made the *Apostles*, and particularly *St Paul*, so frequent in their Warnings against all Inclination to be *deceived* in this matter: well knowing that *Christians*, even in those first Days, were in great danger, from the inward Motions of their own Lusts and Passions, and the outward Hardships of *Persecution*, to be misled by such false *Apostles*, and false *Teachers*, as would sooth their present Inclinations, and flatter them into vain and delusive Hopes.

LET not therefore anything either within us, or without us; let not any thing of this World; (Profit, or Honour, or Pleasure,) lay a Biass upon our Minds in this *Enquiry*. Neither Profit, nor Honour, nor Pleasure can, in the least avail us, when we have made the fatal



mistake: nor can any present Gratification countervail the loss of all Happiness to all Eternity. What therefore can induce us to be so careless, or so weak, as to be willingly imposed upon in a *Question*, upon the just Resolution of which *Eternity* depends; and the false account of which, once permitted to enter into our Minds, must draw after it more Misery, and Unhappiness than we can now conceive? Since therefore it is an Enquiry of such vast, and unspeakable importance; let us



III. CONSIDER the true Method of coming to a Resolution of this *grand Question*; and where it is that we may expect such an Account of this *Affair*, as we may safely and securely depend upon. Now it being a Matter of infinite Grace and Mercy that Almighty God will enter into any *Treaty* at all with a sinful World; or come to any *Terms* with his rebellious Subjects: it is very evident that the Persons immediately commission'd by him, or by the Person whom he sent into this World upon so good an Account, are those only, on whom we can safely and with Honour rely in this *Affair*. It depended on his Will, to make the *Conditions* what he should think agreeable to his own unalterable Perfections, and to the eternal and unvariable Nature of Just and Right. To promulgate these *Conditions*, and to give an Account of these *Terms*, He sent *Jesus Christ* into the World: who in his Life-time did it, as fully as was requisite to his present Design; and, for the same End, immediately commission'd his *Apostles* to preach the glad Tidings to the whole World, and to lay open more fully these *Terms*; and conducted them by an infallible Spirit, to secure them from all Error in this Matter. Whither then should we go but to him? for *he hath the Words of eternal Life*; and to his *Apostles*? for they were the *immediate Embassadors* of Christ, *beseeking us to be reconcil'd to God*, and preaching the *Conditions* of this Reconciliation. It is in the *Preachings* of Christ himself, and in the Writings of these *Apostles*, that we can securely hope to find the only Account of this Enquiry that will avail us any thing.



As for our selves, and all others, who succeed in teaching, and feeding the Flock of *Christ*; we cannot pretend to any *new Revelations*. It is our Business only to explain the *old*; to convince Men of any Errors disagreeable to the written Word of God; and to lay before them, in the best manner possible, what is contained, and proposed in it. We cannot make the *Terms of Salvation* what we, or many others, may wish. They are fix'd by those who only had Authority to fix them, from God, and his Holy Spirit: and we must not vary from those who have declar'd long ago the whole Will of God. Other *Churches* may pretend to be themselves, (consider'd distinctly from the *Apostles* and their Doctrine,) the *Ground and Pillar of Truth*; and not only the Keepers, and Guardians of the *lively Oracles of God*: but our Church declareth the contrary, and professeth to be only the *Medium*, and *Interpreter*, by which the Will of God already settled may be made known to the People; and openly proclaims that the *Articles* and *Terms of Salvation* are long ago fix'd and determin'd, in such sort, that it is an invading the Province of God himself to pretend to make new ones, or to alter them into what they were not, at the Beginning of the *Gospel*. Let that *Unchristian*



*Church*, therefore, answer for it, that debars the People from consulting those Books which alone are able to *make them wise unto Salvation*; and imposeth upon them Traditions and Customs, and Doctrines of her own, which make void the Will of God, and render ineffectual all his gracious Offers of Salvation to the World; that hides the true Word of God from all Communication with the Light; and teacheth those who depend upon her, to seek Salvation, and to learn the *Terms* of it, from such as impose what they please instead of them. But let any *Church* upon Earth, or any *Ministers* of the *Gospel*, pretend to what they please: whether they speak Truth or Falshood; whether they lighten or increase the burthen of these *Conditions*, or fix them where they ought to be; the *New Testament* is the Standard to which all must be brought to be tried; and by which it is the Duty of all to examine, whether they be truly directed, or invited aside into paths of Darkness and Error.

16

THE great Lines of the Gospel, and those parts of it which declare the Terms of Salvation, have no obscurity in them, but lie level to all who have capacity to understand what *God*, and *Salvation*, and *Happiness*, mean. It will not therefore, in this grand Affair, be a sufficient Apology for any, at the great Day of Accounts, to say that they followed their *Leaders*; that they depended upon their Doctrine; and swallowed whatever they told them about the Will of God: because the *New Testament* hath been transmitted down for their Use; to teach all Christians what is their Duty, as well as to guide others in their Doctrine concerning it. The greatest part of it was preached, and written, to the *Laity*: from whence it appears, That they were thought Judges of what so much concerned them; and that it was their business to take their Notions of the *Gospel*, from Those who were immediately sent by God, and Christ, to propose it to the World. The utmost that can be said for depending on any other, since that time, is, that it is probable, or to be hoped, that they will not deceive or mislead us. But how weak an Excuse will this prove, when we know that our *Eternity* depends upon it; that there are Writings which cannot deceive us; and that, if we seriously and constantly advise with them, no human Error, which doth not arise from any wilful Crime in ourselves, shall be charged upon us? Could you not have consulted these Scriptures, and seen whether these things were so, as your *Church*, or your *Leaders* taught you? will be a very sufficient *Reply* to all who think to find Refuge, at last, in depending upon any other Authority in so weighty a matter. And were it not out of regard to some secular or By-end; from want of Desire to know the Truth, or an affected unwillingness to alter the accustomed methods of Action: no one could be so senseless as to depend upon the Word of any *modern Authority*; when it was in his Power to go himself to the *original Covenant*. No Man acts in this manner, in the Case of his worldly Concerns: or in any Point which may affect his *Body*, or his *Estate*, in this transitory World; and this will serve to condemn All who are guilty of so great a neglect, in a concern infinitely more weighty and important.

17

18

AND if it will not avail any at last, that they have depended upon the Word of any *Church*, or *Churchman*, upon Earth: much less will it avail them, that they have consulted

with Flesh and Blood; and can plead the Dictates of them against the Dictates of God himself. And yet it is to be feared, that many Men, in this *Question*, upon which their eternal State depends, instead of consulting our *Lord*, and his *Apostles*, what is truly required of them in order to Justification and Salvation, turn their Thoughts another way: and consult their own Lusts and Passions, and Tempers, and Designs in this World, what will be the most consistent with them; and how far they will let them go towards a Resolution of this *Enquiry*. But this is even to advise with *Satan* himself, and with all the Enemies of God, and of a Man's own Happiness, what it is that Almighty God requires; and what it is that will bring him to that Happiness, which it is *their* Desire, he should never arrive at.

THUS have I gone over the *three principal Points* of which I thought it proper to speak, before we enter upon the *Debate* it self. There are some other *Particulars*, which are consequences from *these*: and which it is likewise highly useful for us to consider, in order to make our *Enquiry* the more effectual, and successful. But these I must reserve for another opportunity.



Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.

## SERMON II.

LUKE x. The latter part of the 25th Verse.

*Master, What shall I do to inherit eternal Life?*

I N my former Discourse I observed to you, that this was the curious *Enquiry* of a Student of the *Law of Moses*, in order to try what Answer would be given to so *important a Question*, by our blessed Lord, who appeared in the World with the Character of the *Messiah*, sent by God into it, to instruct Mankind in the right way to Happiness; though not received or acknowledged as such by the Person who made this *Enquiry*: and that it was our Duty, and becoming our Professions, who believe in *Jesus Christ*, as one sent on so gracious an Errand, to make the same *Enquiry*, with all the serious Sollicitude which a Business of so vast importance requires. And, in order to proceed successfully in the *Enquiry*,

I. I LAID down carefully and distinctly the *great Question*, as it concerns us of later Ages; who are generally educated in the Knowledge, and continue long in the profession of the *Christian Religion*: viz. What are those Terms and Conditions, which are required on our Parts; and upon which, God Almighty will, for the sake of *Jesus Christ*, and of what he did and suffered to that End, forgive us our Sins, committed during this profession of the *Christian Religion*, and finally justify or acquit us at the great Day, and make us afterwards eternally Happy? This, I told you, is the *Enquiry* in which we are concerned: which it is of infinitely more importance to us to regard than any other thing in the World.

2. I URGED some Considerations proper to make us sensible of the great importance of this *Enquiry*; and the great hazard of being misled, and mistaken in it: and this in order to make us truly serious, and truly sollicitious not to be imposed upon, in this grand Affair.

3. I SHEWED you that the only secure Method of proceeding, and the only safe way of coming to a Resolution of this *Question*, is to consult the *New Testament* our selves; in which we have a plain and full Account of what our blessed Lord himself, and they who were immediately commissioned by Him, declared concerning this Matter; and that all other ways and methods are unsuccessful, and full of Danger. But I then told you likewise, that, in order to our arriving at a true account of the important Question now before us, there were some other particulars that deserve to be carefully observed: and though these be indeed but so many consequences from the forementioned Heads; yet, I cannot but think it very well worth our while distinctly to propose, and consider them. As

1. THAT the *Terms of Salvation*, and *Acceptance with God*, are what He hath made them; and of so inflexible a Nature, that it is not in our Power to bend, or alter them, as we

22

23

please, into what Shape, or Nature, we think fit. And this is plain; because it did not belong to us to contrive or frame them; but to the Supreme Lord of all things. It is *He*, to whom it belongs to propose a method of Reconciliation to his Creatures; and *He* alone, whose Office it is to fix the Conditions of this Reconciliation: because He alone knows what is in all respects fitting, and agreeable to the eternal Laws of Reason, and Wisdom; of which we our selves could not be proper and impartial Judges. *He* hath, by Virtue of his Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, an undoubted Right to give us new Laws; and to lay upon us the Conditions of a *Second Covenant*, as well as of a *First*: But we have no Right, either from Wisdom, or Power, to give Laws to Him; or to fix the *Terms* proper for him to accept.

24

IF therefore he hath offered any particular Terms and Conditions, upon which he will accept us; if He hath sent his *Son*, and his *Apostles* to lay open these *Terms*: here we must rest, and remember that it is not our Business to attempt any alteration of these *Terms*; and that it is the most fruitless as well as arrogant Imagination to think of doing it. In vain doth any Mortal wish or desire them to be other than what they are determin'd to be in his Will: and in vain will it be for the greatest or wisest of us all to attempt to accommodate and bend them to our *Schemes*, or our Inclinations. The *System of Christianity* was long ago fram'd, and the *Scheme* of Salvation laid, in the Breast of the Almighty, as it was design'd in Time to appear: and this *System* hath long ago been written by the *Evangelists* and *Apostles*; and this *Scheme* hath long ago been proposed in the *New Testament*, for the Benefit of all who are in a Frame and Disposition of Mind capable of receiving Benefit. God hath there shewn us, which is the Way to the Salvation He promiseth. If, therefore, we will arrive at his Salvation; it must be in the Path which he hath mark'd out: and we must, indeed, either not think of going to Heaven; or we must go to it, in *his Way*, and not in our own.

25

IT is necessary to observe this, because the Generality of *professed Christians*, tho' they have Desire enough of being happy hereafter; yet it must be in their own Way: and they will not depart from their own Schemes, and their own Wishes. Nay, they seem to think it much more fit that God Almighty should come down to *their* Terms, than that themselves should go up to *his*. The Young Man, in the Gospel, was *not far from the Kingdom of God*, as our Lord thought: because he came to Him with some Disposition, and some Desire after Happiness. He was willing enough to be his Disciple, and to be saved by him; if the *Terms* of his Discipleship and Salvation should appear such as he could comply with. But when he found that the *Circumstances* of his professing the *Gospel* at that Time were such, that he must divest himself of his large Possessions; and follow our Lord with an entire Dependance upon him for the common Necessaries of Life; and share in common with him the Wants and Necessities to which he exposed himself: he went away sorrowful; griev'd to hear that he could not be made happy by Him at less expence, and that the Terms of his Salvation were so uneasy to be comply'd with. Thus it is with many *Professors of Christianity* in later Ages.

26

They are, in this Sense, *not far from the Kingdom of God*, that they desire the Happiness of Christians, and of such as belong to that Kingdom: but then they are sorrowful to hear of the Terms plainly required; if they don't suit their present Inclinations, and Designs. And so they either depart from our Lord; and give up all Pretences to his Favour, and his Salvation: or else they lay hold of one Pretext or other, or alter those *Terms*; and amuse themselves with some sort of present *Peace* and Tranquillity, by making them consist and comply with their own Desires and Wishes. Let this therefore be always remembered, that our Fancies, or Tempers, or Desires, cannot make the *Terms* of our *Acceptance* other than what they are already; fix'd and determin'd by the *Father* of our *Lord Jesus Christ*, with whom there is no *Variableness*, nor *shadow of turning*: who, after having view'd all Things relating to our Nature, and his own upon the Principles of unerring Wisdom, appointed the Bounds of his own Mercy, and the Conditions of our Happiness; neither of which it is in our Power either to enlarge or diminish.

NOR is it any other than egregious Folly for us to imagine that He himself will at last vary from his own Terms; and, after He hath declared and promulgated Rules, by which he assures us He will be govern'd in the Distribution of his Love and Favour, to flatter ourselves that he will depart from these Rules, for *our Sakes*, who would not depart from our own unreasonable Practices either for *his Sake*, or *our own*; and that he will adapt his Proceedings at last to *our Practice*, in Pity to *us*, who would not adapt our Practice to *his Laws*. And yet I know of but this one Way in which any Alteration or Abatement, or new *Modification*, of the *Covenant of Grace* can be hop'd for; *viz.* that God himself will at last new model it, and alter it into some other Form: The Weakness of which Imagination I shall have occasion hereafter more fully to lay open. At present I make this Observation, that the *Terms of Acceptance* are establish'd and unalterable; as God himself hath fixed them in the Gospel: because, unless we be persuaded of this, all our *Enquiries* after them will be only so many Speculations, and fruitless Searches; rather serving to satisfy Curiosity, than to direct Practice. For if we entertain a Thought, that those *Terms*, tho' solemnly settled, and solemnly promulgated, by the Son of God and his Apostles, may be again altered, and changed into something more agreeable to us, and more consistent with our Ways? the *Gospel* can have but little, very little, effect upon our Minds, under the powerful Assaults of any considerable Temptation. Pleasure, Honour, and Profit, will work strongly upon a Mind fluctuating in uncertainty about the Consequences of things or made unstable by the flattering Hope that the Consequences at last may not be found so terrible as they are represented in the Gospel. But if we be possess'd beforehand that *such* are the *Terms of Acceptance*, as the plain Declarations of the *New Testament* make them; and that *such* they will be found at last: then our serious Enquiries after them will have a great and powerful Influence upon our Conduct; and be of more force than the Efforts of Flesh and Blood, or the Insinuations of this transitory World. But,

27

28

29

2. ANOTHER very *necessary Rule* to be observed in this important *Enquiry*, is, that all preconceived Notions of our own; all the Impressions of Education; all the Inclinations of Sense; all the Influences of Temporal Interest, and every thing that may cast a Cloud before our Eyes, or prevent our seeing or receiving the Truth, must be disregarded, in comparison of any one plain Declaration of the *New Testament* upon this Head. This is so necessary, that it is in vain to search after any Truth; unless all Prejudices, and evil Habits of Thinking, or Acting, inconsistent with it, be laid aside, and for the present disregarded. And much more necessary is it in this most *Important Enquiry*, that our Minds should lay aside *every weight* which will incline them against Truth, and weigh up the contrary Balance in which that inestimable Jewel is tryed; that we should be perfectly willing to find that *True*, which is *True*, whether we find it or no; that we should be as free as possible from the Bias impress'd upon the Soul, by former Schemes received upon the Authority of others, or by Evil Habits built upon our own Sin and Folly; that we should go to those Books in which the Account of this is laid before us, with Hearts disposed to Truth; and indifferent whether this Account shall be found to contradict our former Notions, and Practices, or not.

THE force of Passion, and Prejudice, against *Truth* is so great, that Men tolerably well skill'd in that sort of Learning, may sometimes be hindred from seeing even the plain Truth of a *Mathematical Demonstration*, by some private Resentment, and secret Pique against others: in which Science there is no complaint of indeterminate Ideas, or obscure Expression. In like manner, set a Man about the Enquiry we are now speaking of, who hath been used to a way of thinking at second hand; and is in love with the Notions received from others, tho' never so false; his Labours shall be found to tend to little, unless it be to strain the obscure Passages into a Sense agreeable to his own Notions: whilst the plain ones are neglected. Or, set a Man about this Enquiry, immersed in this World; embarrass'd with a sordid love of Gain, or Honour; or captivated by Lust and sensual Pleasure; and how hardly will He, if at all, receive any thing, as the Will of God, inconsistent with his present Views? What a Bias will his own Wishes, and his perverted Will, clap upon his understanding? and how many Ways will He find, if He have any Thoughts of Religion at all, to reconcile the plainest contrary Declarations of God's Will to his own State, and his own Hopes? This makes me say that, if we would make the *Enquiry* with Success, we must be willing to find that true which is so; and that we must renounce to all our own Wishes, or Hopes, or Desires, whether founded upon former *Notions* infused into us by others; or upon former *Practices* indulged by ourselves.

NAY, how weak; how unreasonable; how injurious and pernicious a thing is it to be otherwise disposed? For *we* make not *Truth*: but it is what it is, and what it ever will be, whether we receive it, or not; and, when plainly propos'd to us, it is our Condemnation, if we reject it, or prefer any thing before it. And if we have been engag'd in such a Habit of Sin as may incline us to one side more than another: the farther we go in this Way, by estab-

30

31

32



lishing this *Habit of Evil Practice* by an *Error* fixed in the *Understanding*, we are so much the more deeply engaged in a Course of Ruin; and so much the more irrecoverably lost. For by this means we go not in the Dark; but do as it were light and direct ourselves all along the Paths of Misery. We go securely perhaps for the present, but at last the Sight and Sense of our wilful Error will be the most painful Horror, and insupportable Burthen. This should engage Sinners, that have any Thoughts of finding Mercy, to break off their *evil Habits*: because the longer they proceed in them, the more effectually will they blind their Eyes, and the more certainly will they indispose them, either to see the Truth of God's Covenant, tho' written in never so plain Characters; or to receive it to any purpose, if they should not avoid the seeing it. For nothing unqualifies Men for *Divine Truths*, of Importance to Happiness, so much as the *Habit of Sin*: nothing makes Men more afraid of, or unfit for, the *Light*, than their having exercised themselves in the *Works of Darkness*.

3. ANOTHER Particular I must mention, of great use in this Enquiry, is, that we must take *all* the Declarations of the New Testament upon this Head, into the Account; and not *some* only: and then that, if there be any seeming Variety in any of them; the more obscure must be interpreted so as to be agreeable to the most plain and repeated Declarations. This it is but reasonable to require: because neither our Saviour nor his Apostles, have in any one single Portion of the *New Testament*, laid down the several Branches of the *New Covenant*; but spoken of them, as distinct Occasions gave them Ground to do: sometimes of one, sometimes of another. Now all things, equally declar'd by Them to be *Conditions* of our pardon, or salvation, are with equal Willingness, and equal Regard, to be received by us. And this Rule will prevent all those Mistakes in us, which others have fatally run into, by attending to some single Declarations upon this Subject; to the Neglect and Contradiction of others, perhaps more plain and intelligible. This will teach us that, if one Place of Scripture attributes Happiness to one *Virtue*, or one *Act* of the Mind; and another as plainly to another; and a third to a third: and a fourth to the Performance of the whole Will of God, without mentioning Particulars: I say, This will teach us not to overlook one Passage for the sake of another, not more plain, or more intelligible; when *all* have the same Stamp of Divine Authority; and when, without regarding *all*, we cannot pretend to know the whole of what Almighty God hath declared concerning this Affair. The acting contrary to this, is just as if the *rebellious Subjects* of a *Prince*, now to be restored to his Favour upon such and such *Conditions*, should attend only to one or two of these *Conditions*; and pass over all the rest, as if they were not of equal Importance, and had not the Sanction of the same Authority.

AND then, supposing there should be some *Obscurity* in one or more Passages relating to this Affair; there can be no Danger to Us, but in pretending to understand these, and at the same time understanding them so, as to invalidate the Design of the more plain and

33

34

35

express Declarations: and this out of a Desire to reconcile our own Practices to the Hopes of Happiness. For it is no Crime in any Christian, not to understand an obscure or dubious Passage; provided he hath nothing wilful to accuse himself of, in this want of Understanding: But the Crime is, to resolve to understand it in such a Sense, as may best consist with his false Hopes; tho' it consists not at all with those plainer Texts, about the Meaning of which there can be no Doubt.

36

LET us, therefore, but take into the Account the *Whole* of what is, in several Places of the *New Testament*, made necessary to our obtaining God's Favour, and Eternal Happiness. And, if we meet with any thing which we do not perfectly understand upon this Head, let us but attend to the plain and repeated Declarations; and not presume to neglect *them* for the sake of those which are not so; or to interpret those which are not so, after such a *manner* as to *contradict* those which are so: and I dare say, we need not fear any Error in this great Enquiry. For the Terms absolutely required are plainly, and frequently, expressed: and what is so, is, in every sort of Writing, allowed to explain what is not so: but what is not so is never allowed to be interpreted so as to contradict what is so. And therefore it will be unjustifiable and inexcusable in any one, to lay hold on any part of the *New Testament*, or any *Text* in it, which is in any respect obscure; and to oppose this to the plainest and most repeated: in order to build a *Doctrine*, or a *Scheme*, upon it, not to be reconciled to *these*; or perhaps absolutely inconsistent with them. This is not to consult the Honour of God: nor is it the way to find out the *Terms* of our own Happiness.

37

THESE *Rules*, and *Observations*, which I have now laid down, are in order to your careful and exact Examination of what I design to say, when I come to lay before you the *Terms* of our *Acceptance* and *Salvation*, as they appear to me in the *New Testament*: to which I cannot now proceed for want of Time; but before which, it was necessary to commend to your Thoughts the *Considerations* before-mentioned; which will, I hope, be of great use in all your *future Enquiries* after the Way to *Eternal Life*. And all but little enough, or rather, I fear, too little, to make the Generality of Christians as sincere in their Enquiries, and as ready to embrace the true Answer to them, as they ought to be.

38

AND indeed I have mentioned, and insisted upon, all these Precautions; because it is *Eternal Life* we are enquiring after; and the Favour of that God, whose Favour is better than Life, and whose Displeasure is infinitely worse than Death. Were they the Concerns of this Life, that fleeth away like a Shadow, and is not to be stopp'd by all the Art, or all the Power of Man, about which we are enquiring; it would be of no such vast Importance to be solicitous about the Matter. Let *Passion*, or *Pride*, or *Covetousness* direct us; Let *Ambition*, or *Lust*; blind our Eyes; an End would quickly come, when this World could have no part in us. But yet, behold the Perverseness of Mankind. Were the *Enquiry* after the Pleasures, or Riches; or Honours, of this World; had there any Person of great Sagacity, or uncommon Penetration; appeared in it, to direct them in the sure way to these Riches, or Pleasures, or

Honours, that must end with this Temporal Life: how few Mistakes should we find made even by the weakest of Men? The *Covetous* would easily understand, and make themselves perfect Masters of the Way to Wealth; the *Voluptuous* would never miss the Path of Pleasure; nor the *Ambitious*, the Road to Preferment, and Honour, and Titles. None of them would trust any Direction at second hand, when they could consult the Oracle it self. None of *them* would be diverted from their Enquiry by any Impulse contrary to that by which they professed to be directed. None of *them* would hazard the Disappointment of their main end, by relying on any thing but what was plainly proposed by their Guide. And all of them would be Proof against every Attempt that could be used, either to deceive their Understandings, or to influence their Wills to contrary Ways:

BUT let it not always be said, that the *Children of this World are wiser, in their Generation*; wiser in their Pursuits and Enquiries after Trifles and Misery and Ruin; less capable of being imposed upon; more guarded and secure in their Way, than the *Children of Light*, who profess to have nobler Things in View; a State of unchangeable Happiness, Eternal in the Heavens, after this poor, uncertain State is at an End. If we be the *Children of Light*; if we have *Eternal Life* truly in View, and be truly inquisitive after the Way that leads to it; let us consider what *Eternal Life* is; how much it outweighs all that *this Life* can offer us; how much it exceeds all our present Conceptions which are formed upon very imperfect Ideas; how vastly it will recompense all the Pains, and Care, and Caution of the strictest Enquirer; how unconceivable an Happiness must be contained in the Favour of God, the Supreme and Original Father of all Things: and we shall think no Precaution too much to secure us from Mistake, whilst we are seeking our Way to it; no Care superfluous to defend us from the great Enemies of this *Enquiry*; no Pains, or Study, too great on our Parts, in order to be fully satisfied, *What we must do to inherit Eternal Life*.

To the Resolution of which grand *Question* I design to proceed the next Opportunity.



Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.

### SERMON III.

LUKE x. The latter part of the 25th Verse.

Master, What shall I do to inherit eternal Life?

THE Enquiry which I told you, these Words gave me Occasion to propose, as of Importance to Persons educated, and continuing, in the Profession of the Faith of Christ, (in which Number, we, and all of later Ages, generally are) is this: What it is that the *Gospel* requires of Men, who believe in *Jesus Christ*, and have been baptized into his Religion, and acknowledge Him for their Master, in order to their Acquittance from any Sins they have at any time been wilfully guilty of, during their *Christian Profession*; and to their final Justification at the Day of Judgment; and to their Eternal Happiness after this. And, having in two several Discourses endeavoured to engage your Attention, and to raise your Sollicitude after Truth, in a matter of such unspeakable Moment; as well as to point out to you the true Method of your coming to well-grounded Satisfaction, (*viz* your examining whatsoever is at any time laid before you on this Head by all the plain, and intelligible Texts in the *New Testament* concerning it, carefully laid together, and sincerely compared;) I come now to a particular Resolution of the *Question* proposed which I think may be comprized under the four following Heads.

I. IT is required of a *Christian*, who hath been a *wilful Sinner*, that he renounce, and forsake, his Sins.

II. IT is required of him, that he sincerely and with Perseverance, practise the contrary Virtues. And tho' to *these Two* all other Terms may be reduced; yet it is very proper particularly to mention two more, *viz*.

III. IT is not sufficient that the Sinner forsake the Sins of which he stands guilty before God, and amend his outward Life; but he must entirely forgive the Offences, and Trespasses, of others against himself: which is so necessary a Condition, that without it even those Sins which he hath forsaken shall never be forgiven him.

IV. IN the *Case of Injustice*, or *Fraud*, or *Oppression*; it is required of the Sinner, if he ever hope for Pardon, and Acceptance, not only that he leave off Injustice for the future, and act justly, and honestly; (which alone is not sufficient;) but also that he make *Restitution*, in whatsoever instances, he hath by any ways or means, injured any one in the World.

THESE are the *four* particular *Terms*, or *Conditions*, upon which *Christians*, who have been *wilful Sinners*, may hope for Acceptance; and without which the *Gospel* gives them not the least Ground for such Hope. They may be all comprized in one *general Proposition*, *viz*. That it is required of Christians, who have the Guilt of any Sins upon them, to endeavour heartily, and sincerely, for the future, to practise the whole Will of God, revealed in the Book

42

43

of *Nature*, and the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*: and that without this honest, sincere, and universal Obedience, they cannot hope to be accepted, for the Sake, and upon the *Terms*, of *Jesus Christ*. But it is fit to be more particular; and therefore I have chosen to speak of this Matter under the *forementioned Heads*: every one of which I design distinctly to consider, *first*, shewing that they are most plainly required; and *then*, shewing the Fitness and Reasonableness of them. And after we are fully satisfied concerning these, they will be so many infallible Directions to us; and prevent all fatal Mistakes, which otherwise may be occasioned by a too great Readiness to lay hold on any obscure, or misinterpreted, Passage of Scripture, for the Support of any other Notions concerning this important Matter.

44

THESE are the *Points*, I say, which I design particularly to handle. But the *Enquiry* now before us, relating, as you see; to the *Case* of such *professed Christians* as have been *wilful Sinners*, and so have need of other Conditions to be offered them, than that of a perfect and unspotted Holiness; it will not be an useless, or improper Digression; before I come to the particular handling of the Points now laid down, to consider, *who they are that may be called wilful Sinners*; and the several *Sorts*, and *Degrees* of such as are so: that so, we may be all sensible that the very best of us may have need of some or other of these *Terms of Condescension* offered us thro' *Jesus Christ*, and, for his Sake only, made *Terms of Acceptance* with God. And here, it being manifest that all Those may justly be called *wilful Sinners*, who sin, either *first*, against sufficient Light; or *secondly*, against the Dictates of their own Consciences to the contrary: it will be proper to shew *who* they are that may be said thus to sin, either against the *one*, or the other. Now,

45

1. ALL those may be said to act against sufficient Light, and sufficient Evidence to the contrary, who have fair Opportunities and Abilities of knowing their Duty; who profess a Religion, and live in any particular Place, or at any particular Time, in which their Duty is laid plainly before them. And here I must remark that not only those *Sinners* who have attended to this Evidence, and been sensible of the Directions of this Light, may be said to sin against it; but such also, as have wilfully refused to give any *Attention* to it, and have rejected the offers of its Direction, may equally be said to sin against it; because they wilfully refuse to pay any Respect, or Attention to it: and not only upon this account; but because they act against the Maxims which *that* is perpetually offering to their View, and which they might, if they pleased, be very well acquainted with. For no *Ignorance* that is wilful, and affected; or that proceeds from a Resolution to guard against better Information, and is founded upon an ill-disposed Mind; can avail a Sinner any thing, or distinguish him at all from the most wilful of Sinners. And this ought to be remarked, because many Persons seem to be so weak, as to chuse voluntarily not to be better inform'd, because they are pretty well resolved not to alter their bad Courses; and then to imagine that their *Ignorance* will be a sort of an Excuse for their Vices. Whereas this sort of *Ignorance* gives the Man all the *Essence*, and *Guilt*, of a *wilful Sinner*; nay, and makes Him a Sinner against that very Light and

46

Evidence, to which he wilfully refuseth to attend. So that, with respect to persons who have professed to believe in *Jesus Christ*, and to receive Him for their Master, (of whom we are now particularly speaking) it may be affirmed that, not only *They* sin against the Light of his *Gospel*, who, at the very time of their committing Sin, know, and are sensible, that the Action they are going about is condemned by his *Gospel*; but also *They* who, after having professed Faith in Him, are wilfully careless and negligent in their enquiries after his Will; and chuse, upon very bad Principles, rather not to know, than to know, the Rules which He hath laith down. For this, I say, is manifestly sinning against the *Light* of that *Gospel*, which they wilfully refuse to consult, or attend to, upon a Suspicion that it may disturb them in their present Course, and consequently, upon a Resolution of continuing in it without that Disturbance.

47

THESE Two sorts of Christians therefore are *wilful Sinners*: such, as sin against the *Rules* of the *Gospel*, knowing that they condemn their Practice at the very time of their sinning; and such likewise, as sin against those same Rules, with an *Ignorance* which proceeds from a perverse and deliberate Desire of being undisturbed in their Course: an Ignorance, in which they wilfully entrench themselves, as some sort of Security against the Guilt of Sin; but which, in truth, is as great an Aggravation of it, as can well be imagined. The Difference between these *Two*, is only such a Difference as may be supposed between Two disobedient Sons of the same Father: the *one* of which listens to his Will, and hears his Commands, and afterwards transgresseth them; and the *other*, whenever his Father is going to declare his Will to Him, stops his Ears, and refuseth to hear his Voice, merely because he is resolved to go on in his own Way, without any Regard to his Will. And which of these Two is the moth criminal, it is hard to determine: only that there seems more Resolution of Disobedience in the *latter*. Such Persons as I have been now describing, must not expect to be reckoned by our Saviour amongst those Servants *who know not their Master's Will, and so shall be beaten with fewer stripes* than others: for the *Servants* meant in that Saying of our *Lord's*, are such as have not the Opportunity of knowing their Master's Will so fully as others have; not such as have the Opportunity and wilfully refuse to make use of it.

48

2. As there are *Two sorts* of *Sinners*, who may be said to sin against *sufficient Light*: so likewise, there are *Two sorts* of *Sinners*, who may be said to sin against their own Judgments and Consciences; and consequently, to be *wilful Sinners*. First, such as, at the very time of their sinning, perceive within themselves something which forbids that Action, and represents the Unreasonableness of it, and the Anger of God consequent upon it: and secondly, such as, tho' they have by a Custom of sinning worn off all sense of their Duty so far as to sin without any present Disturbance, and Uneasiness of Mind, at the very time of sinning; yet, before this habitual Practice of Vice, have often owned and acknowledged, or, during the continuance of it, do upon many Occasions, and in their most serious Intervals, judge and determine that the contrary Course of Action is truly their Duty, and what alone can entitle

49

them to the Favour of God. Concerning the former of these, no one will doubt but that they sin against their Consciences because they are warned, and made uneasy, by them at the very time of sinning. And, as to the latter, I think it equally certain that they likewise do the same. For they sin against that Judgment which they have heretofore often made, before an Habit of Sin had made them insensible; they sin against their own Determinations in their most serious moments; they sin against a former Judgment of their Minds, which their Reason and Consideration hath never yet reversed, or ever determined to be false or groundless; they sin against that which was the Voice of their Conscience, when they had any awake in their Minds: and consequently, They may be truly said to sin against their Judgments, and Consciences; tho', at the very time of their sinning; they have no present Alarm and Disturbance from them.

50

ALL the Difference between the *Two sorts of Sinners* I have now mentioned, is the same that may be supposed between Two Servants of the same Master: the *One* of which having not shewn his Disobedience so often, the Master still attends upon him, and directs him in his Actions, hoping to keep him, by this means, from all bad and pernicious Practices, which nevertheless he sometimes ventures upon, even under his Master's Eye; and the *Other* having shewn the same Disobedience, under his Master's immediate Direction, more frequently, the Master thinks it useless any longer to attend upon Him, or to warn him against any particular Action. But yet, this Servant, tho' He offends not against his Master's, present express Warning to the contrary; He wilfully offends against all his past Rules, and all those Directions which He hath heretofore given him. So that his Case is worse than that of the *Former*, in this, that the *Former* hath not sinned beyond the Patience of his Master: or so as to forfeit his constant Attendance upon him: which *He* hath done; and still persists in that Disobedience. Just thus is with the *Two sorts* of Sinners now mentioned. Before an Habit of Sin hath made it otherwise; the Man hath generally the Remonstrances of his Conscience, whilst He is thinking to venture upon any Vice. But Conscience may at last be supposed to be weary of that good Office; and to find it fruitless to give so particular an Attendance upon the Sinner. Yet the Sinner nevertheless sins against it, because He continues to sin against all it's former Remonstrances; against that Judgment and Determination which He himself hath formerly acknowledged to be just and reasonable; and which He cannot think, or prove to be otherwise, even in the Height of his Wickedness. So that it is manifest that *He* sins against his own Judgment and Conscience, whose Conscience hath heretofore sufficiently warned Him against the Course He pursues, and sufficiently recommended the contrary to Him; as well as *He* whose Conscience still continues to do that good Office: and consequently, that both have equally the Guilt of *wilful Sinners*.

51

52

THOSE professed Christians, therefore, who do, in any single Action, or in any Course of Actions, transgress those Rules which they know to be laid down in the *Gospel*; and they also, who wilfully refuse to know those Rules, merely that they may the more quietly practise

what themselves think fit; Both *willfully* act against sufficient *Light*, and *Evidence*: and therefore are both certainly *wilful Sinners*. So likewise, they who do, either in any particular Action, or in any Course of Actions, sin against the present Checks and Warnings of their own Consciences; and they also, who sin against the past Determination of their own Judgments, and the serious Result of their own best Reason, tho' wholly unmindful of it just at the time of *sinning*; both *wilfully* sin against their Consciences: and therefore are both certainly *wilful Sinners*. And now, from what has been said upon this Subject, it will not be improper to observe more particularly the several *Degrees*, and *Ranks*, of those who may justly be stiled *wilful Sinners*. As

1. IT is plain that in the lowest degree of *wilful Sinners* are such Persons as have a sincere Desire of avoiding all Sin; such as keep up in their Minds a warm Sense of the Guilt of it and do, in the main Tenour of their Lives, demonstrate the Sincerity of their outward Profession of *Christianity*, by observing its Laws, behaving themselves according to its Rules, and resisting great and frequent Temptations to sin: but nevertheless are sometimes, through the Violence of some particular Temptations, hurried into such a Behaviour, and such Actions, as they know to be condemned by the *Gospel* they profess, and to be displeasing to *Almighty God*. But in this State they do not continue, or glory; but lament and abhor their Condition; and by Amendment raise themselves as soon as possible from it. These are *wilful Sinners*, in this particular Behaviour: because they do the thing which their *Consciences* condemn; and because they *willfully* act in this Particular, against the Light of that Gospel which they enjoy. But it is hard to call such Persons by the Name justly bestowed on those whose main Course of Living is directed and governed by a quite contrary Principle: For as *they* are no denominated *good* and *virtuous*, from one or two particular *good* and *virtuous* Actions; whilst the greatest art of their Lives is filled up with the contrary Practices: so neither can the *others* justly be denominated *wicked Men*, from one or two particular Commissions of Sin, whilst the main of their Lives hath been dedicated to Virtue; provided that, by their Amendment in those particular Instances, they have given sufficient Proof of their Repentance. But what I observe at present is this, that such Persons, are in these Actions, *wilful Sinners*, for the Reasons before given; and that they certainly stand in need of an *Act of Grace*, from *Almighty God*, in order to be assured of Pardon and Forgiveness; because they have done what they themselves acknowledge they ought not to have done; and have *willfully* committed what deserveth Punishment: what they cannot justify, but are forced to condemn themselves for.

2. IN the next Degree of *wilful Sinners*, may be placed such Persons as have some Sense of Religion, and same sort of Resolution of practising the Duties of it: but yet, when any considerable Temptation offers it self, yield up themselves to the power of it; and at that time, when only they can experience the Sincerity of their own Minds, *viz.* in the Day of *Trial*, do very often *willfully* fall into grievous and deliberate Sins. I do not suppose these

53

54

55



Persons to be so bad as to seek out Opportunities of sinning; or to harbour in their Minds before-hand any Designs of laying hold on such Opportunities; but thro' some great Defect, or Negligence in themselves, to be surpriz'd, by almost every Trial, into Sin; and to give themselves Proofs of little, thro' their whole Behaviour, besides the Weakness of their own Resolutions, and the ineffectual Sense they have of the Truths Religion. Of *those*, mentioned under the foregoing *Head*, it may be said that they are sincere, and settled in the Ground-work of Religion; because they resist many Temptations, and govern the main part of their Lives by the Rules of it: but of *these*, I fear, it can hardly be said that they do both truly understand, and heartily believe, the Nature, and Importance of what they profess; because whenever any considerable Trial offers itself, (which alone can prove whether a Man deceiveth himself in this Matter, or not,) they find no Strength, no Assistance, in those Principles which they suppose or profess themselves to have; but always renounce them for the sake of some present Profit or Pleasure in sinning. When none, or very little, Fruit is seen to proceed from the good Seed sown; it is a certain Sign that there is some Fault in the Ground in which it is lodged. But,

3. Is the highest Order of *wilful Sinners*, are to be placed those who are come to such a Pitch in Wickedness, as to contrive and design Evil before-hand; to lay Scenes of Sin, and to invite, or seek out; Temptations and Opportunities for it, with a Resolution of complying, and yielding to them. I cannot conceive any Degree of *Sinners* beyond this: and it will make but a small Difference in those of this *Order*, that some of them meet with much fewer Opportunities successful to their Wishes than *others* do. For in time Eye of God, and of Natural Justice, *He* hath all the Guilt of Sin, who deliberates and resolves upon the Action, whenever a fair Opportunity shall offer itself to him; and is always prepared for more and more Sins, as more and more Occasions present themselves. That He doth not always meet with these Opportunities, may be happy to others: but is no Alteration of his own inward Guilt. For the *Guilt* of Sins lies where the *Wilfulness* of it lies; and that is in the inward Design and deliberate Resolution; the longer Time any Person hath for the deliberating part, enhancing and encreasing the *Wilfulness* of the Action.

THUS, in the Account of the Gospel, *Murthers; Adulteries, Fornications*, and all Sins, are condemned, as in the Heart; and proceeding out of the Heart: *that is*, as designed, and resolved upon, within. In the Eye of our Lord, He is an *Adulterer*, who hath deliberately resolved upon the committing *Adultery*; whether the Opportunity doing it ever present itself, or not: And so He is a *Murtherer*, that is, *He* hath the Guilt of Murder before God, who hath resolved and decreed within himself to take away his Neighbour's Life unjustly; whether He ever meet with a favourable Opportunity, or not.

AND tho' Human Governours cannot teach the Mind, or discover the secret Intention, but by the outward Act; and so cannot reasonably judge of Guilt but by the outward Act: yet there is all the Reason in the World that Almighty God should always judge of Guilt by

56

57

58

the inward Act and Design; because it always lies there, and because He knows the inward Act of the mind in it self, much more perfectly than We can know it from any outward, or open Act. Nay, we ourselves never condemn the *outward Action*, but when it appears, at least, to have proceeded from a bad Design within. Who ever blamed a Machine, or Engine, or thought *that* guilty of Murther; because Men's Lives have been taken away by the Violence of it? Or who ever thought a Brute guilty, in the Sense in which a reasonable Creature is so, for having been the Occasion of a Man's Death? Nay, who ever condemned a Man as deserving Punishment, if, through unavoidable Inadvertance, or designing Good and Kindness, he hath proved the Interment of Death to a Person, to whom he is known to have meant no Evil? Yet in all these Cases there is the *material Action* which is in all Murthers; a taking away the Life of a Man: notwithstanding which, *Guilt* is not supposed to belong to it, because there wants the Design, the Deliberation, and the Resolution, knowingly to do the Action. All this shows plainly that it is in *these* that the Evil of Sin lies: and that by these, the Men who have but few Opportunities of bringing their inward Resolutions to outward Acts, may be made equal in Guilt to those who have many more Opportunities of carrying their designed Wickedness into Action; *that is*, if they have an equal Number of the same evil Designs within, and wicked deliberate Resolutions. We may, indeed, suppose an accidental Difference in this, that one Man's Heart may relent and alter, when the Opportunity offers it self; and another's may not. But of this God alone can judge: and therefore, to Him alone it belongs to do it. These are all the several *Orders*, and *Degrees*, of *willful Sinners*, which I can think of: and to one or other of these, All that come under that Name may be reduced.

I SHALL only observe farther the Difference between these *Three sorts of wilful Sinners*, with respect to the *Habit* of sinning. For though it be impossible to define exactly what Number of *wilful Sins* shall constitute an *habitual Sinner*; as it is, in any Case, what particular Number of Actions are necessary to constitute an *Habit*, or *Custom*: yet it is manifest that the *first sort* of Sinners cannot be called *habitual Sinners*, because the main Tenour of their Lives is governed by the Moral Rules of the *Gospel*; and it is only in some few particular Instances of Temptation that they have been overcome, and transported from the general Bent and Bias of their Lives, in the Course of which they have triumphed over many mote of the same sort of Trials, and Difficulties. It is manifest, in the next place, that the two other sorts of *wilful Sinners* may justly be called *habitual*: because even the better sort of them give themselves up to the Power of all considerable Temptations; suffering themselves to be carried by them into Sin; and much more frequently yielding to the Strength of the Trials they meet with, than using all the Force of their Souls to resist and overcome them. But with this remarkable Difference, that the *one* of them do not design or resolve upon Sin beforehand; or please themselves with the Thought and Deliberation concerning it: whereas the *other* sort have given up themselves to contrive their own Sins; to be their own Tempters, and to yield to their own Temptations.

59

60

61

BUT though there be this very great Difference between these *Three sorts of wilful Sinners*; yet they agree in this, that they have all, (the lowest as well as the highest Degree of them,) done what they ought not to have done; that they may all justly fear a Punishment from God, proportionable to their several Estates; that they all stand in need of an *Act of Grace*, and Favour, from the great Judge of the World; of *Terms of Condescension*, below those of exact and rigorous Justice: in order to their Reconciliation with an offended God; and to well-grounded Peace, and Satisfaction within themselves.

THE *Terms* of which *Reconciliation* and Favour, I laid down at the beginning of this Discourse: and shall distinctly prosecute, one after another; in my following Sermons.



Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.

## SERMON IV.

LUKE x. The latter part of the 25th Verse.

*Master, What shall I do to inherit eternal Life?*

THE Enquiry we are now upon, is this, What it is that the *Gospel* requires of Men, who believe in *Jesus Christ*, and have been baptized into his Religion, and acknowledge him for their Master; in order to their Acquittance from any Sins which they have at any Time been wilfully guilty of, during their Christian Profession; and to their final Justification at the Day of Judgment; and to their Eternal Happiness after this. The *Answer* to this *Enquiry*, in my last Discourse, I laid down in *four Particulars*. And I observed to you, that all *four* might be comprized in this one *general Proposition*, viz. That it is required of *Christians* who have been *wilful Sinners*, sincerely to endeavour for the future to practise the whole Will of God, any ways made known to them, and that without this Amendment, and sincere, universal Obedience, the *Gospel* gives them no Ground for Hopes of Pardon and Acceptance, and Eternal Life: but that it would be more useful to discourse upon this Subject, under fore-mentioned Particulars. In order likewise to our knowing our own Condition, and the need we all have of some or other of these *Terms*, offered to such as have been *wilful Sinners*, I laid before you an Account of the Nature of *wilful Sin*; what it is that makes a Man a *wilful Sinner*; and what are the several Differences, and Degrees, of such as are *wilful Sinners*. And after having done this; I now come distinctly to consider, in their Order, every one of the four Propositions, laid down in my last Discourse: and this, *first*, with respect to their *Truth*; and *secondly*, with regard to their Fitness, and Reasonableness. The *first Proposition* is this:

I. IT is required, in the *Gospel-Dispensation*, of every *Christian*, who hath been in any sort, or any degree, a *wilful Sinner*, that He renounce, and forsake his Sins.

I. THE Truth of this will plainly appear from the following Proofs. In general, *The Grace of God*, i. e. his Mercy in the *Gospel* is declared by St. Paul, *Titus* ii. 12, 13. *to have appeared unto all Men, teaching them to deny Ungodliness; and worldly Lusts; i.e. to renounce and have no Communication with them for the future. And at ver. 14. Christ is said to have given himself for us Christians; that he might first redeem us from all Iniquity, in order to redeem us at last from the Punishment of it. It is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners, saith the same Apostle, 1 Tim. i. 15. But then immediately mentioning himself, as an Example and Instance of this Truth, by the Name of the Chief of Sinners, on account of his having bitterly persecuted the Church of Christ; he plainly lets us know what sort of Sinners they are to whom this Salvation is given,*

64

65

viz. such as have left their Sins: as He had entirely, and with the utmost Abhorrence, that great one of persecuting his Fellow-Creatures on the account of their differing from Him in their Religion, and Worship of God.

IN Pursuance of this main Design of Christianity, all *that name the name of Christ* are commanded to *depart from Iniquity*, [2 Tim. ii. 19.](#) to *have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness*, [Eph. v. 11.](#) which cannot be avoided without forsaking them; to *abhor that which is evil*, [Rom. xii. 9.](#) to *abstain from all appearance*, or, as the Words signify, *every sort Evil*, [1 Thess. v. 22.](#) to *mortify their Members which are upon Earth*, under which Expression all Sin is contained, [Col. iii 5.](#) Particularly, *He that hath stolen*, is required to *steal no more*, [Eph. iv. 28:](#) Agreeably to this, the same St. Paul, describing the Acceptance or Justification, purchased by Christ, expresseth himself thus, [Rom. viii. 1.](#) *There is now no Condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*, (i. e. which believe in him; and profess in his Religion) adding these Words, *who walk not after the Flesh*. And [ver. 12.](#) *we, Christians, are Debtors, not to the Flesh, to live after the Flesh:* And [v. 13.](#) *For if ye live after the Flesh, ye shall die*, i. e. eternally: *but if ye, through the Spirit, mortify the Deeds of the Body*, (which is a Scripture Expression for renouncing and forsaking all Sin,) *ye shall live*; that is, enjoy the Favour of God eternally. In another place, after having reckoned up the Promises of God thro' Jesus Christ, he infers, *Having therefore these Promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit.* [2 Cor. vii. 1.](#) that is, let us, who are Christians, if we hope to obtain the Promises of God, cleanse our selves from all sin. Timothy is commanded to *turn away from*, or disown, all such Christians *as having the Form of Godliness, deny the Power thereof*, [2. Tim. iii. 5.](#) And lest all this should not be sufficient; continual Warnings are given to such as are professed Christians, of the Danger and Eternal Punishment of Sin. They are assured over and over again by St. Paul, that it is for their Sins that *the Wrath of God will come upon them*, [Col. iii. 6.](#) He appeals to Christians themselves, [1 Cor. vi. 9.](#) *Know ye not that the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Be not deceived, neither Fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor other Sinners, there counted up, shall inherit the Kingdom of God*, [Gal. v. 19, 20, 21;](#) the Works of the Flesh are enumerated to *Christians*, that is, all the principal Sins, of the which the *Apostle* tells them, as He saith He had before, that *they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God:* And at [ver. 24.](#) They that are truly *Christ's*, i.e. who will have any Benefit by him, are such as *have crucified the Flesh with the Affections and Lusts*, [Chap. vi. v. 7, 8.](#) the *Galatians* are called upon again *not to be deceived*; and assured that *God is not mocked*: but that *he that soweth to the Flesh*, i. e. who doth the Works of the Flesh, *shall of the Flesh reap Corruption*. The *Ephesian Christians* are likewise called upon, *not to be deceived with vain Words*, [Eph. v. 6.](#) and assured that *because of these things*, i. e. the Sins before counted up, *the Wrath of God cometh upon the children of Disobedience*; and that no such Sinners as are there mentioned, *have any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God*, [ver. 5.](#)

66

67

68

ALL which, as it was the immediate Instruction of God, to his *Apostles*; so was it agreeable to the open Declarations of *Christ*, when He was upon Earth. In his own Account of his Proceedings at the great Day, He brings in such as professed themselves his Disciples, and had many Gifts to boast of; to whom yet he declares He will then say, *I know you not, depart from me, ye Workers of Iniquity*, [Matth. vii. 22](#). In the Parable of the Tares growing up with the Wheat, (by which must be meant unfruitful Professors of his Gospel) the Tares are ordered at last to be *gathered for burning*, [Mat. xiii. 30](#). And at the [41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>d</sup> Verses](#), they which do Iniquity are to be *gathered out of his Kingdom* (to which they professed themselves to belong;) and to be cast into a Furnace of Fire: *there shall be wailing and gnashing of Teeth*. The Angels are to *sever the Wicked from the Just*, and to *cast the Wicked into the Furnace of Fire*, [v. 47](#). The Man in the Parable, found *without a Wedding Garment*, [Matth. xxii. 13](#). and the *unprofitable Servant*, who had not improved the *Talent* entrusted to him, that is, the Light, and Strength afforded him in the Gospel, [Matt. xxv. 30](#). are both ordered to be cast into *outer Darkness*, *there shall be wailing, and gnashing of Teeth*.

69

I THOUGHT it fitting to make this Matter so exceeding evident, that there might remain no Doubt of it: and these Texts are so plain, that there can be no Thought of mistaking their Meaning; tho' they be not so many in Number as might easily be alledged from the same Sacred Writings. And can any Christians hear all this, and not argue certainly from hence, that there is a Necessity of forsaking their Sins, in order to any Hopes of Pardon and Acceptance at last? For, if it were the Design of the Gospel to teach, and influence Men to *deny all Ungodliness*; if *Christians* be commanded, upon Pain of God's Eternal Displeasure, to forsake all Sin; if it be declared, both by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, that all *Workers of Iniquity* shall certainly be excluded the *Kingdom of Heaven*: then it is most evident, that unless they forsake their Sins, and are changed from being Workers of Iniquity, they are got truly, and fully, *Christians*; nor shall ever be admitted to the Favour of God, or the Rewards of Heaven.

70

FROM hence therefore appears most evidently the Truth of the first Proposition, *viz.* That it is required, in the Gospel-Dispensation, of every *Christian*, who hath been, in any sort, or any Degree, a *wilful Sinner*, that He renounce and forsake his Sins. Let us now proceed to the *second*; which will still more confirm the Truth of the *first*: *viz.*

71

II. IT is required likewise of Him, that He sincerely, and with Perseverance, practise Holiness, and Virtue.

THIS is almost always, in the *New Testament*, joined to the forsaking of Sin. The *Grace of God* is declared to have *appeared*, in the Gospel-Dispensation, teaching Men, not only to *deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts*, but also to *live soberly, righteously, and godly in this World*, [Tit. ii. 12, 13](#). And at the [14<sup>th</sup> verse](#), *Christ* is said to have given himself for us, not only to *redeem us from all Iniquity*, but to *purify to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works*. Agreeably to this, Christians are commanded not only to *abhor that which is evil*, but also to *cleave to that which is good*, [Rom. xii. 9](#). not only to *cleanse themselves from all*

*Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit*, but also to *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God*, 2 Cor. vii. 1. They are told, that there is but one way of running in the *Christian Race*, so as to obtain the Prize, 1. Cor. x. 24; that nothing avails in *Christ Jesus*, that is, in the Christian Dispensation, but a *New Creature*, or an Alteration of every thing that is bad, Gal. vi. 15, or, in other Words, that nothing avails, but *Faith which worketh by Love*, ch. v. 6. They are assured that *Faith*, or their believing in *Christ Jesus*, is made *perfect by good Works*; and is *dead without them*, and of no account before God. Jam. ii. 26; that *whosoever shall keep all other parts of God's Law*, and wilfully and habitually *offend in one Point*, is *guilty of all*, v. 10; that *without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14. And indeed a great part of St. Paul's Epistles is generally spent in inculcating the Moral Precepts of Religion. It is for *them* only, who, by *patient continuance in well-doing, seek for Glory and Immortality*, that *Eternal Life* is reserved; Rom. ii. 7. Nay, it is declared to be so far from being an Advantage to a wicked Man, that he professeth *Christianity*, that it had been better for such an one *not to have known the way of Righteousness*, 2 Pet. ii. 21. As our Lord himself saith, *The Servant who knew his Master's Will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many Stripes*, Luke xii. 47.

72

I MIGHT multiply plain, unexceptionable Passages, without Number, declaring that the Rewards of God belong only to Righteousness; that Christians are *called to Holiness*; that unless they *sow to the Spirit*, and *bring forth the fruits of the Spirit*, they must not expect *Life everlasting*; that, *according to what they have done in this Life*, so shall be their Doom; and the like. But they would all, as indeed they are, be only Repetitions, and Enforcements of that most plain and express Declaration of our *Lord* himself, who best knew the *Terms* of that *Acceptance*, which he himself purchased; viz. Matt. vii. 21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven*; which utterly precludes all professed Christians from any Benefit from their Religion, unless they conscientiously practise that good, and perfect Will of God, which they know, to contain their Duty.

73

AND this being the declared Nature and Design of the Gospel; this being thus evidently required of Christians, as necessary to Salvation, in many plain Passages, incapable of any other Sense: no Christian can think any thing of Force enough to induce him to doubt of the *Truth* of what I have now laid down in the *Two first Propositions*, viz. that it is absolutely necessary for any Christian, who hath been in any respect a *wilful Sinner*, in order to his Acceptance, and Eternal Happiness, to forsake his Sins; and with Perseverance to practise all Virtue and Holiness, whilst He hath Opportunity allowed him: and that unless He do this so as to make it his own voluntary Act and Deed, (which must be before a *Death-bed* makes it impossible;) and so, as to be deservedly denominated, *holy, righteous, spiritual*, and the like; He cannot have a *Title* to those Rewards, which in the Gospel are promised to none but such as are truly so.

74

AND thus having established the *Truth* of these *Two first Propositions*, upon such *plain Texts* as cannot be shaken by any thing dubious, or obscure; I proceed

2. SECONDLY, to consider, as I proposed, those Marks of Justice, Reason, and Wisdom, which we ourselves may see to belong to these *Two Terms* of the *Covenant of Grace*, thus explained.

AND here I think I may affirm, That, supposing the Nature of *Almighty God* to be such as it is; at an infinite Distance from all Sin and Iniquity, as well as kindly and tenderly disposed towards his rational Creatures; we cannot imagine any possible Conditions of the *Acceptance* of *Sinners* to his Favour, so free from all Exception, as those now laid down in the *Two* foregoing Propositions. For if God will at all accept *Sinners* to Mercy for the Sake of *Jesus Christ*; it must be supposed either, 1. That He will accept them, for *his* Sake, let their inward Sentiments, and their outward Behaviour, continue what they please; that is, that He requires nothing at all on their part towards it: Or, 2. That He will, for the Sake of *Jesus Christ*, accept them, without any Alteration in their outward Conduct and Behaviour; provided they do but conceive and express a great Sorrow and Concern that they have transgressed his Laws: Or, 3 That He will, for the sake of Christ, *once* pardon to them all their former Transgressions; or that he will forgive such a particular Number of Transgressions: after which the Sinner should have no Hope of Pardon, if He should relapse into the Commission of any *wilful Sin*: or else, 4. and lastly, That, for the sake of *Jesus Christ*, the *Sinner* shall be pardoned who doth, at any time, so forsake his Sins, as to bring forth, in the whole Course and Tenour of his Life, the contrary Virtues, and do the whole Will of God. These are all the *Suppositions* that, I believe, can be thought of, concerning the *Terms of Acceptance* of any who have been *wilful Sinners*. Now,

1. LET us examine the first *Supposition*, which puts the Case, as if it were declared that *Sinners* should be accepted, for the sake of *Christ*, whether they regarded his Laws, or not; whether they altered their Notions, and Behaviour, or not. And what can we imagine a greater Repugnancy to all those Conceptions we have of the holy Nature of God, and of the great Law of Reason, and uncorrupted Nature? For what plainer Declaration could Almighty God make, to lead Men to think that there was no Difference between *Moral Good* and *Moral Evil*; that *Virtue* was of no account in his Eyes; and that the Distinction between *that* and *Vice*, was not worthy to be regarded by rational Creatures? This would be to make this World an Hell of Wickedness and Misery; and Heaven, at last, the Attendant upon *Vice*, which would by this means prevail over the Face of the Earth, and not upon *Virtue*, which would by this means cease from amongst the Children of Men. This is to suppose *Almighty God* descending in Offers of Mercy; in order to encourage Men, indeed, to *continue in Sin*; and causing his Son to be born into the World, I will not say, to no Purpose; but to the worst of all Purposes, *that is*, to the utter Confusion, and Disgrace of the Cause of Virtue. It is to suppose, either that He hath given no Moral Laws to be observed, which we know to be

75

76

77



false; or that He hath left it indifferent whether Men will observe them, or no; nay, that he hath sent his Son to assure Men that this is an indifferent Matter; highly absurd. It is to suppose such an extraordinary Person coming into the World in so extraordinary a manner, for nothing but to speak Comfort to the worst part of Mankind, even while they continue the worst; and not to leave them the least effectual Motive to engage them to make themselves better: which is the highest Affront we can offer to Almighty God; who cannot be supposed, without the greatest Indignity, to visit his Creatures after so extraordinary a manner, in order to carry on a Design opposite to his own Nature. In fine, it is to suppose the Cause of Virtue left entirely unguarded; and the main Encouragements of the Gospel to lie on the side of Vice: which having the Inclinations and Customs of most Men on its side, wants nothing but such a collateral Assistance as this, to enable it to overwhelm the World with an irresistible Torrent.

78

IF any ask, Who are they that ever could think thus of the *Terms of Acceptance* with God? I may answer, All such as. (tho' they do not say it, and speak it aloud, in so many Words, yet,) think and speak, in such a manner, of the Merits of *Christ's* Sufferings, and the Imputation of his personal Holiness to Believers, as to make his *Moral Laws* of none effect, and to render *all Virtue* in *Christians*, a poor insignificant, unnecessary Matter; unless it be the great Virtue of applying the Merits of *Christ* to our selves: a Virtue, which They who have most Spirits, are the most frequently observed to be Masters of: and which hath been too often seen to be founded upon the greatest degree of *Confidence*, and the greatest degree of *Guilt*, mix'd and temper'd together by a strong Fancy, and Imagination. And would not this be the greatest Reflection upon Almighty God, to imagine that He should propose the *Kingdom of Heaven* to *suffer* such *Violence*; not to be *taken* by the *Force* of an holy and exemplary Life, but by the *Force* of a groundless Assurance, and a confident Application of his Promises?

79

2. IF this be not a tolerable Supposition, let us examine the next Supposition, I spake of, concerning the *Terms of Acceptance*, viz. That all manner of past Sins shall be wholly pardoned for the sake of Jesus Christ, provided that the Sinner do sometimes, and especially in his last Moments, conceive and express a very great Sorrow, and deep Concern for them. And here, let any one of the meanest Capacity judge, whether this be a tolerable Supposition concerning Almighty God, that He requires our Grief, or our Sorrow, for the sake of it self, whilst nothing good results from it: which is an Absurdity plainly implied in this Imagination. For all Sorrow is, for the present, Misery and Uneasiness, in its own Nature: and Almighty God cannot, in a State of Trial, be supposed to require, or expect, the least Uneasiness in his Creatures, considered as Uneasiness; but merely with respect to their better State, and greater Happiness for the Time to come. Not doth He ever require our Sorrow, but as the beginning of Amendment, and the first Step to Reformation. But of this I shall have occasion to speak more largely, under the *Second Branch* of my present Design: when I come examine

80

more at length the false Hopes, and dangerous Mistakes of Men, in this Affair. I shall only therefore at present observe farther, that the Supposition we are now considering, is encompassed with the same insuperable Absurdities, under which the former laboured: *viz.* That Christ Jesus descended from Heaven to teach Men to grieve, and shed Tears; that He hath left Virtue unaccompanied with Encouragements, and hath bestowed his Favours upon that which is not so much as the Shadow of Virtue; upon a Practice depending more upon a peculiar Temper and Constitution of Body, than upon any thing truly good and virtuous in the Mind. It is to suppose *Almighty God* to accept, instead of Service, what no Father, no Master upon Earth, would accept; and, in one word, it is to suppose God himself to invalidate and render vain, every Precept of Virtue, and every Moral Law, from one End of the *New Testament* to the other: which who can believe, unless one that can believe any thing of the Judge of the whole Earth? Let us therefore,

3. EXAMINE the *Third Supposition*, *viz.* That Almighty God declares He is willing to pardon a Sinner just to such a particular Term of Life, or such a particular Number of Sins: but that if, after that, He shall sin wilfully; He shall be absolutely unpardonable. This looks like a very great Discouragement to Sin: but yet at the End inevitably leads to it. For what would be the Issue, suppose any one, after his final Pardon, should, through the Violence of a Temptation, be ensnared into a wilful Sin? What would He think within himself, when He was once sure that He was in a desperate Condition? Would He not certainly find a sort of a present Refuge, in being more resolute than ever in his wicked Courses, since He could hope for no Good in breaking them off? Considering, therefore, the present Frailty and Weakness of Man, this would be a vast Disadvantage, in the End, to the Cause of Holiness and Virtue. For the promising Pardon to such a particular Number of Transgressions, or to a Course of Sin of such a particular Duration, would almost fatally influence Men, who were not of a sort of Angelical Nature, to venture so far, in some Instance or other, without Fear, or Suspicion of Danger: and all that Time the Cause of Vice would be wholly unrestrained. And then their own Weakness, and the Strength of their evil Habits, would, without all doubt, in, some Case or other, carry them so much farther, as that they must come to an hopeless State: and that State of Despair of future Mercy must make them violent and resolved in their Wickedness. Thus we see that even this Supposition, which seems to take most Care of the Cause of Virtue, leaves it, not only in a naked, and unguarded, but in a very desperate Condition.

NAY, let us suppose that it was declared only in general, that there was a certain Number of Sins, or a certain Period of Time, beyond which God would not pardon; and not any particular Number, or Time, specified to the World: yet still most Men, it is too justly to be feared, would first be led by *Hope* to commit many Sins, with a flattering Persuasion that they should not come up to that *Number*, or arrive at that *Period*; and then, when the Habit was become strong, would be fixed by *Despair* in this Opinion, that being probably got past

81

82

83

that Number, and Period, they had e'en as good continue in their Sins, as their Inclination powerfully directs them.

THUS it appears that we our selves can discover great and considerable Inconveniencies in any other Proposal of *Terms of Reconciliation* between God, and Sinners, except that which I mentioned in the last place, and have before proved to be the *Truth* of the Matter; *viz.*

4. THAT, for the sake of *Jesus Christ*, the Sinner shall be pardoned, who doth, at any time, so forsake his Sins, as to bring forth, in the Course and Tenour of his Life, the contrary Virtues, and sincerely perform the whole Will of God. In which Proposal, you may see, that when it is said that all *wilful Sinners*, amending their Lives, shall be accepted, there is all the Encouragement possible given to the Practice of Virtue, without making its Cause desperate, even to those who have very much neglected it for the Time past: and that when it is said that no *wilful Sinners*, without such actual Amendment of their Ways, shall be accepted, there is all the Discouragement given to Vice that can be, without throwing the Sinner into such a desperate Condition; as to tempt him to have recourse to his very Sins for Comfort.

I AM not insensible that there is this Inconvenience attending the Promulgation of Pardon and Favour, even upon these Terms; *viz.* That Men of evil Dispositions, and strong Propensions to Sin, but yet not void of all regard to future Happiness, are led from hence to the basest Return to so much: Mercy; to imagine, because all wilful Sinners are pardonable upon these Conditions, that therefore all is well, if one time or other they take care to come up to them: and so, with the Possibility of this, they rather encourage themselves to go on for the present in the Commission of Sin, than immediately to forsake it. We find that there were some such ungrateful Persons, in the very first Ages of the *Gospel*, who barely encouraged themselves to continue in their Sins, as if it would magnify the Honour of God's Favour, to have more to pardon than they had already committed. *St Paul* speaks with the utmost Abhorrence of this way of arguing, *Rom. vi. 1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in Sin that Grace may abound?* That is, in order to give the Mercy of God an Opportunity of shewing it self yet more? *God forbid!* God forbid, indeed, that any should be of so unworthy a Temper, as wilfully before-hand to encourage themselves to affront their Maker, because He hath been so merciful, beyond their Deservings, as to declare that He will accept them whenever they truly turn to him.

I MENTION not this, in order to argue at this time with such Persons as these, who seem to be in the very next Degree to desperate and unpardonable; (which one would think sufficient to alarm any Men in their Senses;) but in order to obviate an Objection which may arise from the seeming Imprudence of openly proposing Favour upon such Conditions, *viz.* That wicked Men may be led to abuse them to other Purposes, and to their own Destruction: In order, I say, to obviate such an Objection by observing that nothing of this Nature can be framed, but what they may so abuse; that it is fit and reasonable that, in so great a

84

85

86

Matter, form thing should be left to the Application of Men themselves, and to the Sincerity of their own Minds; and therefore that this rather shews the Wisdom of the Dispensation than destroys it; that if our Gospel be ineffectual on this Account, it is so only *to those who are lost*, that is, to men *lost* to all Sense of *Virtue*, or common Gratitude; *lost* to all that is good and tolerable, and totally given up to worldly or bestial Enjoyments; and that men of such Tempers deserve to fall into such a snare, and appear resolved upon Sin, whatever *Terms of Acceptance* could have been offered them. Notwithstanding therefore, that this Inconvenience may attend this peculiar Method of *Acceptance*: yet since it is excellently fitted for the Happiness of all who are truly honest and sincere; since it hath been shewn that much greater Inconveniencies must attend all others that can well be thought of; and it is plain that *this* ariseth from an invincible Perversity of Mind; this is sufficient to justify the excellent Contrivance of this Method, above all others. For infinite Wisdom itself can do no more than chuse that particular Method which is the best of all that are possible; and hath the fewest real Inconveniencies attending it; and is most agreeable to the Nature of God, the Condition of Man, and the *End* proposed in it.

I SHALL only add that, from what hath been said, we may learn to adore the Goodness of God in condescending to grant any *Terms* to *wilful Sinners*; and to admire his Wisdom, in doing this after such a manner as at once to shew the strictest Regard to *Virtue*; and the tenderest Compassion to his Creatures that have erred from the Paths of it. And God grant that we may be of the Number of those happy Christians, who embrace these Terms, and upon them only, seek for Happiness and Eternal Life! Amen!



Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.

## SERMON V.

LUKE X. The latter part of the 25th Verse.

*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal Life?*

IN answer to the *Enquiry* which I proposed from these Words, *viz.* What it is, that is required in the Gospel, of a *Christian*, who hath been in any sort, or degree, a wilful Sinner, in order to his Acquittance, and Eternal Happiness, thro' *Jesus Christ*; I laid down the *four following* Propositions.

I. IT is required of such an one, that he renounce and forsake his Sins.  
II. IT is required that He sincerely, and with Perseverance, practise Holiness, and Virtue.

III. IN order to his Acceptance, it is required not only that he forsake his own Sins, and amend his Life in other Instances; but likewise that He entirely forgive the Offences and Trespasses of others against himself. And,

IV. IN the Case of Injustice, it is not sufficient that the Sinner leaves off Injustice for the future, so far as to do Wrong to no more Persons than those He hath already injured: but He must also, as ever he hopes for Mercy and Acceptance with God, make Restitution of what He hath at any time wronged any one of; and all possible Reparation for the Injuries which he hath heretofore been guilty of.

THE *Two first* of these I considered in my last Discourse, *first*, shewing the *Truth* of them from plain, unexceptionable *Texts* of the *New Testament*, incapable of any other Meaning; and *secondly*, the Reasonableness, and Fitness of the *Terms* of Salvation laid down in them, considering the Nature of *God* and *Man*, above any other, which we could possibly suppose. I come now to consider the *Third* Proposition laid down; *viz.*

III. THAT it is required of a *Christian*, who hath been a *wilful Sinner*, not only to forsake his own Sins, and amend his Life; but likewise entirely to forgive the Offences, and Trespasses of others, against himself.

THIS *Condition of Acceptance*, as I hinted to you once before, might justly have been reduced to the Two foregoing *Propositions*: because, Forgiveness being a part of Evangelical Duty, and Implacability and Revenge sinful and criminal in their own Natures, it is impossible that a Man should forsake his Sins, which according to the *first Proposition* is absolutely required, without forsaking his Resolutions, and Disposition to Revenge, and Retaliation; or that He should practise all Holiness and Virtue according to the *Second Proposition*, without practising Forgiveness, and demonstrating himself to be of a yielding and placable Temper. But since the Evidence of this Virtue hath been so much over-clouded by the Passions of Men; nay, since it hath passed, in many Cases, almost for a Vice; since our Lord,



and his Apostles, added to their general Exhortations concerning Repentance, and Amendment, the most particular Injunctions about this Point; since, even under the Light of the Gospel there are too many, who will hardly be persuaded to put their high Resentments, and Purposes of Retaliation, amongst their Vices, which they are obliged, upon Pain of Damnation, to relinquish, and forsake; and *lastly*, since there is so much said in the *Gospel* of the peculiar Necessity of this forgiving Temper towards our own Forgiveness, and of its peculiar Efficacy towards our Justification, it very deservedly claims a particular Place in our Consideration, when we are enquiring after the *Terms* of our Eternal Happiness: as will appear, I do not doubt, from what I have to offer concerning it. And for your Satisfaction in this Instance, I propose,

1. To shew you, from the plainest Passages of the *New Testament*, that this Forgiveness of others is indispensably required at our Hands, in order to our own Forgiveness.

2. To prevent Mistakes, I design to shew you the true Meaning of what is declared in any of these Texts concerning the peculiar Efficacy of this Virtue upon Almighty God towards our Acceptance with him. And,

3. I shew you the great Reasonableness, and Fitness, of God's requiring this of us; and of our practising it, in its utmost Extent, and Comprehension.

1. I SAY, I design to prove the Truth of the Proposition laid down; and to shew you, that the Forgiveness of the Offences and Trespases of others against our selves is indispensably required at our Hands, in order to our own Forgiveness, and Justification.

THE first Proof we meet with of this, is in the Sixth Chapter of St. *Matthew*, part of that Divine Discourse upon the Mount, in which our Lord designed to let his Disciples into the Knowledge of the Nature of his Blessings, and of his Doctrine. At the [7th Verse](#) we find him teaching them a most comprehensive *Form of Prayer*: one Petition of which, [ver. 12.](#) is this, *Forgive us our Debts, as we forgive our Debtors.* The *Debts*, by which we have become obnoxious to Almighty God, are our Sins, and Offences against his Law. Accordingly, in St. *Luke*, this Petition is expressed thus, [ch. xi. v. 4:](#) *Forgive us our Sins: for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.* This is the greatest Proof our blessed Lord could have given of the Importance, and Necessity, of this forgiving Temper in us; that He hath put it into this very short Form, in which He could not express all things particularly; and commanded his Disciples to ask Forgiveness of God on no other Terms, but their forgiving the Offences of others against themselves. Forgive us, as we forgive others; *i. e.* as far as we do the same to our Fellow-Creatures; and no farther; or, as it is in St. *Luke*, Forgive us, for we forgive all others: as if we ought not to approach God; and could not, upon the Gospel-Covenant, apply to Him for Forgiveness, unless at the same time we could appeal to our own Hearts, and declare that we were entirely disposed to forgive all others.

BUT because this was, to the corrupted State of Mankind, a new Doctrine, tho' eternally reasonable, and good; our Lord, for the farther Declarations and Explication of his Mind,

92

93

94

*Matth. vi. 14, 15.* immediately adds the following Words, *For if ye forgive Men their Trespases* (that is the meaning of *Debts*, *ver. 12.*) *your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not Men their Trespases; neither will your Father forgive your Trespases.* As if He had said, Be not surprized that I put such a Petition into the *Prayer*, which I have recommended to you; so seemingly new, upon the Principles commonly received in the World: for I tell you that this is one main part of my Doctrine, and one great Condition of that Forgiveness, which I am to preach, and which Sinners are seeking after, that ye forgive one another and that without it God will never forgive you. Agreeably to this, *Mark xi. 25, 26.* He tells his Disciples plainly, that this Forgiveness is so necessary and requisite, that they had as good not pray to God for Forgiveness at all, as to pray to him without this forgiving Disposition. *And when ye stand praying*, (or, when ye are praying to God) *forgive if ye have ought against any: that your Father which is in Heaven may forgive you your Trespases. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in Heaven forgive your Trespases.* It is in vain for you to expect, it is impudent for you to ask, of God, Forgiveness on your own Behalf; if you refuse to entertain this forgiving Temper with respect to others.

THE same thing, this plainly expressed, is very significantly set forth, *Matth. xviii. 23.* in the *Parable* of a *Servant*, or *Slave*, who owed his Master *Ten Thousand Talents*, which his Master, upon his earnest Request, forgave him. But *He*, little moved with the Compassion of his Master, went and found one of his Fellow-Servants, who owed him an *hundred Pence*: whom, notwithstanding all his Entreaties, He cast into prison, and reduced to extreme Misery, on this Account. But when his Lord heard it, He did not reckon that it was fit to let his former Forgiveness stand good: but gave him up to Misery, and Punishment, till He could satisfy for his old Debt. Of which, for fear Christians should not willingly make the Application themselves, our *Lord* doth it in plain Words, *ver. 35.* *So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your Hearts, forgive not, every one his Brother their Trespases:* that is, He shall rigorously exact of us a due Satisfaction, and Punishment for every Sin we have been guilty of towards him; if we be so rigorous as to take Vengeance of our Fellow-Creatures for the Offences they have been guilty of towards our selves. This *Parable* concerning an unconfined Forgiveness, was spoken, upon occasion of *St. Peter's* Question to our Lord, *ver. 21.* He had naturally a great deal of Warmth in his Temper, and an abundance of Heat and Passion, before the Christian Spirit had quelled, and tamed it. This Temper made him willing to hope that, if any Forgiveness was necessary, yet perhaps not a Forgiveness unlimited, and unrestrained; but only a Forgiveness of so many particular Affronts, or Injuries, after which Revenge (for the Sweetness of which some Men would even be content with receiving Injuries) might again become lawful. *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my Brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven Times?* He was willing, you see, to allow what we esteem a good Number of Affronts, provided there might be any Hope left of coming afterwards to Revenge again. But *Jesus* saith unto

95

96

97

him, [ver. 22](#). *I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven*: which Answer, according to the usual way of speaking, (*i. e.* putting a definite large Number for an indefinite one) manifestly was designed to teach him, and, in him, all Men of the like natural Heat and Fire, that his Doctrine was not designed to fix any Bounds to Forgiveness but that, as we must have Forgiveness at the Hands of God, not for *Seven Offences*, but for *Seventy times Seven*; not for any particular Number of our Sins, but for all, without Exception, before we can be happy; so, we must forgive our Fellow-Creatures, not *Seven times* only, but *Seventy times Seven*, if there be occasion; even all, and every of their Offences against us.

THE same thing, in the [xviii<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St. Luke, ver. 4](#). is expressed by our Brother's sinning against us *Seven times in one Day*; where that Number is put for an indefinite Number, because it is not well possible to suppose that any one should be guilty, in one Day, of so many Injuries towards another, as *Seven*. *If He trespass against thee seven times in a Day, and seven times in a Day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him*. Here indeed it is put upon the injurious Man's repenting; and coming to us; and begging Pardon; and declaring his Sense of his Crime. But it is manifest that we are required to forgive not only when He doth this; but likewise when He doth not; because, as I have before observed, we are not to beg Pardon of God any farther than we pardon others; and we are never to pray for Forgiveness, without declaring that we do forgive others; or without feeling within our selves that we have the Disposition and Resolution to do it. The same [St. Luke, ch. vi. ver. 7](#). records these plain Words of our Lord, *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven*; and [ver. 38](#). *For with the same Measure that ye mete (or measure) withal, it shall be measured to you again*: that is, if ye do not forgive others, but are rigorous upon them; Almighty God will certainly be as rigorous upon you, in the requiring Satisfaction and Punishment for every Sin that you have at any time committed against him.

AGREEABLY to this plain Doctrine of their Master, the *Apostles* preached the same universal Love, and unconfined Spirit of Forgiveness. *St. Paul* calls upon the *Romans* to lay aside all Thoughts of Revenge, upon any Provocation, or Injury, [Ch. xii. ver. 19](#). *Dearly beloved avenge not your selves*. And [ver. 21](#). *Be not overcome of Evil*, so far as to return, and retaliate, Injuries; *but overcome Evil*, by returning *Good* for it: which cannot be done without a forgiving Temper. I omit many such like Passages in the Gospels, against Revenge, and Retaliation; because I would confine my self to those *Texts* which expressly touch the Point in hand. The same *St. Paul* calls upon the *Ephesians*, *Be ye kind, one to another; tender-hearted; forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*, [ch. iv. 32](#). And addresses himself to the [Colossians, ch. iii. 12, 13](#). after this pathetic manner; *Put on therefore, as the Elect of God, holy and beloved, (for so Christians are called in the New Testament) Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any Men have a Quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye*. I have now said what is fully sufficient to satisfy you that this Forgiveness of others is

98

99

100



indispensably required at our Hands, in order to our own Forgiveness; and that without this we ought not so much as to ask Forgiveness of God. I shall now,

2. JUST observe to you the true Meaning of what is declared concerning the Efficacy of this *Forgiveness* of others, upon Almighty God, towards our own Forgiveness, and Acceptance; which is in short this, That, without this Forgiveness of others on our part, He will never finally acquit us from the Guilt of any of our Sins: that it is not sufficient for any Sinner to forsake his Drunkenness, or Uncleaness, or Swearing, or any other Vice; but He must likewise forgive others their Trespasses and Injuries against himself: and that otherwise, God will be as severe upon him, and require an Account of every Sin, which he hath at any time been guilty of, through his own life.

I HAVE before shewn you, from the plainest Texts, that it is absolutely required that Men forsake all other Vices; and become holy, and virtuous, in order to their final Pardon, and Happiness. It is impossible, therefore, that what is said concerning the Efficacy of this Forgiveness of others, should invalidate what is said of the Necessity of a good Life in other Respects. I have now shewn you that it is as plainly said as Words can express it, that if we forgive, we shall be forgiven. The Meaning therefore can be only this, that those Sins which we have forsaken, and utterly renounced, shall be forgiven to us; if we will forgive those Sins which others have committed against us: But if we will not, that our Heavenly Father will upon no Terms forgive us our past Sins; not even tho' we have forsaken them. Thus, you see the several Passages about these distinct *Terms* are very easily reconcileable. God will not forgive us, and make us happy, unless we forsake our own Sins: nor will He then forgive us, unless to this Amendment, in other Instances, we add a placable forgiving Temper with respect to Neighbours; and readily and heartily remit to our Fellow-Creatures, so as not to take Vengeance on them, their Offences against ourselves. This I just take notice of here: but I shall have another Opportunity distinctly and fully to handle it, when I come, in due Place and Time, to examine those Pretences which Men have built upon mistaken and misapplied Texts of Scripture: amongst which will come in the Pretence of Men, to get rid of the Necessity of a good Life in other respects, founded upon the Promise of God made to this Forgiveness of other Men's Trespasses, taken distinctly by itself, and separated from the other Rules of the Gospel.

3. I PROPOSED, in the third place, to shew you the great Reasonableness, and Fitness, that this forgiving Disposition should be required by God, and heartily practised by us as it hath been now explained. A very few Words will satisfy us of this: for,

1. IF *this* were so required, as to stand in the stead of other Duties, and atone for the continued Neglect of them: then farewell all Hopes of any Virtue, except this, in the World: of which I cannot determine, whether it would then be a Virtue, or no. In vain are all the Promises of God made to Righteousness; in vain are all his Terrors displayed against all manner of Sin; in vain are all the Moral Precepts inculcated from the beginning to the end

101

102

103

of the *New Testament*; if this single Virtue may at last make Atonement for a Life of wilful, and habitual Sin. This shews us the Unreasonableness of supposing that God can attribute such an Efficacy to this, as to make all his other Laws entirely of none Effect and to give a Loose to almost all manner of Vice, and Wickedness in the World. Nor could any thing be a greater Encouragement particularly to the mutual doing of Injuries, than this. It is highly reasonable, therefore, that this *Forgiveness* should be required, and favoured, no otherwise than as in Conjunction with all other Virtues. And,



2. THERE cannot be a more equitable and unexceptionable Condition, proposed to us than this, that we should not expect that Mercy at the Hands of God, which we will not shew to our Fellow-Creatures. Who that considers the Obligations He hath received from *Almighty God*; the infinite Distance between Him and his Creatures; the Guilt and Heinousness of the least Sin, and the least Neglect, where so much is, on so many Accounts, owing: who that hath common Modesty, or the least degree of Consideration, would not think it fit, to forgive the greatest Offences of others against himself, (little and inconsiderable, in comparison of the least Offences of a Creature against God,) and even voluntarily to do this, in order to dispose his Judge to be merciful to him? Or, can any one think it proper to come into the Presence of God, and ask or expect Pardon for his own Sins; and in the same Breath to tell *Almighty God*, He never can forgive his Brother? *Forgive us our Trespases*, O Lord; tho' we never will forgive those committed by frail Men against our selves. Thus doth every one in effect pray, who comes before God with an heart full of Revenge and Retaliation? or void of Forgiveness, and Mercy. And how absurd this is, I need not say. Would any Earthly *Master*, as our Lord intimates in the Parable, forgive a Servant who should openly refuse to forgive his Fellow Servant? or remit his Punishment for Crimes against himself, when he saw him exercising Barbarity and Cruelty, in revenging himself upon his Fellow Servants for the least Affronts and Injuries? Nay, what Servant would not gladly comply, and think it great Condescension, if his *Master* should offer him to forgive him all his Debts, or Offences, on Condition that he would do the same, with regard to his poor Fellow-Servants? And certainly, there can be no Christian, or Man, of so embittered a Temper, as not to think this a most reasonable Condition of his own Forgiveness; or to expect that God should forgive Him, whilst He breathes nothing but Revenge, and Punishment, for every Offence of his Fellow-Creatures. But enough of this. I must now speak a little upon the *last* of the *four Propositions* laid down: which is this:



IV. IN the Case of Injustice, it is not sufficient that the Sinner leave off Injustice, for the future, so far as not to do the least wrong to any Persons, thro' the remaining part of his life: but He must also, as ever He hopes for Mercy and Acceptance with God, make Restitution of what he hath at any time wronged any one of; and Reparation for the Injuries which He hath at any time heretofore, by Word, or Deed, committed against his Neighbour.



HERE some one may ask, Where is the plain Text of the *New Testament*, which requires this Restitution? To which I answer, that indeed there is none which in so many Words doth say this; but that the reason of this is manifestly because this is a part of *Common Justice*; of the Obligation to which there was ever an open Acknowledgment in all Nations, as of what was no more than one of the lowest Degrees of Virtue. We have an Instance in the *Gospel*, I mean that of *Zaccheus*, who, when he once came to think of making his Peace with God, declared openly his Resolution to restore more than what he had wronged any man of, if any such wrong could be proved upon him. We have it declared by *St. Paul*, that *neither Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God, 1 Cor. 6. 10.* And *Eph. v. 5.* the *Covetous* are reckoned up amongst such as have *no Inheritance in the Kingdom of God, and of Christ.* In the *Tenth Commandment*, recognized and reinforced, in the *Gospel*, we are absolutely forbid to covet any thing that is our Neighbours. Now whoever doth, after an injurious Acquirement, or, indeed an Acquirement of any sort, detain what He knows to belong to another, is most certainly a *Thief*, in the Sense of the Word truly criminal; a *covetous Man* and an *Extortioner*, who flourishes upon the Spoils of his Neighbour and therefore must expect to be excluded the *Kingdom of Heaven*, as such. For who is there that can more properly be said to *covet* what is his Neighbour's, than the Man who, by Fraud, or Force, retains in his Possession what He knows another to have a Right to? Common Honesty, and Justice, are what the very Heathens, and even the most Ignorant of them, have ever acknowledged to be Duties. And as surely as the highest Crimes will be punished by Almighty God; so surely the Dishonest, and Unjust, will have a particular Share in his Wrath. The Design of the *Gospel* was to make *Christians* somewhat more than honest Men: but if They, who have the Light of the *Gospel*, will not be so much as *good Heathens*, they will be certain to inherit the Punishment of the *worst of Christians*, and of such as have refused to practise the very lowest degree of Virtue.

RESTITUTION, and Reparation, I say, are Instances of Justice, strictly due. The continued Refusal of them is a continued Act of Injustice; a continued Theft; a continued Extortion; an Habit of the grossest Vice. And consequently if Injustice it self can never be pardoned, till it be forsaken; this complicated, and continued, wilful Injustice will raise the Account of a Sinner to an unpardonable Heighth. How then can *They* hope for Mercy, who cannot so much as pretend to common Honesty, and Justice; but every Minute of their Lives are treasuring up Wrath, and increasing their first Guilt, by approving their own Injustice; and acting it anew by refusing to undo it by Restitution, and Reparation? Certainly, He that can think to go to Heaven without being an honest Man, and whilst he robs his Neighbour every Moment that He lives without Restitution, must take it to be the Reward of Villainy, and the Receptacle of such Knaves as Human Society would not bear, could they be fairly detected, and prosecuted.

107

108

109

THIS I have said, because many People seem to think *Restitution* to be somewhat distinct from *common Justice*, and *Honesty*: when truly it is only a Branch of it; and the contrary Vice nothing but a complicated *Knavery*, and an Injustice, the Guilt of which increaseth every Moment; and consequently, the Continuance in it, utterly irreconcilable to all Hopes of Happiness, according to the Gospel-Dispensation. I might have added more upon this Head: but it is not my present Design to enter into the Nature of this, or any other, particular Virtue; but only to shew that *this* is indispensably required in order to the Justification, and Happiness, of such *Christians* as have sinned against the plain Law of Justice and Honesty.

I HAVE now gone over the *four general Propositions* which I laid down, in answer to the important *Enquiry* after the Way to *Life* and Eternal Happiness. We see, from the plainest Proofs, that there remain no Hopes of Acceptance for Sinners, according to the Gospel, unless they forsake their Sins, and practise Virtue; unless they heartily forgive the Trespasses of their Neighbours; and make Restitution of what they have wronged any Man of, according to the utmost of their Power. From hence appear the Vanity and Folly of building any Hopes of Mercy upon any thing besides these, so clearly, as to need no other Proof. But because the Imaginations of Men have been various in framing other Terms of Acceptance; and pressing even the *New Testament* it self into their Service: it is another Branch, therefore, of the Design I have now in View, to examine particularly into their *Pretences*; and to endeavour to shew such Persons their miserable Delusion. In the mean time, *If we know these Things; happy only are we if we do them*: Which God grant, & c.



Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, & c.

## SERMON VI.

St. *JAMES* ii. 10.

*For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all.*

HAVING in several Discourses endeavoured plainly and particularly to propose the *Terms*, or *Conditions*, on which alone *Christians*, who have been in any sense, or any degree, *wilful Sinners*, may hope to be acquitted, justified, accepted, and made eternally happy, by Almighty God; it may not be improper now to handle this important Subject after a manner, which, tho' something different, may yet be of farther use to us in our serious Enquiry after the Way to Happiness, and Eternal Life. In order to this, I could think of no Passage of Scripture, more comprehensive; or more proper, than this taken out of *St. James*, in which He declares that *whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point; he is guilty of all:* and I design, therefore,

I. To explain to you, as well as I can, the true Meaning of the Words.

II. To propose to you the Doctrine plainly taught in them: and to prove the Justice and Reasonableness of it.

III. To answer some Questions, and Doubts, which may arise upon this Subject. And

IV. To draw such Observations, and Inferences, from the whole, as may be of great use in order to our successful Endeavours after Eternal Life.

I. IT is very proper to explain to you, as well as I can, the true Meaning of this Passage: which, as to the manner of Expression, is not without some Difficulty. And,

1. THE Meaning of it cannot be this, that *whosoever transgresseth in one single Instance*, is as bad a Man; as great a Sinner; as guilty an Offender; as he that transgresseth in every Instance possible: that he who covets his Neighbour's Goods, for Example, is as bad a Man, and as great a Sinner, as he who not only covets his Neighbour's Goods, but also commits Adultery, Murder, and Theft; profanes the Name of God; dishonours his Father and Mother; and breaks every Law that he can possibly, in Contempt of God, and his Authority. This cannot be the meaning of the Passage: because it is absurd, at first hearing, thus to take away all Distinction between the degrees of Sin, and Sinners; and to make all Transgressors, tho' differing in the Instances, and Number, of their several Transgressions, equal in their Crimes, and in their Guilt. Nor consequently,

2. CAN it be understood to imply in it, that God will punish all such Persons equally; that the Man who offends only in one Instance, shall be made equal, in the degree of Punishment, to him who hath offended in that, and in many more: because the Punishment of Offenders is without doubt to be proportioned to their several Offences; and because he who offends in many Cases, is guilty of a more repeated and settled Contempt of the Au-

112

113

thority of the Law-giver, than the other, and therefore must reasonably expect a greater degree of Punishment. But,

3. HE who offends against the known Law of God, in any one Instance, may, on other Accounts, tho' not on these above-mentioned, be said to be guilty with respect to all his Laws.

IN the first place, as he sins manifestly against that Divine Authority which enacted that part of the Law which he transgresseth, as well as those others which he thinks fit to observe. For Sin, tho' committed but in one Instance, is a sort of a Denial of that Authority by which it is forbidden: and this, tho' applied by the Sinner himself to one Instance only, yet affects all others; because Almighty God hath the same Authority to command, or forbid one thing, that he hath to command or forbid another. Now if we, by our Practice, deny, in effect, his Right to govern us in one Instance; we do, in effect deny it in all; because He hath as much Right to do it in this, as in others; and no more in others than in this. In this respect therefore; whosoever *offends wilfully in one Point*; may be said to be *guilty of all*; that his wilful offending in this Point, is a Rebellion against the Authority of God: which toucheth all his other Laws, as well as this one which he transgresseth: And thus St. *James* himself seems to explain his own Meaning in the Verse immediately following the Text, *For He that said, Do not commit Adultery, said also, Do not kill. If therefore thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law.* As if he had expressed himself thus. The meaning of my charging a Man who sins in *one* Instance, with being *guilty of all*, is this, that the same God who forbids the other Sins; forbids this one also. Therefore, if thou dost abstain from the other Sins, and yet wilfully sinnest in this one point; Thou art a Sinner with respect to the other Points as well as this: because God claims no greater Authority in those other Points than He doth in this: and Thou, by wilfully offending in this one Point, callest in question his whole Authority, and the *Validity* of his whole Law, which hath no more to uphold it in other Instances, than what it hath in this which thou neglectest. And this certainly must aggravate and increase the Guilt of one, who wilfully sins in any *one* Instance only, that it reflects highly upon the whole Law; and that, by calling in question, or refusing to obey, the Authority of God in this one Point, the Sinner effectually calls in question his whole Authority, which is just the same with respect to others. In this Sense therefore, it may be true, that a Man's Guilt will not be proportionable to the intrinsic Evil of the single Sin which He indulges himself in; but aggravated by considering this Sin, as forbidden by the Authority of God; and as having a very bad Influence upon that Authority in other respects; tending as much to weaken and destroy it in *other* Instances, as it Both in effect call it in question, and contemn it in *this*.

AGAIN, the *Guilt* of a Man who offends wilfully in *one* Point of God's Law, must likewise be supposed to extend, in some degree, to all the rest, because it is certain that the same Disposition of Mind which engageth, or permits him to transgress one Law, when Inclination

114

115

116

or Interest, Pleasure or Profit, invite him, would likewise prevail with him to transgress any of the others likewise, supposing him under the Influence of the same Inclination or Interests, Pleasure or Profit. For the Occasion of his wilful Commission of *one* Sin, is that He hath some Temptation to it, which He has shewn to be too hard for his Faith, and his Sense Of God's Authority, to conquer. If therefore, he had the same Temptation to another Vice; if it were accompanied with the same Circumstances, equally grateful to his Sensuality, or Covetousness, or Ambition; is it not plain that He would equally permit himself to be carried away with the Temptation to it? So that his Innocence in other Respects is not owing to his Virtue, or Faith, or Sense of God's Authority but to Necessity; to his want of the same Inclination, and the same Temptation to these, which He hath, with respect to that which He wilfully commits. For if he had that Faith, or Sense of God's Authority, which is sufficient to set him above the same degree of Temptation to other Vices; this would as certainly set him above the Power of the Temptation He hath to this one. And consequently, He must be guilty, in some degree, with respect to all: because He is so disposed, as that his Religion, were it to undergo an equal Tryal in Other Respects, would most certainly yield to it in them, as it doth in this Instance, in which it pleaseth God in a particular manner to try his Faith, and Sense of his Authority. I do not say that Almighty God will actually punish such Man as much in degree, as if He had been tried in all other Instances, and wilfully sinned in all: but I know not whether in strict Justice He might not. And this I say, that a Man's Guilt must be in Proportion to his inward Disposition; which, it is manifest (all Circumstances of Inclination and Temptation being supposed equal) would produce the same Behaviour and Practice in *all* Cases, which it doth in *one*. *Whosoever* therefore *offends* in *one Point* only, is *guilty of all*, in this Sense; because He would as certainly yield in *all*, as He doth in *this*, were He to undergo a Tryal, equal in every respect, in all other Cases,

AGAIN, the same may be proved, and explained, by the Case of such as wilfully transgress any Humane Law. Would not any Master think his Authority, with respect to all his Commands, called in question, by a Servant, who should chuse which He would obey, and which He would not, merely by his own Humour, or Inclination, or Profit; and wilfully refuse to obey such a particular just and lawful Command, because He had no mind to it; or could get more present Advantage by disobeying it? And would not that Master think that the same Disposition of Mind in such a Servant would carry him to injure and affront him in all other Instances likewise, could He propose to himself the same Pleasure, or Interest, by so doing? Nay, Would not he speak of him, or, treat him, as a Person to whom he was obliged for no Service performed out of a Sense of his Authority, or any farther than his own present Interest directed him? The same may be said of any *Lawful Supreme Powers*, and the *Subjects* under them; who, if they wilfully offend against any *one* of their just Laws, are in some Sense guilty of *all*: as they rebel against the Authority which is the same in this Law, as it is in *all* others; and as they would certainly offend against *all* others, were they not sensible, they

117

118

119

could not do it, with the same Pleasure or Profit, the same Secrecy or Impunity. And who will reckon the *material Act* of Obedience, in any respect, a Virtue: when it is so certain from other Instances, that it had been Disobedience, had the same inviting Circumstances attended it?

IF therefore, any Persons do allow themselves in any one wilful Sin; they may be certain that their *Guilt* reaches beyond, this one Sin, as it includes in it a Contempt of that Authority by which other Sins, as well as this, are forbidden; and a Disposition which would end in the Commission of all other Sins, were the same Tryals offered them in all respects. *Whosoever therefore keepeth the whole Law besides, and yet offends in one Point, is, in this Sense, guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit Adultery, said also, Do not steal. Now if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou steal, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law.*

IT seems there were in those Days certain unreasonable Persons, amongst the Christians, who were very ready to obey the Law of God in such Instances as were agreeable to their Inclination or their Interest. But then they desired leave to hope that they might, for the sake of this Obedience, be excused from observing it in some other particular Instance: which to be sure They would chuse out for themselves, according to their own Inclination, and Temper. Thus they would willingly retain a darling Sin; and compound for this, by serving God, and obeying his Law, in other Instances, in which they did not find so much Difficulty. And this, I am persuaded, is the Case of many *Christians* now a-days, who think, if they observe the Laws of Christ in most Instances, especially if they be not guilty of open, and notorious Sins, they may indulge themselves in *one Vice*, which they hope will be atoned for by their Observance of the other Evangelical Laws. This Vice they chuse for themselves: not being able to find any Allowance made by *God* to one, more than to another. But, in opposition to this unchristian Humour, and fatal Mistake, this Affirmation of *St. James* in the Text, was designed which I have explained to you; and shall now proceed, as I proposed, in the *second place*,

II. TO lay down the Doctrine plainly taught, or implied, in these Words of *St. James*: and to prove the Justice, And Reasonableness of it. Now,

1. THE least that can be implied in them is this, that it is not enough for any Man to obey all the other Laws of God, with a silent reserve of so much as one Case, in which he allows himself wilfully to transgress; that the Authority of God equally extends to all his Laws; and that refusal of Obedience in one single Instance is a Rebellion against that Authority that it is an *Universal Obedience* which God requires, to all his Commands equally, and without Partiality; that Obedience in all Particulars except one shall not atone for the wilful Neglect of that one; but that whosoever doth allow himself in one wilful Sin, under this Pretence, will find himself miserably mistaken, and will be judged and punished at last, as a Contemner of the Authority of God. This is the least, I say, that can be implied in this Declaration of *St. James*: and is no more than what our Lord himself declared, [Matth. vii.](#)

120

121

122



21. where He openly warns all his Disciples, that nothing can entitle them to an Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, but the *doing the Will of his Father which is in Heaven*. But whosoever wilfully transgresseth in any *one* Point, certainly cannot be said to do the Will of God, in that Instance, tho' He doth it in all others. Besides, his Will is his *whole Will*, taken all together: and this being a part of it; whoever transgresseth this part of it, doth not do the *Will*, or the *whole Will*, of God. That Man therefore, cannot, upon the Gospel Terms, hope for an Admittance into Heaven, who allows himself in the habitual Commission of any one known Sin; or in any one wilful Transgression of the Will of God. Our *Lord* himself hath in those Words put our Title to Heaven upon our sincere Regard to the Whole Will of God in all its parts: as his *Apostle* in the Text, hath utterly precluded all who pretend to observe some parts of God's Law, whilst they wilfully continue in the Neglect of others, from any Hopes of God's Favour.



2. THE Justice and Reasonableness of *God's* requiring this *Universal Obedience* without any Exception to any one Law, or any one part of his Will more than another, is so apparent, that every one can see it in the Case of others, tho' He may be so weak as fondly to hope for an Exemption in his own Case. Put it to the covetous Man, whether the Condemnation threatned against the more expensive Vices be not just and fitting; who more ready to join in it than himself? Put it to the Voluptuary, whether it be not highly reasonable that the Wrath of God should be reveled, and executed, against so vile a Crime as Covetousness; and you need not doubt of his Approbation of it. So will the dishonest Man condemn the Uncleaness of another; and the unclean condemn the dishonest: every one thinking (if they think at all of such Matters) that any particular Transgression of God's Law must in reason be punished by God; so it be not that of which they know themselves to be guilty, and for which they have their own peculiar Temper, Inclination, or Interest to plead. This indeed they will inwardly except; out of a Self-Love and an Aversion to Misery: but yet even this they do, only with some faint Hope; not with any fixed Judgment, that it will not be highly fitting even for this particular Sin to receive its just Reward. But suppose this were their fixed Judgment in their own Case; we know their Judgment is bias'd when themselves are concerned; and much more free when it is the Case of others about which they are to judge.



LET, therefore, but the Judgment of Christians be enquired into, about the Case of others living but in one known Sin, for which themselves have no Fondness, or Inclination; and you will find them all allowing that this continued Course of one particular Sin is a most high Provocation to God; a continued Affront to his Authority; and what justly deserves to be punished at last, when He shall come to judge all Men for their Offences against him.



BUT, farther, if this *Universal Obedience* were not the Condition of Eternal Happiness; what would Men have to do, but to chuse out the Vice for which they find the greatest Fondness in themselves, and that which will be most agreeable to them; and give themselves

all that Loose in this, which can be consistent with the Observation of the other Laws of the Gospel? Nay, where would be the Harm, upon this Supposition, if each Man chose to himself Two or Three Darlings out of the whole Catalogue of Sins, to love, and pursue? If God can be supposed to pass over the continued wilful Violation of his Laws in one Instance, for the sake of Obedience in others; why not in *Two* Instances, if the same Excuse of Inclination, and Temptation, can be pleaded? Thus every Man may have his Idol, set up in the same Heart in which God places his Temple: and which do you think will have the greatest Share of Adoration, and Service in this Competition? Why, it is plain that God Almighty can have only that Service which the Idol can spare; no more Love, or Obedience, than what is consistent with the Prosecution of this particular Vice now supposed to be connived at by God. And can any one think it tolerable to entertain such an Opinion of Almighty God, as makes his Will to truckle to a beloved Sin; and to accept of so much Service only as *that* can spare; without being neglected it self? Can any one think it pardonable in himself to think thus of the wise, and holy God, that He can give a Licence after such a manner to any one Vice: much more to think that He can give such Allowance to all Vices?

126

FOR I must observe farther, that this Supposition would not only be an Allowance to any one particular Vice; but in general to *all*, and every one. For if Almighty God be supposed to overlook the Covetousness of one Man, for the sake of any other Virtues; He must, by the same Reason, be supposed to connive at the Dishonesty of another; at the Uncleaness of a third; at the Drunkenness of a fourth; and so consequently, at the particular Vice to which any particular Person hath addicted himself. For by the same Right that we chuse our own Vice, which we think to except from his Anger and Condemnation; by the same Right, I say, another chuses another Vice, agreeable to his Temper, Inclination, and Opportunities. And by this means not only our darling Vice is excepted; but the darling Vice of every one in particular: which brings in an Encouragement to universal Debauchery; and to every Instance of Folly, and Wickedness. The Adulterers, Fornicators, Drunkards, Swearers, Extortioners, Covetous, Malicious, Revengeful, Backbiters, Envious, Murtherers; all who are expressly excluded the *Kingdom of Heaven* in the *New Testament*, may at this rate entertain Hopes of getting into it by this Artifice: if they can but plead an Observance of God's Law in other respects; and a strong Inclination, and Temptation, to that particular Vice, in which they have indulged themselves. As unreasonable then, as it is to suppose Almighty God to leave room for Hopes of Indulgence, or Pardon, to all manner of Vices, so they meet not in *one* Person; so reasonable is it, to believe that an *Universal Obedience*, without Partiality, to all his Laws, is the only Obedience to which He hath annexed the Promise of our inheriting Eternal Life.

127

128

AGAIN, if this be not the one only Rule for us to go by, in this Affair; we must suppose our selves left to our own Government and Guidance, much more than is really consistent with supposing God to be our Lord and our Legislator. For, according to this Supposition,

it doth not depend upon Almighty God, what Laws shall be obligatory to us; but upon our selves, and our own Humour, or Inclination; our Pleasure, or Profit. For we are to pick and chuse out of all the Laws, He hath given us, which is our Pleasure to neglect; and to except out of all the Sins, which He hath in general condemned, that particular Sin which we have a mind to indulge. And tho' God hath declared, it, amongst others, to be a damning Sin; yet at this rate we have it in our Power to reverse this Decree, and to alter the Nature of it: that so, what God hath declared pernicious, and fruitful of Misery, shall become, by our own favour to it, of an harmless and innocent Nature; only an Instance of our Frailty, and a Subject for his future Mercy to exercise it self upon. He, hath told us, that if we be not Doers of his Will we must expect his Wrath, and Eternal Displeasure: and if this be not so, then we are our own Directors, and in great Part out of his Jurisdiction; I mean, if we can frame another Rule for our selves, and oppose it to his. He commands obedience to *all* his Laws. We claim a Right to except *one*, He forbids every *Vice*. We pretend a Privilege to retain *one*: and promise him we will be as careful as can be in other Instances, if He will overlook this. After this manner, I say, we take our selves from under his Government; and assume a Dominion over ourselves in some Instances, equal to what we pretend to allow to him in others: But nothing can be more absurd than this: and consequently, without universal, impartial Obedience, we can have no Hopes to inherit his Rewards, or escape his Punishments.

BUT, last of all, the Supposition of his accepting of an Observance of *some* parts of his Will, from Men who continue in known Neglect, and wilful Violation of *others*, is directly contrary to the Design Christianity; and destructive of the main End of the Gospel. For it was a Regard to universal Holiness; to a more perfect Obedience to the Laws of Righteousness, and a more perfect Freedom from all Sin, that engaged God to send his Son into the World and that influenced our Lord to undertake his great Work. He appeared to put away and destroy, not one, or two, but all *the Works of the Devil*. His *Grace was reveled to teach Men to deny Ungodliness, and worldly Lusts*; without Exception, and without any Reserve to what might be the peculiar Favourite of any Man. And it a contradicting this Design; frustrating this End; if he hath left any Hopes of the Mercy which he purchased, to Those who allow themselves in any one of the Works of the Devil or continue in any sort of Ungodliness; or in any one wordly Lust.

BESIDES, the Case of the Generality, or Bulk, of Mankind being manifestly this, that it is one particular darling Sin that enslaves the Man; that he is devoted to this, and for this often neglects other Sins, as well as his Duty: it was without doubt to engage Men to leave the Sin *which doth so easily beset them*; to disengage them from that Bondage which This kept them in, that the *Son of God* appeared in the Flesh, and instituted his holy Religion. I know, there are Men who seem, without Distinction, to be under the Government and Influence of a whole Body of Sin: to be as covetous, for Instance, as is consistent with their

129

130

131

other Vices; and as vicious in other respects as is consistent with their Covetousness, and worldly Designs. But the Case of Multitudes is, that it is one Vice which generally enslaves them so much, that they can willingly sacrifice other Vices, as well as their Virtue, to it. And now put the Case, that our Lord can be supposed to give any Ground for hope of Favour to such Persons, continuing in this State, upon Condition they do, in other Points, observe his Laws: and what Good could his coming into the World be supposed to do, if He brings along with Him any such Indulgence as gives Encouragement, and Strength to the darling Vice of every Man, who believes in him? Where would be any Endeavours after the *Perfection*, talked of in the Gospel, and becoming Humane Nature? Where would be the Truth of that Proposition, that Christ came to *call Sinners to Repentance*, and Amendment? How vain must his professed Design be, and how unworthy of an holy, and wise God; if He be supposed to appear so partially in the Cause of Virtue? How might the *Heathen Philosophers* themselves have boasted that their own Schemes were more worthy of the Deity? and have drawn an unanswerable Argument against the Divine Authority of an Institution, in which Allowance was given, in effect, to any Sin or Wickedness Men would particularly give themselves up to? But I have said enough upon the present Head.

THE remaining part of what I proposed upon this Subject, I must reserve to another opportunity. But from what hath been said it is evident that, if we would not fix the highest Absurdities upon *Almighty God*, and our *Saviour*, and his *Gospel*; we must be firmly persuaded that it is an *universal Obedience* to all his Commands equally, which God requires in order to our Happiness: and that the continued Allowance of our selves in any one wilful Sin, is inconsistent with all Hopes of his Mercy, as far as it is revealed and promised in his Gospel.



Concerning the Terms of Acceptance, &c.

## SERMON VII.

St. JAMES ii. 10.

*For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all.*

**I**N last Discourse I proposed,

I. To shew you the true meaning of these Words.

II. To lay down the Doctrine certainly taught, or implied, in them.

III. To answer some Questions which may arise upon this Subject.

IV. To draw such Observations and Inferences, from the whole, as may be of use, in order to our successful Endeavours after Eternal Life.

As to the *first* of these; I then shewed you that one who allows himself in the wilful Neglect of any known Duty, or in the wilful Commission of any known Sin, may justly be said to be guilty, with respect to the other parts of God's Law, as well as this particular Instance, as he sins against that Divine Authority by which the whole was enacted; and as the sinning against that Authority in one Instance doth imply in it a Neglect and Contempt of it in all others also, in which it is of no greater force or account, than it is in this Particular: and likewise, as the Disposition of Mind which permits or induceth the Sinner wilfully to transgress in one Instance, would inevitably produce the same Effect, in other Instances, supposing all the Circumstances of Inclination, and Temptation, to be equal.

AS to the *second* Head; I shewed you that the main Design of the Passage was to assure Men of the Folly of imagining that they could atone for the wilful Violation, and continued Transgression, of any one Law of God, by the Observation of others: and therefore, that the least that could be intended by St. *James* in it was this, that it is an universal Obedience to all his Laws which God expects of Christians; that if they think to except any part of his Will from their Observation, and that He will excuse this for the Sake of Obedience to other parts of it, they will find themselves miserably deluded; and that nothing can recommend them to his Favour at last, but a sincere, constant, and universal Obedience to all his Commands, without Partiality, and without Exception; and that upon the Condition of such an Obedience, for the Time to come, any Christian who hath been a Sinner, may hope for his Mercy, thro' *Jesus Christ*: but not without it; as far as we know of his Will declared in the Gospel. This I shewed you to be plain from these Words of St. *James*, as well as others of our *Lord* himself: and likewise from the many Absurdities following from the contrary Supposition. I come now,

III. To consider some Questions, and Doubts, which may arise upon this Subject.



Now there are Two which presently offer themselves to our Thoughts. The *first* is this, Whether it doth not follow from what hath been said that Almighty God requires of us a perfect, sinless, Obedience. To which I answer,

1. IT is certain that God requires an Obedience to all, and every of his Commands; at all Times, and in all Places equally: and likewise that there is no one Sin, or Transgression of his Law, in any one Instance, but what He disapproves of, and absolutely forbids. And therefore, if our Practice were directed, without Variation, by his Rules; it would be a perfect and sinless Obedience. In this Sense therefore, it may justly be said that He requires a perfect, sinless Obedience at our Hands, free from all wilful Sin. And wilful Sin being that which we could have avoided, if we would; it is certain, He may justly forbid, and condemn it in every Instance. Nay, this we might be certain of, without any express Revelation, that the supreme infallible Understanding, the most wise and holy God, could not but will that every Law of Reason should be strictly and constantly observed by reasonable Creatures: and could not but condemn all wilful Transgressions of it, as the most unreasonable and absurd Practices. But now, since this is such an Obedience as was never yet actually performed by any Mortal; every Man in the World having found himself surrounded with Infirmities, and misled by Temptations and Trials, in some Instance or other, to as that He cannot but confess himself guilty of some wilful Deviation, in some Point or other, from the Rule of right Reason, and the Will of God; it remains to enquire what *Condescension*, is shewn by Almighty God, in the Gospel, thro' i.

2: THEREFORE, it is certain, from the Gospel, that every wilful Transgression of his Law is not unpardonable: for the Design of it, was to offer Pardon upon some Conditions to wilful Sinners. This is very consistent with the former Proposition: For, as a Father may command such and such Particulars; and yet admit his Son to Reconciliation, upon some Terms, after he hath transgressed any of these Commands: so likewise may Almighty God require Obedience to every one of his Commands, at all Times, And in all Places and yet, after any have been so unhappy as wilfully to transgress any of his Commands, He may forgive them these Transgressions, upon some certain Terms and Conditions. It is, therefore, certain that Almighty God forbids every Sin always, and enjoins the Practice of every Virtue at all Opportunities; and in this Sense may be said to require a sinless Obedience: and it is as certain that there is room left by his open Declarations, for Favour and Mercy to such as have wilfully committed Sin. It appears, therefore,

3. THAT the Perfection, which is so required of Christians, as that they shall not be made happy at last without it, is Amendment and Reformation in those Instances in which they have wilfully failed; and a constant Progress in Virtue and well-doing, This State of the *Case* at once guards against that comfortless Doctrine, on the one hand, that God will insist at last upon that spotless and absolute Perfection which never was yet known in a Mortal: and against that fatal Mistake, on the other hand, that He will accept Sinners to Mercy, for

138

139

140

the. Sake of Christ, tho' they have no Signs in their Lives and Behaviour, of their hearty Repentance, and Detestation of Sin.

THE Perfection required of Man, in a State of Trial and Probation, cannot, be a State uncapable of Improvement: because this seems not attainable in such a State by such a Creature; or, at least, never was actually attained by any. And who, according to this Rule, supposing this to be required, could come to any well-grounded Hopes of Happiness? For who in his Senses can think himself at any time so good, so perfectly free from every thing evil, as He might possibly be? But it must consist in a daily Progress, and sincere Endeavour, after Perfection; in an increasing Conquest over what is evil in us; and in a daily acquiring more and more of those good Qualities, in which we can think our selves defective. This progressive Motion in the Paths of Virtue, and this increasing Conquest over Sin, will sufficiently demonstrate the sincere Repentance of a Sinner; and will be a good Foundation in his breast, for Hope and Comfort.

IN this Sense therefore, God requires universal Obedience to all his Commands equally; and insists upon it as a Condition without which we shall not be happy at last, that in what Instances soever we have in Time past offended, in *these* He expects us for the future to amend; that in what Points soever of the Law of Righteousness we are defective, He absolutely requires an Improvement in them; a Progress, or growing, in all that is good; a Departure, or flying, from every thing that we know to be evil. He will bestow no Happiness upon those who go on to allow themselves in any one known Transgression of his Law: till Death overtakes them; nor doth He in the Gospel give us Ground to entertain any Hopes, that they than ever experience his Favour, or be put upon the Level with such as by patient Continuance in well-doing seek after Glory and Immortality.

THIS, therefore, is a sufficient Answer to the *first Question*, concerning the Obedience required to all God's Commands; that it cannot be so understood, as if He would not make any happy who had not arrived in this World at a State of *absolute Perfection* and Freedom from every degree of Sin, or moral Evil: but must be understood thus, that He doth absolutely require of all who know themselves to have been in any respect *wilful Sinners*, that they do sincerely set about the Work of Amendment; and demonstrate their Sincerity by getting Ground of their Vices: by proceeding to greater degrees of Virtue; and by going still more and more towards the Perfection of rational Creatures; at least till they are out of the Power and Dominion of any known Sin; and till they are in such measure possessed of the contrary Virtue, as to be justly denominated virtuous in that Instance in which they know they have been vicious. This is a State of Perfection to which the meanest Christian may arrive; if He knows but what Virtue and Vice mean. This is that Condition of our Acceptance, that Law of the Gospel, which will admit of no Abatements at the great Day. And it is an invaluable Mercy, that God will accept of this Progress, and Improvement in Virtue, instead of State of blameless Perfection.

141

142

143

THE *second Question* which offers itself, now we have been speaking of the *Terms of Favour* proposed in the *Gospel*, and the Conditions of our Acceptance at last, is this, How we shall be able to form good Judgment concerning our own Condition; or to know when we are in such Circumstances, as to be able to have a well-grounded Hope unto Eternal Life.

WHAT I have said concerning the *last Question* will help us in the resolving this to our own Satisfaction: but I shall not refer to that; but be a little more particular. I am sensible, indeed, that many desire to know exactly what is barely enough for their Happiness, for fear they should do too much for themselves, not out of any Love to Virtue; but indeed out of Love to Vice, which they would gladly retain something of, if they could with any Safety. This, believe, is impossible to be defined exactly, so as to suit all Cases: God having never declared what is the lowest Pitch of Holiness that He will accept of at last. And I cannot but think it wisely concealed from Men; that so Sincerity may be encouraged, and a Love to Virtue, which, seems impossible to consist with the Notions of such Inquirers that so the more may depend upon Men's own Integrity; and lest the general Progress in the Paths of Virtue, should be more stunted than it is already: it being too probable that most Men would be content to place themselves just out of Danger, rather than to make any large Progress in the Ways of Righteousness. For there is a great deal of difference between the Love of future Happiness, and the Fear of future Misery; and much more in the latter that moves the Actions of most Men, than in the former; and Ground enough for Suspicion, that if Men could but secure themselves from Punishment in the Life to come, they would stop just at that Pitch which they knew would do that, and not greedily aspire after such Degrees of Virtue as would carry them to great Heights of Happiness. But tho' it be impossible to satisfy all the Inquiries of such Persons, as these; who indeed cannot be in a safe way, whilst they are of a Temper so little a-kin to Sincerity, and a serious Love of Religion: yet it may be possible to offer such Considerations as may help other more truly sincere Christians to judge whether have Ground to hope that they themselves are so disposed, and so free from Sin, as to be within the Covenant of Grace and Mercy, the Conditions of which I have, in some former Discourses, been representing and: explaining to you.

HE, therefore, who makes no other use of the gracious Proposals of the Gospel, but to encourage himself to recover from any Sin, of which He knows he hath wilfully been guilty; and is so affected by any Instance of his past Weakness, as to keep a greater and stricter Watch over himself for the Time to come; He, who at any time finds, upon a review of himself, that, tho' He be not absolutely perfect, yet He gets Ground of his Imperfections, and proceeds, by a daily Course, farther and farther, in the Paths of Virtue; He, who carefully avoids the Opportunities and Temptations, by which He knows He hath formerly fallen, may reasonably conclude that He is truly sensible of the Importance of Holiness, and of the Necessity or forsaking his Vices, and sincerely disposed to practise the one, and relinquish the other. He, who, when He unavoidably, and without any Fault of his own, meets with

144

145

146



the same Trials, and Temptations, which have formerly vanquished him, finds his Belief of a future State and Sense of his Duty strong enough to vanquish them, and resist all their Arts and Force, hath good ground to Hope that He is in a Way acceptable to God.

IN some Cases, the Rule for this Judgment is so manifest that it cannot be mistaken. He who hath robb'd or cheated his Neighbour after any manner; whether by the Smiles of a Friend, or the Force of an Enemy; cannot but know whether He hath, or hath not, made Restitution, to the uttermost of his Power, of whatsoever He hath thus obtained by Fraud or Force. This is what removes the Guilt of that Injustice: and without this it is impossible He can think that He comes up to the *Terms of Acceptance*, or is in a safe Way to Happiness. So likewise, in all other sorts of personal Injuries, whether respecting the Reputation, or Quiet, of our Neighbour; He who doth to his utmost make Amends for the Damage received, comes up to the *Terms of Acceptance*, as far as this Crime is concerned. So that in this Case it is too easy to judge, for Men to pretend an Evasion. In fine, *He* is certainly in a safe Way, who, in this State, which, as I said, is not a State of absolute but of increasing Perfection in Virtue, is ever studying what He hath to subdue in himself, and is always subduing it by the Power of Religion.

ON the contrary; He, who takes Encouragement before sinning from the Doctrine of Acceptance and Reconciliation, delivered in the Gospel, to venture still farther in the Paths of Sin, with a foolish Hope of coming up to the *Terms* of that *Acceptance* some time or other, is as yet in a very unsafe Condition without any the least Ground of Hope from those Terms of Favour which He thus abuses to his own vile Purposes. He, who finds himself led by his sinning at any time, rather to love the Sin than to detest and guard against it; rather, to run to the Temptation, than to fly from it, hath too much Reason to suspect his own Case. He, who finds his Sense of the Importance of Morality and Virtue diminishing, and the Power Of the World, or the Flesh, increasing over him, so far that he is still every Day carried by their Allurements, or Affrightments, into the Practice of Sin, may be sure that he is rather laying up for himself the Matter of a terrible Repentance to come, than truly repenting at this time of any thing past. He, who keeps Possession of what he hath unjustly obtained; or refuses to do right, or make Restitution, to his Neighbour whom he hath injured; how deep soever his Sorrow, how many soever his Tears may be, is far from the Way of God, or any well-grounded Hopes of Salvation, upon the *Gospel-Terms*. In a word, He, who finds within himself that his Virtue grows less, and his Passions increase in Strength; that he is so far from getting Ground of them, that they get ground of him every Day, is in the worst Condition we can well imagine. And He, who finds that he is a Captive to any one wilful Sin; that he has not yet made any successful Warfare against it; that he hath not yet got out of its Power; that his Faith in God, his Sense of Religion, his Belief of a future State, are not sufficient to disengage him from it; but that it keeps its Ground, and is too hard for the Resistance of his Virtue, may be sure that He is not yet in such a Condition, as that He may at all depend

147

148

149

upon the Favour of God, promised in the Gospel to returning Sinners; having not yet made himself any more obedient to his whole Will than He hath been in Time past.

THESE Particulars I have laid down briefly: but hope the Consciences of all, who are any ways concerned, will apply what has been said to their own particular Cases; without any such foolish Partiality as may endanger their own Eternal Salvation. But if they will not act sincerely with themselves, when themselves only are concerned, and when Almighty God hath shewn such a tender Regard to their Interest; but, on the contrary, will endeavour, and labour hard, to put a Cheat upon their own Souls: how wonderfully strange is this? and how little Thanks will they owe themselves, when they come to feel the Effect of so wilful a Delusion! After having spoken to these *Two Questions*, I come now, in the last place, as I proposed,

IV. To draw such Observations and Inferences from the whole, as maybe of use to us in our successful Endeavours after Eternal Life. These are such as our Thoughts, I hope, have been naturally led into already by my part Discourses; and will often run into, when we come to retire, and to consider of our true and eternal Interest. The Time will now permit me to mention but Two or Three. As,

1. FROM the very Words of St. *James* in the Text, and the lowest Sense in which they can be understood, as well as from the Absurdity which I have shewn in the contrary Supposition, it is evident that, upon the Gospel Terms, there is no such thing as atoning for the Neglect of one Virtue by the Performance of others; nay, nor by the Performance of every other Virtue.

2. FROM what hath been said let every one observe, that it is not Inclination, or Custom, that can excuse or bear them out in the continued Commission of Sin, or in the repeated Neglect of any known Duty. For God excepts no Sin from his Condemnation; no Duty out of his Commands. He requires all equally, as we have seen: and to pretend to exempt our selves, is to put our selves out of his Jurisdiction, and Government; and to set our Humour and Inclination above his Law, and Authority. Yet how many Men do we meet with, who are apt to think their own Sin, to which they are most inclined, and most easily seduced, to be out of the Number of the condemned Vices; or else to hope that God will depart from his settled Rules, on purpose to release their Punishment. They will pray, and hear; and perhaps receive the Sacrament; and do several good Actions, to the end that their Inclination may be allowed of by God Almighty: and as long as they do what they have no great Temptation to allure them from doing; or omit that Sin to which they are under no strong Bias: they foolishly imagine that their Inclination and Bias to another Sin will be Excuse enough for their Darling and Bosom Vice. But, if St. *James* says true, they who are; in one Instance, Transgressors, are Sinners against all the Law; and the whole Authority by which it was enacted.

150

151

152

3. LET the very best of us be led, by what hath been said, to look narrowly into our selves, and to see whether there be not some latent Root of Vice in us: some secret and less observed Instance, in which we transgress the Will of God. The Christian World is come to pass, that He who is not guilty of open Acts of notorious Sin, Drunkenness, Adultery, Blasphemy, Revenge, or the like, passeth for a good Christian: and many think it well with them, because they cannot accuse themselves of such Sins. And so far indeed it is well. But alas! Though they be not thus openly lewd, and profligate: yet perhaps, there remains something in them that requires, and is worthy of, a Cure. They are not Swearers, or Drunkards, or Unclean, or Profane: but perhaps, a silent Discontent eats thro' their Hearts; a secret grudging and repining discomposeth their Nights and Days; Envy gnaws upon them; or some Passion or other torments, and holds them Captive. Some Imperfection or other we may find, if we turn our Eyes more to what we have of Evil in us, than to what we have not. And here lies the Business of every Christian, to conquer his own proper Enemy. If we have no very great ones; if we be out of the Reach and Power of the most formidable: the more Shame and Ignominy, to be led captive and spoiled by those of less Strength, and less Account. Let us not think it beneath us to exert ourselves against the least of God's Enemies, and our own. Since 'tis a Progress towards Perfection that is required of us; let us think and act, as if we thought it our Duty to make this Progress.

153

IF thro' the Happiness of a good Disposition, and careful Education, we have escaped those Pollutions under which so many in the World groan; let us thank God: and let us remember that it is from hence, that we are to begin our Race: that we have not those Impediments which others have created to themselves by a long Course of wilful Sin; and that we have Incitements, and Encouragements from hence, as well as Obligation, to attempt the greater Heights of Religion and Virtue. By Religion here I do not mean Devotion, and Prayer; which yet are of admirable Use, and of great Necessity but the greater Degrees of all that is good; the more sure Conquest over all our Passions; the more quiet Possession of our Souls in Patience; the more profound Submission to God's Will, and to all the Dispensations of his Providence; the more composed Resignation of our selves to his good Pleasure, the bringing down every Imagination which raiseth it self against him; the subduing every undue Tendency in us towards worldly Ambition, Honour, or Riches; the quieting every turbulent Motion in our Breath; the taking off more and more the Edge of the Mind from all sensual enjoyments; the Discovery, and gradual Amendment, of the least Dislocations, the least irregular Movements, the most secret Disorders of our Wills and Affections. This is the Task of a Christian, who is past the Danger of being immersed in open Vice and Profaneness: to go on from Strength to Strength; from one Degree to another; from one Branch of Perfection to another; till He is called for by God into a State of greater Perfection. And whoever will seriously look into themselves, will find Instances enough of Imperfection;

154

155

in the amending of which they will shew sincere Intention to please God, and give themselves a greater Hope of his Mercy than they could otherwise have.

BUT last of all, let none of us increase our own Misery by such a Baseness of Temper, as ungratefully to abuse the Mercy of God, offered us upon the *Terms* of the *Gospel*, to the Purposes of Sin and Wickedness. This is a Sin of a deep Hue; and what will indeed be the greatest Aggravation of our continuing in our Vices. God offers us, for the sake of his Son, to receive us to Favour, returning to him; and sincerely practising his whole Will for the future, without any Partiality, or Neglect of any part of it. It is a servile and ignominious Disposition, for which no Name is bad enough, to take occasion from the Offer of Mercy to which universal Amendment and Holiness is at any time entitled, to defer our Amendment and Holiness. The only generous Way; the only secure Way for our own Interest, (which we pretend to be so dear to us;) is immediately and without Delay to endeavour to come up to his *Terms*, that we may obtain his Promises; to work out our Salvation *while the Day lasteth: because the Night cometh* (we know not how soon) *when no Man can work*. Thus shall we find the Way to *Eternal Life*, before it be hid from our Eyes: which God grant we may! & c.



Concerning the terms of Acceptance, &c.

## SERMON VIII.

HEBREWS x. 26, 27.

*For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remained, no more Sacrifice for Sin: but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries.*

I HAVE, in several Discourses, shewn you, from plain and uncontestible Passages of the *New Testament*, what those *Terms and Conditions* are, upon which *Almighty God* will finally pardon, accept, and justify, those professed Christians, who have been, in any Sense, or any Degree, *wilful Sinners*: and in my last Discourse I summ'd them up in that one Condition of *sincere, universal, and impartial Obedience* to all the Laws of God, without Exception; or a real and sensible Amendment of their Lives and Tempers, in all those Instances, in which they know themselves to have transgressed any of his Commandments. In order still more to confirm the Truth of what hath been said upon this Subject, design to consider particularly those several Schemes, and various Hopes, which the Imaginations of Men have framed to themselves, more agreeable to their own Humours, and Inclinations; in Opposition to these settled Conditions of God's Favour.

BUT, before I set about this, it will be very proper to take notice of another sort of Mistake in this important Affair, equally contradictory to what I have already laid down; equally fatal to ill-disposed Minds; and very troublesome and afflictive to many well-meaning and honest Christians: and that is, the Opinion that their Case, as well as the Case of all professed Christians who have been at any time *wilful Sinners*, it so sad and desperate, that it is in vain for them to hope for Pardon and Reconciliation, upon any Terms; even tho' they should heartily endeavour to come up to the *Conditions* I have heretofore laid down. These are of a differing sort, and of a differing Temper, from the most of their Neighbours. And their Opinion is pretended to be founded upon some *Texts* of the *New Testament*, which seem to speak of the Irremissibleness of some Sins, which perhaps they fancy themselves to have been guilty of; and particularly upon this Passage, now read to you: which, taken by it self, and separated from the Context and manifest Scope of the Writer of this *Epistle*, seems to conclude, in general, against all Hope of Pardon to such as have sinned wilfully after the receiving and professing the Christian Religion.

IN Opposition to such Imaginations, (which render all that I have before advanced of none effect) I shall not confine my View to this one Text of the *New Testament*: but I shall have regard to several others, which have been in the same manner, mistaken and misapplied; as well as to some Considerations taken from the Nature of God, and the End of the Gospel; designing

158

159

I. To shew the great Absurdity of fixing upon Almighty God or: the Christian Religion, any such Opinion as that all Hope of Pardon is cut off in the *Gospel*, from Any *Christians* who have been *wilful Sinners*. And

160

II. To consider particularly the Intent of those mistaken Texts; and the Impossibility of fairly fixing upon them any such Opinion as this.

AND these Points I think it very useful to explain. For tho' the Generality of professed Christians are more apt to presume upon the Goodness and Mercy of God; and to interpret all Texts of Scripture concerning that, so much in their own Favour as to receive some Support from them, even whilst they wilfully continue in their Sins: yet, fence there are, on one hand, some others, who may, from a pretended Despair of God's Mercy, go on to increase the Number of their Transgressions; and, on the other hand, some weak, tho' honest, Christians, who have been brought to the melancholy Condition of thinking themselves, without any Ground, to be such sort of Sinners as have forfeited all Title to God's future Mercy; it is very necessary to consider this Point, that so the Uneasiness of the latter, which is only their present Unhappiness; and the Despair of the former, which is their Crime (as it is founded upon their Desire to continue in their Sins;) may be removed; and some Stop put to such destructive Imaginations. Nor can it be amiss for us to descend, as near as we can, to the Wants and Occasions of all sorts of Persons; to consider the Scruples of some, as well as the Presumption of others; and to accommodate our Teaching sometimes to the more rare and secret Cases, as well as at other times to the more known and common. Nay, it is indeed necessary, in order to place beyond all reasonable Doubt what I have heretofore laid down, to handle this Subject: that so it may appear, not only that the *Terms* of God's Favour which I have pointed out, are the only *Terms* upon which He hath promised Acceptance; but that there is reason to think but that all professed Christians may be sure of Acceptance, upon coming up to those *Terms*, whatsoever their former Condition hath been. To return,

161

I. I SHALL now endeavour to shew the great Absurdity of fixing upon Almighty God, and the Christian Religion, any such Opinion, as that before mentioned.

162

1. IT is extremely absurd to suppose that Almighty God, in condescending to make *Terms* with his Creatures, in the Christian Dispensation, should not propose some Method of Reconciliation to all those who sin after they have received that Religion, as well as to those who had been Sinners before their believing: because no Man, tho' never so hearty and sincere in his Profession of that Religion, is thereby made so infallible, that nothing shall ever impose upon his Judgment; or so well-guarded and resolute as that nothing shall be able to surprize, or entice, his Will into a Consent to Sin, in any possible Instance. It may be true that a Christian hath such a Power, and so much Strength, and that He is so free from an absolute Necessity of committing any one single wilful Sin, that He may possibly, by Watchfulness, and Consideration, and a perpetual Care over himself, prevent this. But

it is true likewise that this is so very difficult, that the Experience and Confession of all the best Men, in all Ages, have demonstrated that this sinless Obedience was never performed in Fact.

THERE is indeed a vast difference, and in the Opinion of the World a greater sometimes than is just, between Sins: which hath induced some Men perhaps to think themselves more free from Sin than they really are. Some are apt to imagine, because they do not permit themselves to be guilty of Drunkenness, or Adultery, or Fornication, or Murther, or Covetousness, or Dishonesty in their Dealings, that therefore they are clean. But they often forget the Thoughts of Pride and Haughtiness; of Revenge and Implacability; of Severity and Ill-nature; of Envy and Malice; of Anger and Passion; of Ambition and worldly Grandeur; the frequent Mispende of their precious Time, and the like: in one, or more, of which, they have, some time or other, in some degree or other, too certainly, indulged themselves more than they can answer for at the Bar of Justice. Too certainly, I say: for, Is there a perfect Man upon Earth? Is there one, who hath not one weak Side? who hath been ways so strictly upon his Guard as that He .can say, He hath resisted all Temptations to every sort, and every degree of Sin? It hath been often observed to you, that Men are too apt to pass over the Consideration of that particular Vice to which they have found themselves inclined; especially, if it be not of the Number of those which are called scandalous and notorious Crimes: Whereas some of these I have now mentioned, do in truth defile the Soul; hinder the Perfection of Virtue; render the Man as truly obnoxious to the Divine Anger; and as truly oppose the Design of Christianity, as some of the former sort; and therefore ought to be esteemed as Sins, and acknowledged as such by all Christians.

I BELIEVE, therefore, it may be truly affirmed that there neither is, nor ever was, a Christian who hath not, in some Instance or other, suffered himself to be carried beyond the Bounds of strict Religion, particularly of the Christian Institution; so as that He must acknowledge himself, to the great Judge of the World, and Knower of Hearts, to be, in some degree or other, a wilful Sinner after the Reception of Christianity. *St. Paul* indeed, after his Conversion to the Christian Religion, and his Labours in the Work of the Gospel, doth say, that He is conscious to himself of nothing for which He can condemn himself, *1 Cor. iv. 4.* for that is the meaning of those Words, *I know nothing by myself.* But He doth not mean this in any other Sense, to be sure, but this, that in the main He had performed his Office after such a manner, as that He had good Ground to hope for the Favour of God, and the Rewards of Heaven: which Assurance, others likewise may arrive at. That He could intend by this to signify that, in any single Instance either of Thought, Word, or Deed; either consider'd as an *Apostle*, or as a private Christian; He had nothing to accuse himself of; is a Supposition without all Ground, For He doth not appear to have had such an Opinion of himself: and particularly seems to have acknowledged himself in an hasty and indecent Passion before the High-priest, *Acts xxiii. 3.* for the Words cannot be understood to mean

163

164

165

less than that. Nor indeed doth He extend the Expression, *1 Cor. iv. 4.* to himself in all Capacities: but is there considering himself particularly as called to, and executing, the Work of an *Apostle*. St. *Peter* once thought it absolutely impossible that any worldly Consideration could bring him to a Denial of his *Master*, after all the convincing Evidences, to which He had been witness, of his being the true *Messiah*: and yet, the same Night in which He shewed this Confidence, He shewed his Weakness also.



THIS, therefore, being undoubtedly true, that no Christian, since the first preaching of the Gospel, hath actually so fulfilled the Law of Christ, as to be entirely free from all Sin either of *Omission*, or *Commission*; either in Thought, or Word, or Deed: I say, It is absurd to suppose that Almighty God would leave no room in such a Dispensation, for the Recovery and Reconciliation of wilful Sinners, after their believing the Gospel, without which there could be no Salvation obtained. This would be to bring Men into such a Dispensation as must only affright and terrify some, and throw others into a more profligate Course of Sin than they were in, before their believing in Christ. This is to suppose Almighty God calling the World solemnly to the Knowledge of the Gospel; descending to treat with his Creatures, in order to bestow his Mercy upon them after an extraordinary manner: and that the Effect of this Condescension is, that the sincerest Believer that ever embraced his Call to the Christian Faith, cannot have any Hopes of Pardon, if He hath once after that wilfully transgressed any of his Laws. And what is this but to publish a Religion to the World, which hath no Effect towards making any of the Sons of Men happy; but indeed, upon this Supposition, makes them all much more miserable, in the End, than they would have been without it.



SOME Men have made it a great Objection against the Wisdom and Goodness of God, that he should promulgate, after such a manner, such a Religion as that of Jesus Christ; when He foresaw that so many, who have it in their Power to do otherwise, would live so unworthily of it, in the Practice of gross, and notorious Sins. But the Love of God, in answer to this Objection, is sufficiently seen in the unspeakable Benefit which the better sort receive from this Institution and in the Proof which that affords is that others might receive the same, were they not extremely wanting to themselves. But the present Supposition takes away all Hopes, even from the most sincere Believer, of acquitting himself so as to obtain God's Favour at last. For the Weakness of all Christians, in some Instance or other, proving such a Difficulty of absolute Perfection, as no Christian ever yet conquered; this Supposition represents Almighty God as instituting a Religion entirely fruitless and ineffectual. Which is so great an Absurdity, that from hence it may certainly be concluded that there is a Method of Pardon and Reconciliation for those who have wilfully sinned after their receiving the Christian Religion. And this with respect to all sorts of wilful Sinners in that Religion: because, as it is absurd to suppose that God should not mean and speak Consolation to the better sort of Christians; so, on the other hand, it is equally absurd to suppose that He should, by cutting





off all Hopes of Favour on any Terms, urge and force the worse sort of Christians into a more resolute and uninterrupted Prosecution of their Vices. And this brings me to another Consideration, *viz.*

2. THAT, as the contrary Opinion, is, in it self, absurd and shocking: so, it is expressly contrary to the declared Design of the Gospel: which is, that all Sinners should be called and invited to Repentance and Reformation; and that Virtue should have an Encouragement annexed to it, sufficient to work upon Men to forsake Vice, and return to the Practice of their Duty. But now, this End could not possibly be answered, if it were certain that, if once men arrived to such a Pitch of Wickedness, they should never be accepted by Almighty God, even tho' they should forsake it for the Time to come. For, as I observed in a former Discourse, the Certainty of this, nay, the probable Suspicion of this, would incline all Sinners, especially habitual Sinners, to strengthen themselves in their Sins and to take Courage from their Despair of Mercy, or of any other sort of Happiness, to take as much as they possibly could of the Pleasures of a Course of all manner of Sin; and so to engage themselves, more inextricably than ever, in a vicious Habit of Life.

BUT because some have built so pernicious an Opinion, not upon the Reasonableness of the thing it self; or upon the main End and Design of Christianity; but upon some particular Texts and Passages of the *New Testament*; and argued from them, against the Acceptance of some Sinners, who are professed Christians, upon any Terms whatsoever: I shall now therefore, in order to remedy the Mischief of such a Mistake,

II. ENDEAVOUR to shew that these Passages of the *New Testament* prove not the Point, for which they are alledged. And of these Passages I shall take particular Notice of *Three*; upon which the whole of the present Debate entirely depends.

1. THE *first* is that Passage, recorded the *Gospels*, in which our Saviour speaks of *sinning against the Holy Ghost*; and declares it unpardonable; particularly, *Matth. xii. 31, 32.* which some well-meaning Christians have been so unkind to themselves, as in their desponding Minutes, to apply to their own Case. The particular handling all the Circumstances of this important Passage would require a long Discourse on purpose. But all that is necessary to my present Design is to shew that the Sin there spoken of, is a Sin in which such Persons as we are now speaking of, cannot possibly be concerned. For whatever it was that was there intended by our Lord; this is manifest, that He speaks to, and of, such Persons as themselves saw the Course and Series of his wonderful Works; and did, out of mere Malice, and an incorrigible Disposition of Mind, ascribe all that He did to the Power of evil Spirits: tho' there was not the least Sign of that, but manifest Demonstration that He was acting directly against the Interest of all evil Spirits. It is upon this Occasion, and of such sort of Sinners, that He there speaks. And from hence it appears that, whatever the Nature and Malignity of that Sin was, it cannot be a Sin which it is possible for any Persons to commit, who profess Faith in Jesus Christ, and believe Him to have been sent into the World by God; nay, nor for any

169

170

171

who did not themselves see with their own Eyes his mighty Works, and, out of mere Malice and Perverseness, ascribe them to the Devil. It follows, therefore, that, supposing the *Sin against the Holy Ghost* (whatever be the full Nature of it) to be unpardonable; (which probably must arise from the perverse Disposition of Mind from which it proceeds, incapable of Alteration for the better, and not from any Resolution of Almighty God never to pardon it upon such Alteration for the better;) supposing, I say, this Sin unpardonable: yet it follows from what hath been said, that, notwithstanding this, the wilful Sins of all who profess Faith in Jesus Christ may be pardoned, upon some Terms; and that they may be capable of coming up to those Terms. For it appears that no professed Christian, or sincere Believer in *Jesus Christ*, is capable of being guilty of this Sin: and it is of *Christians*, who have been, or are, wilful Sinners, that we are now discoursing. This is fully sufficient for our present Purpose, concerning this Passage about *sinning against the Holy Ghost*, viz. That professed Christians are not, and cannot be, concerned in it.

172

2. THE second Passage I shall mention, is that in the *Sixth* Chapter of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, from ver. 4, to ver. 7. For *it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to Repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open Shame*; concerning which Passage, have the following Observations to offer.

1. THIS is spoken only of a wilful and open Apostacy from the Faith of Christ, and a public Denial of Jesus Christ, persisted in for some Time: and this Apostacy is the Apostacy of such Persons as had tasted and, been endowed with some of the miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost, seen in those first Days; and had been witnesses to the great and wonderful Gifts which others in the Church likewise enjoyed, and to all the Wonders of the *Gospel-Age*, called here by a Jewish Phrase, *the World, or Age, to come*. These are the Persons, and this is the falling away, here spoken of: and such a falling away it is, as may justly be said to be, in effect, an Acquittance of those who crucified our Lord: and a joining with the Infidel World in bringing a publick Shame upon Him, and his Religion. This then is vastly different from the Case of any who are still professed Christians; and cannot possibly be applied to any, who have not, by open Apostacy, fallen from a State of such Gifts, and such Powers, and Each Illuminations.

173

2. THE Impossibility of the Acceptance of such Persons is not here fixed upon any Resolution, on the part of Almighty God, not to accept them; should they again sincerely turn to Him and come up to his Terms: but it is declared to arise from the Impossibility of such Persons ever recovering themselves, so as to come up to the Terms of the Gospel. It is said to be impossible to *renew them to Repentance*: not to be impossible for them to be pardoned and accepted, supposing them to come to true Repentance. But we are now speaking of the Pardon of such professed Christians, tho' never so notorious Sinners, as

174

may, and do, come up to the Terms required: and this Passage, you see, cannot be meant of Sinners, during their Christian Profession; or of Sinners of any sort, who do at any time come up to the *Terms* offered in the Gospel. But then,

3. THE *Impossibility* here spoken of, is not a natural or absolute Impossibility: but only a very great Difficulty; which in the ordinary way of speaking, is often said to be impossible; and represented by Similitudes taken from natural Impossibilities. At this Day, we our selves often call a difficult Matter, an impossible thing without meaning it in the strict and accurate Sense of the Word: and in the Eastern Nations, their Ways of speaking were much more exorbitant, and their Figures of Speech more strange, than those amongst us. *Can the Ethiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots?* saith the Prophet, *Jer. xiii. 23. then shall ye also who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well.* If one were here to follow the Letter of the Expression, one would think that the Prophet was representing it to be as impossible, in the nature of the thing, for the habitual Sinner to turn to the Practice of Virtue, as it is for the *Blackmoor* to alter the Colour of his Body. Whereas it is manifest that this could not be intended, because it was the same Prophet's Business and Design, (as it was that of others also) to persuade those very Sinners to whom He speaks, to reform their Ways: which certainly was the absurdest Thing imaginable, supposing it a Matter which He knew, and represented to them, to be absolutely impossible.

THUS our Saviour himself represents the Difficulty of a Rich Man's embracing the Gospel, and arriving safe at the Place of future Rewards, (a Difficulty arising from the strong Temptations there are in the Possession of Riches, to Covetousness, or Pride, or Luxury;) by a Similitude taken from a thing absolutely impossible: and goeth so high, in the figurative way of speaking, as to say, *It is easier for a Camel to go through the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,* *Math. xix. 24.* And yet his great Design was to call these rich Men themselves to such an use of their Riches, as that they might prove the Occasion of their greater Reward hereafter, Which shews that it was not his Intent, in those Words, to speak literally; or to signify any more than his Sense of the very great Difficulty of rich Men's behaving themselves so here, as to attain Eternal Happiness hereafter.

FROM all this it appears that Things are, in Scripture, said, or represented, to be impossible, by an usual manner of speaking, which are only extremely difficult: and consequently, that the Word *impossible*, in the Passage now under Consideration, (taking into the Account likewise the nature of the thing spoken of, doth not signify any more and that the Apostle's Design in that Passage was no other than to signify the extreme Difficulty of the true Repentance of such as do totally renounce the Christian Faith, and publicly disown their Master, Jesus Christ, after they have received themselves, and seen in others, the greatest and most miraculous Proofs that he is the true *Messiah*.

AND thus We see that, whether we consider the Persons concerned in this Passage; or the thing affirmed of them in it; it hath no reference to the Sins of professed Christians,

175

176

177

continuing such; and doth not prove any thing of the Impossibility of their Repentance, and Acceptance:

3. THE *third* and last Passage of the *New Testament* which I shall mention, as quoted, and applied, by some, to the same purpose, is that which I read to you, at the Entrance of this Discourse, out of the same *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*, *ch. x. ver. 26, 27*. *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries*. Now,

1. To put such an Interpretation upon this Passage, as to take away all Hopes of Pardon, from such professed Christians as have been, in any degree, wilful Sinners, even supposing them to return and amend; is to contradict the main Design and Tenour of the Gospel: as I have just now shewed. And whatever contradicts the main Design of the Gospel, cannot possibly be the true meaning of any particular Passage in it: whether we be able to find out the exact; meaning of the Passage, or not. The Form of Expression, upon which the Supposition is founded, equally precludes from Mercy the sincerest repenting Christian, who hath once wilfully transgressed God's Law, and the vilest Sinner who is hardened in his Iniquities. So that, if it excludes any Sinner from Pardon; it excludes *all* who ever once sinned. And who can put such a Sense upon this Passage, as will render vain the whole Christian Dispensation; and debarr every one, who ever named the Name of Christ, from all Title to any Benefit from Him? This is impossible to conceive, or embrace, as the Intent of the Apostle. And as for the true Intent of it,

2. IT will be obvious, I believe, to every one's Observation, upon the reading the whole Context, that this *sinning wilfully*, in *ver. 26*, is the total and open forsaking the Christian Assemblies, in the Verse before: which was accounted a renouncing and being ashamed of the Christian Faith, in Compliance with the Infidel World about them. And that this *sinning wilfully*, here spoken of is to be understood of a publick Renunciation of Christianity, and Apostacy from the Gospel, seems plain from the *29th Verse* in which the *wilful Sinner*, mentioned here, is opposed to one amongst the *Jews that despised Moses's Law*, and professedly opposed it; and is farther described to be one who hath *trodden under Foot the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done Despite unto the Spirit of Grace*: Phrases, very like to those by which the *Author* of this *Epistle* describes an open Apostacy from the Christian Faith, in the *Passage* which I last considered; and which cannot agree so well to any other sort of wilful Sins, as to that of a Departure from the Profession of Christianity, and, as much as in Men lies, giving an open Affront to that Dispensation, and bringing a publick Disgrace upon it. So that the *wilful Sinners*, here spoken of, are not the *wilful Sinners*, of whom we are now treating; *viz.* those who are so, at any time, during their Profession of Christianity.

178

179

180

3. WHAT is affirmed of these Sinners, in the *Passage* now before us, is that *there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sin*: that is, either that the Force of *Christ's* Sacrifice signifieth nothing to such as have renounced his Religion: or that there is no other Sacrifice of any Force, besides that which they have renounced; which cannot profit them, whilst it is publicly renounced by them. But certainly this is said of them, considered as continuing in their Apostacy; and not as returning sincerely again to their former Profession. And this indeed may be said of any wilful habitual Sinners, continuing such, that the Sacrifice of Christ will profit them nothing: but this, without taking from them the Hope of the Favor of God, upon the Alteration of their Lives, and their coming up to his Terms.

IT appears, therefore, I think, very plainly, that the Persons here spoken of, are not *wilful Sinners*, who are such, during their open Profession of *Christianity*; and that, supposing the thing here affirmed, to be affirmed of all *wilful Sinners* in general, it is not an utter Exclusion of any of them from all Hopes, but as remaining in their Sins: and consequently, that this *Passage* proves nothing against the Possibility of *wilful Sinners*, of all Degrees, amongst such as profess Christianity, obtaining the Favour of God; upon the Terms appointed by Himself in the Gospel: *viz.* the forsaking what is evil; and the sincere, universal Amendment of their Lives, in all those Instances, in which they can discover themselves to have been formerly sinful, or defective.

AND it being so evident, from what I have heretofore discoursed, that these are the only Conditions of their final Justification, and Acceptance; and so plain from what I have now said, that, upon their coming up to these Conditions, they need not doubt of that Justification and Acceptance; what remains but that we all shake off every Pretence of Despair and Despondency, on the one hand; and every vain Hope and fruitless Expectation, on the other; and heartily set our selves to amend whatever is amiss in our Tempers, or Practice; to run our Christian Race in that Path which *Christ* himself hath marked out to us; and, *by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek after Glory and Immortality?* Which God grant we may all obtain, for the Sake of his Son *Jesus Christ*, our Lord!



*The Mistake, of relying upon Faith, considered, &c.*

## SERMON IX.

EPHESIANS ii. 8.

*For by Grace, are you saved, through Faith; and that not of your selves: it is the Gift of God.*

Now come to the *Second part* of that *Design*, which I have, for some Time, had in View; *viz.* to examine particularly the principal of those false Pretences, and mistaken Notions, concerning the *Terms* of our Acceptance with God, by which Men support themselves in their Continuance in their beloved Vices; and endeavour to elude the Force, and arm themselves against the Power, of those plain Texts of *Scripture*, and those convincing Arguments, by which I have already proved that that Method laid down in the Christian Religion, by which Sinners may hope to be reconciled to *God*, thro' Jesus Christ, is the actual Amendment of their Lives and Tempers in all such Instances as they know to be contrary, in any respect, to the Law of God; and that this is indispensably required of them in order to their final Justification at the great Day of the Lord.

THE *first* of these Mistakes which I shall take notice of, and examine, is the Mistake of those Men who appear to be induced, by some Texts of the *New Testament*, to rely upon *Faith*, or their believing in *Jesus Christ*, and confident Application of his Merits to themselves; and to expect Salvation from this, considered as distinct, and separate, from Obedience to the Moral Law of the *Gospel*. And amongst the rest, the Text which I have now read to you, hath been often heretofore, and is very likely to be often again, alledged to this Purpose, by Men who are thus disposed to lay hold on any thing rather than heartily to set about the uneasy Task of reforming what is amiss in themselves. In the Examination of this great and fatal Mistake, I design

I. To lay before you the plain meaning of St. *Paul* in the Text.

II. To shew that no such Pretence as this can fairly be built upon these, or any the like Words in the *New Testament*.

III. To observe that St. *Paul*, doth, in this very Epistle, as well as in many other Places, sufficiently declare against any such Pretence: as our *blessed Lord* did likewise before Him in the plainest Words.

IV. To shew you in what Sense, *Faith*, or believing the *Gospel*, is said to save us.

I. IT will be very proper to lay before you the plain meaning of St. *Paul* in the Text.

AND, if you look into the *Chapter*, you will find that He is there speaking of the former Condition in which the *Ephesians* were, before their Conversion from a State of Heathenism, to the Belief of the *Gospel*; and magnifying God's Mercy, and the exceeding Riches of his Grace, or Favour, towards them, from the *first Verse to the eighth*: in which He therefore



goes on to make them sensible of their Obligation to that God who had thus *quicken'd* them *who were dead in sins*. For by *Grace are ye saved*: that is, For it is very fit you should know and consider that it is by the mere *Grace and Favour*, or Mercy of God (as the Word signifies) *that ye are saved through Faith*; that ye, are put into a Method, and State of Safety and Salvation, by means of your receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is his own Act, his mere Mercy, that you have Terms of Acceptance offered you, upon your believing in Christ. The being saved in this Method is by the Grace or Mercy of God, I say; *not of your selves*, that is, no Contrivance, or Appointment of your own; not owing to your selves: but it is the Gift, the free Contrivance, and Offer of God to you, that you should be put into this happy State by the Gospel. This is the meaning of the Expression, *and that not of your selves*; not, as it may found in our Translation, *and that Faith or believing, not of your selves*, but entirely *the Gift of God*; (for the Word *That* in the *Greek* is of the Neuter Gender, and so cannot so easily be supposed to relate to the Word *Faith* going before:) but, *that*, or *this* whole Matter, *this* your being *saved by Faith*; this being called into a State of Salvation by the Gospel, is *not of your selves* but the Gift, the Favour, the Offer of God; previous to all Design, and Thought of your own. Then follow these Words, *ver. 9. Not of Works, lest any Man should boast*, i. e. And as the Proposal of this gracious Method of Salvation was not owing to your selves, and your Contrivance: so neither was such a Favour merited at the Hands of God by any part Perfection, by any good Behaviour of your own, preceding it. For, as I told you already, *v. 1. and 5. you were dead in Trespasses and Sins*, when you were called to the Knowledge of this merciful Dispensation. And this I add, lest any of you should boast, as if you had deserved of the Hands of Almighty God, by your past good Behaviour, so merciful a Dispensation, so gracious a Proposal, as is made to you in the Gospel. Then he goes on to assure them farther that their happy Condition is owing entirely to God, who had, without any Contrivance or Desert of theirs, ordered Affairs so by his good Providence, that they were now Believers in *Jesus Christ*; and had the Offers of Salvation, upon the Terms of the Gospel, brought home to them.

THIS, therefore, is the manifest Design of the Apostle in the Text, to raise the Gratitude of the *Ephesians* to *Almighty God*; and to inspire them with all possible Regard to Him; by putting them in mind that they were formerly in an helpless and miserable Condition, *dead in Sins*; void of the true Life of reasonable Creatures; that they find no Thought themselves of such Salvation as had been offered them by the Christian Religion; that they had no Merit to engage God Almighty to make them such an Offer, and preach such a State of Reconciliation and Salvation to them; that it was of his *Grace*, or Favour, that they were *saved* from their former evil Condition of Sin and, Ignorance, by believing and receiving the Gospel: for which they were obliged therefore to magnify the exceeding Riches of God's Mercy towards them in Christ; and not to attribute this Happiness to themselves, who were before this void of everything that could be pleasing to Almighty God, or influence him to

186

187

188

shew them so great and remarkable a Kindness. It is by *Grace* that ye are delivered from your former miserable Condition; it is an Act of Grace that *ye are saved thro' Faith*, or put into a State of Salvation by believing the Gospel: and this being *saved* in this Method, and by means of this believing, is *not of your selves*; but wholly owing to the good Will of God, whose free Offer, and Gift it is. This being so manifestly the Intent of the Apostle in this Place; it appears from hence what I proposed in the second place, *viz.*

II. THAT no such Pretence as that which makes Faith alone, separated from a good Life and Conversation, the Condition on which we shall be accepted at last; that no such Pretence as this, I say, can be built upon this Passage of the *New Testament*: which will lead us likewise to the farther Consideration of this Mistake; and to give a true Account of what St. *James* and St. *Paul*, upon other Occasions, have affirmed upon this Subject.

As for the Passage now before us; we have seen already that by our being saved by, or thro' Faith, is meant our being put into the true Way of Salvation by believing in Jesus Christ: and therefore that it cannot be laid upon any such Expression as this, that it is this Faith or believing taken by it self, and considered without any Influence upon our Lives, that will at last be accepted by God; if we had Opportunity of practising Righteousness, and have refused to do it. Besides, every thing necessary to Salvation must be represented as the Method that leads to it and because Faith in Christ, believing in Him, and receiving Him for our Master, is one and the first Requisite; therefore we may be said to be saved by *Faith*, without any such meaning as that other Things may not be as necessary, and as indispensable, as that.

BUT here it may be said, Doth not St. *Paul* expressly in another place attribute Justification to *Faith* without the Works of the Law? *Gal. iii. 6, 11.* To which I answer, Doth not St. *James* In his *Epistle*, *ch. ii. 14.* expressly combat that Opinion which some Men may falsly build upon this, *viz.* that *Faith*, without Moral Works consequent upon it, is sufficient to Salvation? And is not St. *James's* Epistle of Authority with Christians, as well as St. *Paul's*? And is not this a Demonstration to all who acknowledge this, that St. *Paul* could not intend any such thing as some have fathered upon Him? But this is not all that is to be said. For it is manifest that St. *Paul* is there speaking of such Works of the Law, as Circumcision; and arguing, that such are not necessary, from *Abraham's* being justified by the eminent Faith which He had before Circumcision: and this against some Persons who would still pretend that the Observation of such Things was necessary to the Favour of God. Add to this, that St. *Paul* uses the Word Faith for the Gospel-Dispensation preached by Jesus Christ; and is only arguing that That is sufficient without the Observation of thee Mosaical Ceremonies. But He is never arguing with design to make Men believe that a mere empty Faith, void of good Works, the Works of Righteousness, can save any Man at last: but saith much to the contrary in all his Epistles. But with respect to what is said both by *Him* and St. *James*, concerning the Faith And Justification of *Abraham* and of *Christians*; it may be proper to observe as follows:

189

190

191



1. St. *Paul* saith that *Abraham* was justified without, and before, such Works as Circumcision. St. *James* saith that *Abraham* was not justified by an empty Faith without Works of Obedience; and would never have been excepted of God, unless He had shewn the reality of his Faith by Obedience to the Call and Command of God. Here is no Contradiction between them. So likewise *Christians* will be justified by means of believing the Gospel-Dispensation, without any such Works as Circumcision, or any other Works of the Ceremonial Law; as St. *Paul* argued: But they will never be justified, and finally acquitted by any Belief in Christ, without bringing forth, as they have Opportunity, such good Fruits, and walking in such good Works, as the Gospel of Christ directs, and commands them to practise; as St. *James* saith. Again,

192

2. ABRAHAM was, for one signal Act of Faith and Trust in God, called by Him *righteous*; taken for such, and reputed as a Person free from the Guilt of his past Sins: as saith St. *Paul*. But it is manifest, saith St. *James*, that this Faith of *Abraham* was not such an empty Faith as some Christians pretend to rely upon: nay, that He would not have been justified finally by God, unless He had, when He was tried by God, shewn by the Obedience of his Life, that his Faith was real, and sincere. Neither in this is there any Contradiction between them. So likewise it is true that a Christian, upon his first believing the Gospel, and receiving Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Saviour of the World, is acquitted from the Guilt of his past Sins; and reputed at this time, and for the sake of this *Faith*, as a just and righteous Person, clear from all past Guilt: as St. *Paul* always taught the first Christians, who were converted at ripe Years from a Life of Infidelity and Sin. And so likewise it is true that no Christian who hath Opportunity, after his Conversion, to practise Holiness, and yet continues unfruitful, or wicked; that no such Christian, I say, shall be finally justified and acquitted, at the last Day, for the sake of his believing in Christ; as St. *James* teacheth: but that the final justification of such Christians depends upon their shewing their Faith by their Works, as St. *James* expresseth it; and upon their bringing forth good Fruit in their Lives and Conversations.

193

THUS may it easily be seen that these *Two Apostles* perfectly agree concerning the Necessity of a good Life, and of every Branch of the Law of Virtue. But St. *Paul* had to deal with a sort of Jewish Christians, who retained an Affection for the Works of the Law, and Circumcision particularly: and therefore found occasion to tell him that their Father *Abraham* himself was justified without such Works; that his eminent Faith was one time counted to him for Righteousness, or Justification; that for the sake of that Faith He was esteemed by God free from all the Guilt He had contracted by Sin before that Time; and that therefore it was nothing but what was agreeable to that great Example which they pretended to love and honour; that God should accept such as believed in his Son Jesus Christ, without their adhering to such Works as Circumcision; and for the sake of that Faith in Reward, and for Encouragement, of it; should acquit them from the Guilt of all their Sins committed before that Time. But St. *James* found that some misunderstood and perverted such Doctrine as

194

this: and that some Christians began to pretend that no Works at all, not those of Piety, and Charity, were necessary to their Justification at the Great Day; and that their believing in Christ would acquit them from the Guilt of all their Sins that they should commit after this Belief, and during the Time of their Christian Profession. And therefore He found it necessary to tell them, that *Abraham* shewed his Obedience to God's Will in the highest Instances, and trusted not in an empty *Faith*; but, tho' He had been once acquitted from past Sins by an eminent Degree of it, yet that he did not expect to continue in Favour with God, unless by obeying all his Commands, and shewing himself ready to fulfil his whole will; and so likewise that *Christians* cannot expect to continue in the Favour of God, or that State of Justification and Acceptance which their first believing put them into, without imitating *Abraham's* Obedience, and following his Steps in good Works, as well as in Faith; or rather, that there can be no such thing as true Faith without good Works, any more than there can be a good Tree without good Fruit.

THESE were the different Reasons for the different, tho' not contradictory, *Positions* of these Two *Apostles*; and for their different manner of handling this Point. And in this Matter great Account is to be had of the following Distinction; that believing in Jesus Christ acquits from Guilt of Sins committed before such Belief; and this merely in order to a better Life for the future; which was St. *Paul's* frequent Affirmation: but that believing in Jesus Christ doth not acquit from the Guilt of any Sins continued in, after this Belief, and during our Christian Profession, but indeed add to it extremely, and as St. *James* in effect affirms; and as St. *Paul* often taught. Which will appear more plainly from what will be said under the Third Proposition, *viz.*

3. THAT St. *Paul* doth, in this very Epistle, as well as in many other places, sufficiently declare against any such Pretence as that which I have been now examining: and this in Imitation of his great Master who did the same before him. Our Lord, you cannot but remember, set himself against this very Deceit, by which He foresaw that many of his professed Disciples would endeavour to elude the great Design of his coming into the World. The Words you have often had in your Ears, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but He that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven:* a Declaration which, in other Words, expresseth this very thing, that it is not believing in Him, or acknowledging him for our Master, or applying his Comforts to our selves, that shall avail us at last; but the *doing the Will of his Father*; or a constant universal Obedience to the Commands laid upon us in his Gospel. This I repeat to you, under this Head, because it is so express a Declaration against Men's relying on *Faith* only for Salvation, or final Justification; that a more express one could no have been made in Words.

AFTER having remarked this, I come to shew that St. *Paul* himself guards against the same fatal Mistake in this very Epistle, in which He declares that *We are saved through Faith*. He doth indeed profess to the *Ephesians*, ch. i. ver. 9. that their being in so happy a State

195

196

197

came not of *their Works*: but that is meant of their Works before their Conversion; that they had no Merit to invite or induce Almighty God to offer them such Salvation. But in the very next Words, [ver. 10](#). He declares that we Christians are *God's Workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good Works*; that we are, by Conversion to Christianity, as it were a-new created by the Will of God, calling us to it; and created for this End, that we may perform good Works. So that you see He immediately guards against any such Notion, as they might weakly entertain, of his attributing our final Salvation to Faith separated from good Works, in the Gospel Sense of good Works. And indeed, tho' in some Places St. *Paul* doth vilify the Merits of the World and their Behaviour, before the coming of the Gospel; and tho' in others He vilifies the Works of the *Law of Moses*, with which some would have burthened the Evangelical Profession: yet no one can shew any one Text, or any one single Passage, in which He vilifies, and sets at nought, the Works of Evangelical Righteousness, or Obedience to the Moral Laws of Virtue.

198

To vilify and decry the Behaviour and Works both of *Jew* and *Gentile*, before the Faith of Christ prevailed, was not to set at nought *good Works*, but bad ones; and only to observe the corrupt and sad Estate of Mankind. To vilify the *Ceremonial Law*, after the coming in of Justification by *Faith* (or the *Gospel*) was not to vilify such Works as we are speaking of: but indeed to take Men's Minds off from Shadows and Ceremonies; and to fix them upon good Works that are more substantial. Nay, when He ever toucheth upon the Moral Duties; with how much Vehemence doth He recommend them? When He speaks of the *Ephesians*; or other Christians, having improved in Virtue, since their Conversion to Christianity; what Commendations doth He give them? And with how much Joy doth He offer up his Thanks to God for it? But we never find him depressing that sort of Works; or setting up *Faith* against them; or taking off the bent of Men's minds from them: but pressing them into the love and practice of them with all the Earnestness possible. And then, if He mentions the Sins of any professed Christians; doth He do it, as if He thought their Faith would avail them? Or rather; doth He not do it with such a Spirit and Zeal against them, as if no Words were bad enough for them? And yet they had an easy Reply to make to Him, had He taught them any such Doctrine, as that a strong Faith would save them at last, tho' separate from good Works.

199

BUT particularly, in this Epistle, how many Moral Duties and good Works doth He press upon the *Ephesians*? and how solemnly doth He assure them, [ch. v. 5, 6](#), that the Immoralities there mentioned will exclude all, who are guilty of them, from Heaven? And adds, *Let no Man deceive you with vain Words: for because of these Things the Wrath of God cometh upon the Children of Disobedience*. He puts them in mind, [ver. 8](#). that they *were sometimes Darkness; but now Light in the Lord: walk as Children of the Light. For the Fruit of the Spirit is in all Goodness, and Righteousness, and Truth*, [ver. 9](#). and so on. Doth all this, and an hundred times more of the same sort, that might be urged from his Writings: Doth all this

200

look like the Doctrine of a Man who aught them that *Faith*, without Goodness and Virtue, would save them at last? Or rather, Is not all this plainly inconsistent with that Supposition? And doth it not all shew that it is impossible He should intend to teach any such Doctrine; however his Words may sound at first hearing.

I MENTION not here, what I have often mentioned upon the like Occasion, that it is contradictory to the declared Design of the Christian Religion to suppose any such thing as this. For if the mere believing in Christ shall save us at last; tho' during that Belief we have wilfully persisted in Disobedience to his Commands: then is it not true that He came to *call Sinners to Repentance*; then is it not true that the *Grace of God hath appeared to Men in the Gospel, teaching us to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present World*; then is it not true that our Lord expects us to bring forth Fruit; or to be prepared for his coming by good Works; or that He will judge us according to what we have done, whether it be good or evil. But on the contrary, these Things are true; and most expressly, and positively asserted in the New Testament: and consequently it cannot be true that Faith, without good Works, will save us at last: nor can any thing be true, that takes away the absolute Necessity of an holy, and virtuous Conversation.

BUT now, after I have thus guarded against that bad and pernicious Sense in which any Christians may understand some Expressions of Holy Scripture concerning our being *saved by*, or through, *Faith*; it is time,

4. To consider, a little in what Sense it is that Christians may be said *to be saved by Faith*, or by believing in Jesus Christ; And

1. THIS may be well said of Them, because it is their Faith, or believing, which saves them from the Guilt of all their Sins committed before this Faith: a Privilege which peculiarly belonged to the first Christians converted, at Years of Discretion, from a Life of Sin and Impurity. And therefore, this first Justification is often spoken of by St. *Paul* in his Epistles, and attributed to Faith. But this doth not concern those who have been educated, and instructed, in the Knowledge of the Christian Religion. The guilty Sinner in those Days knew not whither to fly from the Guilt of his Sins, till his Belief entitled him to this Favour; which God had annexed to it, and the Apostles always promised in his name.

2. WE may be well said to be *saved through Faith*, because it is by believing in Jesus Christ, that we come to know and embrace those Terms which are offered by God for our Salvation and Happiness. He came to save us; and by closing in with his Proposals we must be saved: and this we cannot do, without believing Him to be sent of God, and receiving him as such. This, therefore, being absolutely necessary; we may well find Salvation attributed to this, which is the first moving Principle towards it; and without which we should not go one Step forward in that Way to Salvation which He came to point out to us. *He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life*; and without knowing him, and believing in him, how should we know the Way; or the Path, to that Eternal Life which He came to unfold to us; who otherwise



might have wandered; every one after the peculiar Imagination, or Inclination, or Humour, of our own Hearts? as Salvation therefore, comes in the Method proposed by Christ: so may it well be attributed to believing in Him; because that alone can put us into the Method proposed by Him.

3. CHRISTIANS are *saved by Faith*, because it is the Foundation of their Obedience, and of all their good Actions. It is the *Tree* which bears good Fruit; without which good Fruit there could be no Salvation: and consequently, what is so necessary, and so useful, to the Production of good Works, is it self entitled to those Rewards, and happy Consequences, which follow good Works. This is what St. *James* seems to think, that the only way of proving that we have Faith, is by our good Actions, [Ch. ii. 15](#). Will any one, saith He, believe that you wish them well, or that you are willing to relieve them, if, when you see Distress, you only tell them so; and at the same time deny them what you can afford them towards their Relief? From hence He argues, As there is no true Sign of this charitable Disposition, but the Fruit of Beneficence which it produceth; and as one who is always hard-hearted hath no Pretence to it: so, is there no Proof of a real Faith, but the Works it produceth: of which Works, therefore a sincere Faith is never destitute. Thus will even *He* allow that *Faith may save us*, by influencing our Actions; but no otherwise.

LET any one likewise turn to the *xith chap.* to the *Hebrews*, there indeed he will find an Account of the Excellencies and Advantages of Faith; of its Acceptableness to God, and its Efficacy towards our own Happiness: but He will find that the Argument must be resolved into this at last, that *without Faith it is impossible to please God*, because without Faith it is impossible to live a Life of Virtue, or to do such Actions as are there recorded: and that by *Faith* is meant a vital active Principle, moving us to behave our selves agreeably to our Faith. And therefore, with respect to Christians, *Faith* must be an active Principle, influencing and strongly moving them to such a Behaviour, and Conduct; such a Life and Conversation, as their believing in such a Master naturally directs to. If we believe in *God* truly; we cannot but love and honour him above all things. If we believe in *Christ* sincerely; we cannot but endeavour to obey his Commands; observe his Precepts; and follow his Example. And thus shall we be *saved thro' Faith* or believing in Him; because this Faith, if it be sincere, will be the Foundation of such an universal Obedience as He requires of us.

IN these Senses, therefore, and on these Accounts, great Things might well be said of Faith in the New Testament; and Salvation attributed to it. But the great Point, in which we are concerned, is, not to be deceived in a Matter of such Importance; and to that End, not to interpret any one Expression of the *New Testament* so as to contradict the plainest and most repeated Declarations of it. Let the Conclusion of the present Subject, therefore, be to this effect, *Faith* is an Act of the Mind most acceptable to God. Faith in his Son saves us, as it puts us into the secure Way to Salvation, if we be sincere; and as it is the Foundation of all our Christian Practice, and of all our best and most Godlike Behaviour. This *Faith* alone,

204

205

206

that is, the Method proposed in the Gospel, without the Works of the Ceremonial Law of *Moses*, is sufficient to secure to us our future Happiness: but *Faith* alone, that is, a Belief in Christ, without Obedience to his Laws; an empty, unfruitful Faith, accompanied with an ungodly Life, will condemn us at last. We are saved thro' Faith; or by believing in Christ; no otherwise than by being influenced by it: for Faith is required in order to Practice. *Faith* is indispensably necessary in order to Salvation: and so likewise is a good Life indispensably necessary in order to Salvation. Or, in other Words, a *Faith* working by Love, and manifesting it self by good Works, is that alone which will be of any Account to us, at last. *For as the Body without the Spirit is dead; so Faith without Works is dead also.* Now to God, & c.

207

208

209

*The Mistake of relying upon external Performances considered.*

## SERMON X.

ROMANS x. 13.

*For whosoever shalt call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.*

I HAVE frequently observed to you that when Men are resolved to retain their Sins, and go on in their evil Practices; and yet not to cast away all Hopes of future Happiness; they are ready to lay hold on my obscure, or mistaken, Text of the New Testament: and to draw it to their own Purpose; Without considering the Purpose of the Writer, or laying the whole Tenour of the Gospel together. One of this sort of Passages, relating to Faith, I considered in my last Discourse; and endeavoured to shew that no Encouragement could be designed in it for any to rely on a bare Belief of the Gospel, without the bringing forth those good Fruits, and practising those Moral Duties, which the Gospel it self recommends.

ANOTHER of the like sort, is That which I have now read to you; which some Men of weak Understandings, or strong Passions, may be apt to separate from the rest of this *Epistle*, and consider it so much by it self, as to imagine that it was the Apostle's Design in it to make the *Calling upon the Name of God*, or of our Lord Jesus Christ, the whole of the Gospel-Covenant; and to affix Salvation to the mere outward joining in the public Acts of Christian Profession, and Worship. This is a very great Error: and must prove at last a very fatal Mistake. And tho' it be indeed such a Mistake as one would think no one who considers the Nature of God, or all his Declarations in the Gospel, could permit himself to be guilty of; yet we find by Experience that many professed Christians do at least seek for Ease this way; and find as much as any such poor Pretence can give to the Conscience of such a Creature as Man is.

IT cannot therefore be accounted unnecessary or improper; to consider the Case of such professed Christians as allow themselves in the Commission of known Sins: and yet receive Comfort, and entertain Hopes of future Happiness, from their devout, and repeated Performance of some outward Acts of Christian Profession, and Worship. They know that they continue in the Practice of Sin. But because they feel a Warmth of what they imagine to be Devotion in the Worship of God; because they frequent the public Prayers, or Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; because they hear his Word with some Attention and Zeal; upon such Accounts as these, they hope for his Favour at last, and perceive some Satisfaction and Rest in that Hope for the present: imagining, perhaps, that St. *Paul* is on their side, and hath given it as his Judgment, that whosoever should *call upon the Name of the Lord*, as they do, should be saved.

ONLY, before I come to speak particularly to the Case of such Christians, I must give you a true Account of St. *Paul's* Design in this part of this *Epistle*; which will at the same



time lead you to the true meaning of the Words of the Text: viz. that He is here disputing against Two Errors of the *Jews*. The one is, their seeking Justification by the Law of *Moses*; and rejecting the Faith of Jesus Christ, and the Gospel preached to them as the only Method of Justification: and the other is, their imagining that the Messiah, whom they had been taught to expect, was to be of Benefit only to themselves; and that the *Gentiles* were to have no part in his Blessings. There two Errors, you may see, gave St. *Paul* no occasion of speaking particularly in this place of the Necessity which professed Christians lay under, to practise all Virtue; or any otherwise than in general Terms, of the Christian Faith, in Opposition to these Mistakes. It was enough for his Purpose to put them in mind that, according to the Law it self, they must seek for Justification in another Method, distinct from that of the Works of the Law of *Moses*; that this Justification had been declared by their own Prophets to be of such a nature, as that it must be effected by means of Faith; and that the same Prophets had enlarged the Bounds of the Kingdom of the Messiah, and had promised this Blessing to all true Believers wheresoever dispersed thro' the World.

212

THE first of these He doth, *ver. 4. For Christ is the End of the Law*; that is, the Law it self leads to Justification by the Gospel: because, as it follows, *ver. 5. Moses* himself proposeth Justification by the Law upon no other Terms, but that of a perfect fulfilling the whole Law in every Tittle; Now, none of you can pretend to this: and therefore you ought to be willingly led to seek for Justification, or Acquittance from your past Sins and Failings, by believing and embracing the Gospel.

213

As to the second; He puts them in mind, *ver. 11.* that *Isaiah* himself, one of their own Prophets, speaking of the *Messiah*, had declared long ago, that the true Method of obtaining the Assurance of God's Favour was by believing in Him, when He should appear; and by entering into his Religion, And then He argues, from the Latitude of this Declaration, that *whosoever*, whether *Jew* or *Greek*, takes this Method, *shall be saved*; alledging another of their Prophets, who had likewise, in speaking of the Kingdom of the Messiah; declared that *whosoever*, without any Exception of *Gentile* more than *Jew*, *shall call upon the Name of the Lord*, that is, truly receive his Religion, let him be of what Nation or Family soever, *shall be saved*; shall be saved by this from the Guilt of his past Sins; and, if He be sincere in this Profession, will infallibly be put hereby into a State of Salvation, and obtain it most certainly at the great Day of Accounts.

214

IT very plainly, therefore, appears that St. *Paul's* Design was not to fix the Terms of final Salvation; or to tell Christians exactly what was required of them: but, in general, to tell the *Jews* that it was the Voice of their Law, and their Prophets, that Justification could not be by their Law; and that the true Method in which they must come to be acquitted from the Guilt of their past Sins; and made happy at last, is the believing in Jesus Christ, and seeking this Happiness in the Ways proposed in the Gospel; and that in this Method the *Gentiles* had as real a Right to God's Mercy, as themselves.



HAVING thus given you a View of the *Apostle's* Design in this part of his *Epistle* to the *Romans*; I shall now consider the Pretence of such as are led by this, or any other like Passage in the New Testament, or by any false Motive, to place their Confidence in the external Parts of Religion, whilst they manifestly refuse to permit it to have any vital Influence upon their Minds; and openly allow themselves in an habitual Course of Sin. And,

1. FROM what hath been said already; it cannot but appear absurd to take a general Expression of *St Paul's*, used upon quite another Occasion; and to apply it to what was not then in his Thoughts, or in his Design. He doth say, indeed, that the true Way to Salvation is the believing in Jesus Christ: and the external Profession of that Belief: in Opposition to such as sought for Justification by *Moses's* Law. But it is very unfair to argue from hence, that therefore *whosoever* doth *call upon the Name of the Lord Jesus*, tho' He live in constant Rebellion to his Laws, shall at last be made happy by Him; and that nothing but this external Act of Religion is required of Christians. So that *St. Paul's* manifest Design forbids us to apply his Words to what was not at all his Intent in this place.

2. IF the plain Drift of his Argument did not suppose this; that it would be the highest Absurdity to deduce any such Consequence from his general Declaration of God's Favour to such as should come in to the Profession of the Christian Religion. For suppose a Person should be commissioned to assure a Company of Rebels, that *whosoever* of them should resign themselves up to the Mercy of their rightful Prince; and own him publicly; and call upon his Name in their Petitions, and Submissions; should be saved from Punishment: would it not be the most unfair and absurd Conclusion, if they should argue from hence, that Prince required nothing from them but this external Act of Submission; and that this would be for ever sufficient to secure his Favour; tho' they should after this reassume their former Behaviour; openly violate his just Commands; and affront his Government? Who would not join in condemning such an hypocritical Submission as this? And who would not think it just, that their Punishment should be doubled upon them, even for the sake of this pretended Submission? And yet, Are the Dealings of many Men with God Almighty's Declarations, in the least degree, better, or more justifiable? He sends his Son to entreat those who are Rebels against Him, to be reconciled to Him: and he declareth by Him that *whosoever* comes in to Him, and believes, and calls upon him, shall be in a safe Condition, and kindly received by him. And they argue from hence, that this external Act of Submission, or Homage, is enough; and that they may safely rebel against Him for the future: so they do but in Words acknowledge Him. Whereas the Submission required, is a sincere, and hearty Submission: which it cannot be, if it be accompanied with Dishonour, Disrespect, and Disobedience, in Actions. In this Case, Men should be convinced by their own Maxims, and Principles. For if they abhor the Man who pretends Friendship, or Submission, whilst he neglects all Opportunities of doing them Service; or perhaps employs his Time in affronting and injuring them: how can they possibly imagine that any such general Declaration of

215

216

217

God's Favour to such as *call upon his Name*, or perform any outward Acts of Religion, was intended to make Men easy under a Course of Sin; or to be applied to any Performances but what proceeded from a sincere and upright Mind, full of a true Sense of Religion, and bringing forth such Fruits as Sincerity cannot be void of? So that were this Declaration in the Text separated from the Design of the Apostle; and taken entirely by it self: it is contrary to all the Maxims, and all the Rules of proceeding amongst Men, to interpret it so, as to take Courage from it to affront Almighty God by the Disobedience of our Lives; and to hope in his Mercy merely on Account of some external Performances of religious Worship. But, to proceed to other Considerations.

3. THIS *Pretence*, which I am now examining, doth really debase the Value of Virtue, in the Eyes of God, under the *Gospel-Dispensation*, below what it was under the Influence of the Ceremonial Law it self. When that Law was in force, one would have thought, that Men might then, if ever, have trusted to make themselves acceptable to God by the Externals of Religion; by *Rivers Oil, and Thousands of Rams*: yet we find even then, the Question asked, *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly; and to love Mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?* The Moral Virtues were the Things, even then, insisted on, when the Assistances, and Motives to them were not so great, or not so apparent; and when the Minds of the *Jews* could not but be more amused, and diverted from them, by their numerous and costly Services. And can any one believe that, under the Gospel, in which God hath declared a Day of Judgment to come, and pronounced his Wrath more openly, than ever, against Sin; and in which He hath promulgated the greatest Motives and most powerful Assistances; that, under this Gospel, I say, God should put such a Value upon the external Performances of Religion, as to make insignificant the more *weighty Matters* of it? That He, who said under the Law, *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to practise the Moral Duties?* should, under the Gospel, say, *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to call upon his Name, or to hear his Word?* That He, who laid such Stress upon Holiness, and Virtue, even when He had consulted Pomp and Ceremony in the *Jewish* Religion, should now in effect disengage Men from all strict Obligation to that Holiness and Virtue; and turn all their Thoughts upon external Acts of Devotion, and Religion, when He hath called the World to a Spiritual Religion, void, of all that unnecessary Pomp, and Ceremony? Who can believe this? Or who can fix so great an Absurdity upon the Christian Religion? And if we cannot in Words fix such an Absurdity upon it; let us not entertain, even in our most retired Imaginations, any such Opinion, or Notion, as doth effectually lay this Scandal upon the most holy Religion that ever yet appeared in the World.

4. GIVE me leave to put you in mind of those many plain, unexceptionable, Texts of the *New Testament*, by which I so fully proved, in the former part of my present Design, that the actual Amendment of our bad Lives, and the Practice of all Holiness and Virtue, was indispensably required of us in the Gospel-Dispensation; and to argue from thence that

218

219

220

it cannot be the Intent of any Passage, in the same *New Testament*, to fix Salvation upon any external Acts of Religion unaccompanied with Holiness; or paid to Almighty God in order to appease him for our Continuance in our Sins. Remember particularly Two Passages: the one of our blessed Lord himself; the other of St. *Paul*, the same *Apostle* who applies to *Christians* this general Declaration in the Text.

THE first is that in *Matth. vii. 22, 23. Verses*: where, after our Lord hath declared that it is not the calling upon his Name, without doing his Father's Will, that can save us at last; He goes on farther, *Many will say to me in that Day, Have we not prophesied in thy Name and in thy Name have cast out Devils; and in thy Name done many wonderful Works? and then will I profess unto them, never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.* So that, supposing Persons can even plead at last that they have not only professed his Religion; but done many Things, beyond the Common Pitch of Believers, by the Power of his Name: yet they are in a desperate Condition, if they be found to be *Workers of Iniquity*. And if it shall fare thus with Professors of so extraordinary a Rank: what shall we say to Those who trust to be accepted at last for the sake of much more inconsiderable Performances? Must not they expect as certainly to hear the same Sentence; *Depart from me, ye that work Iniquity?*

THE other Passage is in St. *Paul's* Second *Epistle* to *Timothy*, in the *Second Chapter, the 19th Verse*: *Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ, depart from Iniquity*: from whence it is evident that this *Apostle* could not be of that Opinion that *nameth the Name of Christ, or calling upon the Name of the Lord*, in the Words of the Text, was sufficient for Salvation, without *departing from Iniquity*. For if He had taught any such Doctrine, it might have been easily retorted upon him by any professed Christian, who had a Resolution of continuing in his Sins. What necessity is there for *departing from Iniquity*, when it is declared that *whosoever calleth upon the Name of the Lord, or nameth the Name of Christ, shall be saved, without this Departure from Iniquity?*

MULTITUDES of other Passages might be alleged from the same St. *Paul*, for the Necessity of Holiness; and the Condemnation of Sinners at last: which all contradict the Pretence of such as would fix the contrary upon some of his Expressions. But I must not be always repeating them. Yet it is worth while to remember that these are the professed Christians, of whom He forewarns *Timothy, ch. iii. ver. 5.* under the Character of those who *have a Form of Godliness, but deny the Power thereof*: whom he esteems no better than Scandals to the Christian Profession; *Enemies to the Truth; Men of corrupt Minds; and reprobate concerning the Faith, ver. 8.*

.5. IF we consider the Nature, Tendency, and Design, of all those external Acts of Religion and Worship, in which some Christians are inclined to place so great a Confidence; we shall find it a great affront to Almighty God; and the most gross Abuse and utter Perversion of their Design, to rest in them; to place our Hopes in them; and to make the Performance of them the Ground of our Expectation of the Favour of God, whilst we continue in the Practice



of known Sins. For the great End of the *Christian Religion* is not that Men should pay external Homage to Almighty God, but that their internal Tempers, and the whole Course of their Lives, should be regulated by a deep and constant Sense of God, and of a Judgement to come. To keep up this Sense, and render it effectual; and to encourage others to profess, and carry forward, the same End; public Assemblies of Christians were instituted, and appointed, for the united Acknowledgment of God, and their Saviour; for the more solemn Obligation of themselves to the Duties of their Religion; for the praying to God, the hearing his Word, and the partaking of the *Lord's Supper*.

224

Now what is Prayer to God, if it be not a sincere Acknowledgment of his Sovereignty, and our Dependency; of his Authority, and our Duty? And what is this, but an Affront, if we know, and own, our Obligations to serve and obey him; and yet continue wilfully to disobey and dishonour him? Or, if we imagine to put a Cheat upon him, and to satisfy him with the *Fruit of our Lips*, whilst our Hearts are far from him, and entirely indisposed to render him that Service which our Mouths own to be due to him? What is this Prayer, unless it influence us to Obedience? And why can we be supposed so ask of God his Assistance, and Holy Spirit; if we be resolved not to make use of it, and continue to stand out against all its Motives and Offers?

225

AGAIN, what can we conceive that hearing God's Word could be intended for; unless for the Practice of what we hear? Now, suppose that a Servant of an Earthly Master should run with Zeal every Day to receive his Commands, and hear his Will; eagerly attending to it, and seeming to imbibe it greedily; whilst all the time He is resolved, not to perform it, or constantly goes away to his former Course of Negligence and Disobedience: would not this be justly esteemed the highest Affront, and greatest Indignity, to his Master; and the utter Abuse of his Master's Design in Calling upon him to hear his Duty? And thus it must be in Religion. Hearing can be only in order to our knowing our Duty; and knowing our Duty can be for no other End, but the doing it: and in all Cases, both of them are so far from excusing any who neglect it, that they are ever esteemed by Men the great Aggravations of that Neglect. *To whom much is given, of Him much will be required. He that knows his Master's Will, and doth it not, shall be beaten with many Stripes:* proportionable to his Knowledge, shall be his Punishment. How contrary to some of his Disciples, who pretend to screen themselves with their Knowledge? They hear greedily, and know a great deal: and from hence argue that they are what He approves; and that this their Zeal in *hearing*, than cover their Crime in not *doing* his Will:

226

THIS is what St. *James* warns all Christians against; the resting in the external Action of hearing. *Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves, James i. ver. 22.* and he goes on to compare a Man, who comes to hear his Duty, and goes away and neglects it, to a Man that looks into a Glass; and presently goes away, and forgets his own Countenance, The Man can consult the Glass with no other Design, but to see something

relating to his own Face; which he presently forgets, as much as if he had not consulted it. The Christian can hear the Word for no other End, but to know his Duty: and yet, his Behaviour shews that he goes away and immediately forgets it. And thus the End of hearing; the only End to which it can serve; is totally neglected and perverted.

OF such *Hearers* as these, remember what our *Lord* himself pronounces, [Matth. vii. 26.](#) at the end of the longest Discourse, He is recorded to have made; and that, in which it was plainly his Design to preach Morality, and rescue Virtue from the Cloud which had been cast over it. *Every one*, saith He, *that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish Man which built his House upon the Sand; And the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House; and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.* Such is the Man, we see, who builds his Hope of Salvation upon his bare hearing the Word of God with Greediness, without a conscientious Practice of what he hears. The Woman in the Gospel who heard with Delight the Words of Life, as they proceeded out of our *Lord's* own Mouth, lift up her Voice, and said unto him, *Blessed is the Womb that bare thee.* But he said, *Yea rather, Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it,* [Luke xi. 27, 28.](#) So ready was He to lay hold on every Opportunity of assuring his Disciples, that their Happiness depended upon their doing what they heard, and knew, to be their Duty.

THE like may be said of partaking of the *Lord's* Supper: which was intended for the united Profession of our Faith in Christ; and the open Acknowledgment of our Obligations to live as becomes his Disciples. And what then can it be, to rely for Salvation upon the outward Act of communicating; or the present Fit of Devotion in which we find our selves, separated from, and void of, Influence upon our Lives, and Practice: what can this be, I say, but to mock our blessed Saviour; to celebrate his Sufferings, and join in afflicting him; to own our selves his Disciples, and behave out selves as his Enemies; to contradict the Design of the Duty; and to fly to that *Religious Rite* for Refuge from the Punishment of Sin, which was instituted for a perpetual Memorial against Sin; and designed as one of the greatest Motives against the Dominion and Power of it?

NOTHING, I think, can be plainer than that thus to depend upon the external Acts of Devotion and Religion, for Salvation; without that Holiness Life which they were designed to further and promote; is one of the greatest Instances of Ingratitude and Presumption that can well be thought of? a formal Mockery of Almighty god and our blessed Saviour; a Contradiction to the *End* and Design of the external Duties themselves; and a fatal Delusion and Deceit upon our own Souls: it being certain that our Performance of these external Duties is so far from being an Excuse; that it will be the greatest Aggravation of a wicked Life.

AND now, if these Things be so; what must we say of some sort of Christians? They come to these external Parts of Religion for Comfort. With Hands, and Eyes lifted up, and

227

228

229

an Air of the highest Devotion, they will call upon the Name of the Lord, perform the publick Acts of Worship; hear his Word with Greediness; and perhaps partake of his Table. But here they rest. The same unmortified Lusts and Passions which they bring with them, they carry back again: and return, day after day, to take their Rounds of what they call Religion; in order to flatter themselves, the more plausibly, into a Fancy that they are not wholly devoted to Sin, and the World. And if they be a little easy themselves in this Method; they are apt to think that Almighty God is easy with them likewise. But it is high time to awake out of this Dream. It is the Paradise of Madmen; and a State of the deepest Folly and Misery. It is high time to consider what Religion is: that it is not the being professed Christians; or Members of the best Church in the World; or Frequenters of the public Worship; or attentive Hearers of God's Word, that can at last avail us; without living as becomes Christians; without adorning the Church we boast of, by an exemplary Holiness; without manifesting a deep Sense of God in all our Conversation; and without doing that Will of our heavenly Father, which we pretend to hear with so much readiness.

AND God grant that all of us may consider these Things, as to let them have their due Influence upon all our future Behaviour, through *Jesus Christ* our Lord! *Amen!*



*The Power of Charity to cover Sins, considered.*

## SERMON XI.

1 PETER iv. 8.

*And above all things have fervent Charity among your selves: for Charity shall cover the multitude of Sins.*

THE Design which I am now prosecuting, obligeth me to take notice of such Passages of Scripture as any professed Christians may, on any Account, be apt to interpret to a very bad Purpose: that is, to the giving themselves Encouragement to hope for God's future Mercy; for the Sake of his Son: even whilst they continue in the habitual Practice of known Sins. And the Words which I have now read to you, as well as some others in the *New Testament* to the same purpose, seem at first reading, and taken by themselves, to be as likely to be abused this way, as any we can well pick out: which, therefore, I now design carefully to consider; in order to prevent any such fatal-practical Mistake as may endanger the Salvation of those who profess the Faith of Jesus Christ.

THE *Apostle* is, in this Verse, after the most earnest manner, pressing upon the Christians to whom he writes, the most fervent and unconfined Love towards one another, *Above all things, have fervent Charity among your selves*: as his great, Master had frequently, in the most pathetic manner, exhorted his Followers to love one another. From which Words, *Charity among your selves*; it is evident that He is not in this place, pressing upon them Love in the most comprehensive Sense possible; or the Love of God, which is a distinct part of the Law of Christ; but particularly the Love of one another.

NOR is it any Objection against this (which is indeed plain from the very Words) that the form of Expression, with which the *Apostle* introduceth them, seems too much for this. For the Phrase, *above all things*, in the common use of it, is not designed to be understood, as making the thing spoken of, of greater Importance than every other Point whatsoever: but only to signify that the Matter is of great Importance; and that there was great Occasion, perhaps from some manifest Failure amongst the Persons spoken to, to press upon them this Particular, at this time, above all others. Thus, to give one plain Instance, St. *James*, in the *fifth Chapter of his Epistle, at the 12th ver.* brings in the Prohibition of Swearing, after the same manner, *But above all things, my Brethren, swear not.* Not that any one can imagine but that other Crimes, condemned by the Gospel, were full as much to be avoided by Christians, or were of a less heinous nature than this: but that He had some more than ordinary present Occasion to remind them of their Duty in this Particular; and in an especial manner to charge them not to be guilty of this Vice. So likewise, in the Case before us, there may be supposed very good Reason for St. *Peter*, at that time, to press upon *Christians* to



whom He wrote, the Love of one another, *above all things*; because they either had offended particularly against this Law, or were most likely to do so; without putting such a Sense upon this common Form of Expression, as if He must mean by it any thing more, and greater, than what this own Words profess; *viz. fervent Charity among themselves*.

234

THIS might suffice to account for the manner of his introducing this Duty: but it is fit likewise to consider that the Love of one another, considered as a Duty distinct from the Love of God and all other Duties; the Forgiveness of one another; the bearing with, and tenderly regarding one another, is so peculiar a Branch of Christianity: is so much insisted on by Christ himself, as the indispensable Condition of our Happiness, and that which He came down from Heaven in an especial manner to implant, and encourage in the Minds and Manners of Men; that an Apostle, and Preacher of the same Gospel, might well, in speaking to Christians, put them in mind, in a very particular manner, to regard this peculiar Branch of their Profession; that Love of one another, by which all Men were to know they were Christ's Disciples, and to see them distinguished from the rest of an unfriendly, and selfish World about them.

IT is, therefore, without doubt, as the Words themselves shew, Love to one another, peculiarly so called, or a *fervent Charity among themselves*, that St. Peter is pressing upon them with such Vehemence: and which he urgeth farther by this Consideration; *for Charity*, i. e. this Charity to one another, of which He is speaking, *shall cover the multitude of Sins*. With respect to which words, all my present Design is to guard against any fatal practical Mistake, by considering in what Senses they may possibly, or probably, be understood; and shewing that no Encouragement can be drawn from these or the like Words, taken in any Sense of which they are capable, to induce Christians to hope for Salvation on account of their *loving* one another, or forgiving one another, without forsaking their own Sins, and entering upon an holy Course of Life in other respects.

235

INDEED, it is very observable that there are none less likely to stand in need of the Abuse of this Text than such as are truly charitable; and sincerely love their Neighbours; and are heartily disposed to forgive their Offenses against themselves: that none have fewer Faults to cover, than such as these; or are less likely to take Refuge in their *Charity*, to indulge themselves in any thing evil. For, Did any of us ever know one truly charitable Man; I mean, charitable in a regular and stated Course, and in an eminent Degree; who willingly allowed himself in the habitual Practice of any known Vice; or in any sort of Transgression of God's Law? On the contrary, tho' we may have known a very vicious Man do particular Acts of Liberality, and shew an uncommon Generosity upon some uncommon Occasion; perhaps out of an ill-gotten Stock; and to support a great Temporal Interest: yet, did we ever know any Man, who continued in a course of a *multitude* of known *Sins*, to be regularly charitable in a great degree; and always disposed and ready to forgive and overlook all Offenses against himself? But yet it is fitting sometimes to do more than may be strictly necessary, in order

236



to take away all Pretext from such Men, as may fancy themselves possessed of a Charity which they have not; and take Courage from thence to presume upon the Mercy of God. To return, therefore, to what I proposed,

1. IT is not at all improbable that the *Apostle*, when He declares that our *Charity shall cover*, or covers, *the multitude of Sins*, means that it will, or doth, cover the Sins of *others*; and not our own: which Interpretation at once cuts off the Ground of the Mistake, supposed to be founded upon this Declaration. And supposing him to speak of the Sins of others; it may be, as it hath been by several Interpreters, understood two ways.

1. IT may signify that our Charity and Love to others will incline us to *cover*, that is, to hide so as to forgive, and not to revenge or punish, all the Offences of others against our selves. So that the *Apostle* may exhort the Christians to have a fervent inward Affection for one another, on this Account; because this fervent Love of one another will incline them to overlook and forgive all the Offences of others against themselves: which is so main a part of the Evangelical Law, and so acceptable in the Eyes of God. Against this Interpretation there may be *Two Objections* raised.

1. THE first is, that the Phrase, which is rendered *to cover Sins*, is always in other places used with respect to God's covering our Sins, and not to our covering the Offences of others against our selves. But this will not be of great force, because, tho' this may possibly be found true, yet is to be looked upon as a Matter purely accidental; and not arising from any Impropriety in applying the Word to the Sins of others: it being of that nature, that it is full as apt to express our covering, so as to pardon the Offences of others, as it is to denote God Almighty's covering, so as to pardon our Offences. Just as the Word *Forgive* is used both of God's forgiving our Sins, and of our forgiving one another: So may the Word *Cover* be, in it self, equally proper in both cases; and the Circumstances or Words of any particular Passage of Scripture be reasonably left to determine to which it is designed by the Writer to belong. If the Word which is translated *Forgive*, had happened to have been generally used in speaking of God's forgiving us; this would not have been a Proof that it might not have been used, in one or two places, where our Forgiveness of one another was spoken of: and the same may be said with respect to the Word *Cover*; which is equally applicable to both Cases. From whence it follows, that no Argument can be drawn from hence to prove that it may not as properly and justly be said that Charity *covers* the Offences of others against us, as that it *covers* our Offences against God. Indeed, if there were any thing peculiar in the Word, which made it absurd to apply it to any thing but our own Sins against God; a critical Argument might be drawn from hence against this Sense. But when the Word is frequently used in many other Cases, and applied to many other Things; nay, is only in a metaphorical Sense used for Forgiveness, or taking no notice of, Sins; nothing can be urged from hence against using it in all Cases, in which it is equally proper. Besides, as I hope to make out by and by, this very Word and Phrase is used by St. *James*, with respect to the Sins of others.

237

238

239

2. IT may seem to some a little absurd to make the *Apostle* press Christians with so much Vehemence to mutual Love; not by declaring the future Reward of it, but by laying before them, one main Effect and Branch of it, as a Motive to engage them to endeavour after that Love. But if we consider what a Stress the Gospel layeth upon our Placability, and Forgiveness of one another; we shall not much wonder to find an *Apostle*, earnestly pressing Christians to labour after that inward Disposition, which will produce such an Effect; so necessary to their own Happiness. Let us labour after a fervent Charity, or Love, for one another; for this will dispose us readily to *cover*, to pass by, overlook, and forgive, the greatest Number of Offences of others against our selves: This, I say, is no small Argument to Christians, who know that this is the way to their own Forgiveness, and Happiness; and a Condition, without which they cannot hope to have their own past Sins covered by Almighty God. The like way of speaking is used by St. *Paul*, [Rom. xiii. 8.](#) where He exhorts the Christians to *love one another*, because He *that loveth another* may be said to have *fulfilled the Law*: that is, because, if we truly love one another, this will induce us to do no Mischief, but all possible Good, to our Neighbour; and so to come up to what is required of us by God, with respect to our Neighbour, which must be a great and substantial Motive to any Christian to endeavour after such a Love, and Charity.

2. THE second way, in which the Words of the Text may be interpreted, with respect to the *Sins of others*, is this; that, if we have a *fervent Charity* for others, this will engage us to seek after the Conversion of such as are Sinners, and so our Love to the Souls of Men, shewing it self by turning many to Righteousness, will be the Occasion of God's covering, or pardoning, their Sins, who are so turned from a Life of Sin, to all holy Conversation; and Godliness. This is, indeed, a safe Sense of the Words. But, I cannot think it so probable that the *Apostle* could mean this; because it is unlikely that the Christians to whom He wrote should so understand him: since He doth not make the least mention, or give the least hint, of that Conversion of Sinners, upon which this Interpretation wholly depends. If this had been the thing in his View; it is hardly possible to suppose but that He would have once mentioned what He principally intended.

I GRANT, indeed, that there is a Passage at the latter end of St. *James's Epistle*; which in Words is parallel to this in St. *Peter*: about which it is now fit to say something. The very last Words of that *Epistle* are these, *Let him know that He who converts a Sinner from the Error of his way, shall save a Soul from Death, and shall cover a multitude of Sins*, the very Words used by St. *Peter*. Where indeed it is very natural to interpret the Words to signify, that by converting a Sinner to Righteousness we *save a Soul from Death*; and are the Occasion of God's not punishing those many Sins, which if they had been continued in, must have laid the Sinner open to the Divine Vengeance: which is a Consideration enough to move any sincere Christian to that Work. Nor is it any Objection against this Interpretation, that *saving a Soul from Death, and covering a multitude of Sins* in this Sense, are the same thing,

in other Words; when the Apostles seems to propound them as two distinct Motives: because there are numberless Instances, in sacred and profane Writers of the best Rank, of the like Tautology to this; viz. the expressing the present Sentiment of their Minds, at the same time, after several ways, and yet still to the same Purpose.

BUT here, we see, when St *James* meant particularly to signify to Christians that it was by Conversion of Sinners that they might be Instruments of *covering a multitude of Sins*, which was a great and God-like Work; that He doth not speak of Charity in general: but very particularly and plainly points out to them that particular Branch of it, by which *a multitude of Sins* might be *covered*. And this is an Argument why St. *Peter* probably had not this in his View: because, if He had, there is no reason to think but that He would have said so, as plainly as St. *James* did; or, at least, that He would have given some Hint, sufficient to have led us to understand Him to the same Purpose. Nor is the use of the same expression sufficient to shew that they both meant the same thing: it being full as proper for St. *Peter* to tell Christians that their Love to one another would engage them to forgive one another's Offences, without resenting or punishing them; as for St. *James* to tell other Christians that their converting a Sinner would be the means of his past Sins being covered, so as to be forgiven by God. This shews us that, as the Word *Cover* is applied to several other things as well as *Sins*; so, may the Expression of *covering Sins*, or a *multitude of Sins*, be used with respect to very different Cases, and with very different Views.

THIS, therefore, is the first general Proposition I lay down, that these Words may be so interpreted, at least one way, very probably, as to respect only the covering the Sins of others from Punishment; and not our own. And if this be the Intent of the Apostle in this place; the Inference is plain, that all Ground is removed of building upon it any such Opinion, as that any degree of any sort of Charity will *cover our own Sins*: since, according to this Interpretation, all that is here said, is that our Charity will cover, and overlook, the Failings and Offenses of others. Nay, if this be but a possible Interpretation of the Words; as long as it is free from all Hazard; who would be so weak as to venture his Eternity, and Salvation, upon the Possibility of any other Sense, not so certainly safe, and secure? But lest any Sinner should think himself too hardly dealt with; and not indulged and soothed, so much as he may imagine this *Passage* to have indulged him: let us proceed farther, and, in the *second place*,

II. LET us suppose that the *Apostle* intended in the Text to exhort and allure *Christians* to *Charity* amongst one another, by telling them that *Charity* would *cover the multitude of their own Sins*: and yet we shall find, upon a due Examination, how small a Consolation this, or any the like Assertion, rightly understood, can afford to any *Christian* who continues in his Sins. And, under this Head, it is my Design to take notice of *three* or *four* several Passages, which may give unstable Men occasion of imposing upon themselves.

243

244

245

As to the Words of the Text; supposing it be affirmed by St. *Peter* that *Charity shall cover the multitude of our own Sins*; I say,

1. IT is highly unreasonable to interpret this, as if He meant that it should atone for the wilful Sins in which we still continue: because to say this of any thing, is to contradict, as I have often observed, the whole Tenour of the Gospel, in which *the Wrath of God is revealed*, without Exception, *against all Unrighteousness*. This therefore, cannot be fixed upon any obscure Words of the first Preachers of the Gospel: whose Business it was to declare this *Wrath of God*: it being one certain Rule to go by, not to fix a Sense upon any particular Passage, contrary to the main Design, and Tenour, of the whole.

2. IT is contrary to St. *Peter's* own Declarations, and most earnest Exhortations, in this very Epistle: who beseecheth the Christians to whom He wrote, *to be holy in all manner of Conversation, as He that called them is holy, ch. i. 15. And to abstain from fleshly Lusts which war against the Soul, Ch. ii. ver. 11.* and the like. Now in vain did He do this; and to no purpose were all his Exhortations: if He can be supposed tell them after all, that tho' they should *not be holy in all manner of Conversation*; tho' they should *not abstain from fleshly Lusts*; yet they might be secure of the Favour of God; that, if they did but take care to love one another, that would cover all. So that if we would not make St. *Peter* contradict and destroy his own Design; we must not make him speak after this manner.

BUT if any should say that St. *Peter* means it of a most comprehensive and extensive Love of God, and Man: I answer, that He saith himself, He means it of *Charity among themselves*; and that St. *James* hath used the very same Words of one single Branch of brotherly-Love, which are supposed, by those who alledge this, to be exactly parallel in meaning to these in St. *Peter*. This wholly takes away the Benefit of this Observation; and affixeth Salvation to one single Branch of Charity, distinct from other Virtues.

AND here, having mentioned the *Passage* in St. *James* again; I must observe of *that* likewise, that, supposing the *Apostle* to mean by it, that a Christian by *converting a Sinner doth cover*, or make an Atonement, for his own Sins; yet, it cannot there be understood of the Sins he continues in; but only of those which He hath forsaken because the particular Branch of Charity spoken of there, supposeth the Necessity of all Sinners being converted, in order to the saving their Souls. If therefore, I convert a Sinner; yet, if I my self remain a wilful Sinner against God's Laws in other respects; there is the same Necessity of my being converted, in order to the saving my Soul, that there was for the Conversion of the other, about whom I have been labouring. But if it were sufficient to convert another; though the Converter himself remain a wilful habitual Sinner; supposing that another should afterwards convert this Man himself from his Sins; it cannot be said, as this *Passage* affirms, that He *saves a Soul from Death*, because it was saved before by his having converted another: and then likewise, all the Business any Man hath to do, is to endeavour to chuse out some Sinner, and by all means to labour his Conversion upon which He may be sure of God's Favour, let

246

247

248

his own Life be what it will. But what then signifieth the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*? and the Terrors of the Lord displayed in it against Sinners; if such a Sense can be fixed upon any part of it? It remains, therefore,

3. THAT, if St. *Peter* meant the Words of the Text with respect to our own Sins, all his Intention was to say that our loving one another; our kind Regards; our Placability and good Nature; our Forgiveness and Forbearance of one another, would engage Almighty God to forbear the Punishment of us, or to forgive to us our selves those manifold Sins, which we have ever been guilty of towards Him, in Time past: not those which we indulge our selves in; but those which we have forsaken. For I must observe to you that this is the Peculiarity belonging to that great Virtue of loving one another, so as to be ready to forbear, and forgive; viz. that, for the sake of *that*, God will forgive us the Sins which we have forsaken: but that, without it, (that is, unless we forgive others, our Neighbours and Brethren;) even those Sins which we have formerly been guilty of; tho' we have forsaken them, and tho' God had, upon that, heretofore forgiven them; shall be remembred against us, solely on the Account of our implacable and unforgiving Temper of Mind.

IF St. *Peter*, therefore, speaks of *our own Sins*, as covered by our Love to others; I take him to say what our Lord himself affirmed, *Matth. vi. 14. If ye forgive Men their Trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*: to the right Interpretation of which Words, what I have already said will lead all Christians who are not resolved to impose upon themselves. The Interpretation which I mean is this, that, if they forgive the Trespases of others, God will likewise forgive them the Sins which they have forsaken, and amended: but, if they do not forgive others, that even those Sins which God had formerly remitted to them, on Account of their first Faith, or Amendment, shall be again accounted for, and severely punished upon them in the other World. And thus *Christ* himself seems to have explained it in the Parable, *Matth. xviii. 3.* in which the *Lord* punisheth his Servant for the Debt which He had once forgiven him, only because afterwards He would not forgive the small Debt of one of his Fellow-Servants.

To draw towards a Conclusion; If our Lord, in his Account of the great Day, speaks of *Alms-giving* only; we see, by the forementioned Text, and multitudes of others, that it was not his Design there to speak of every thing necessary; but only to shew the great Acceptableness of that Branch of Charity to God Almighty; and what strict Enquiry there would be made, at the great Day, into the Practice of this Virtue: but that we must not so interpret it, as to render void his other plain Declarations about the absolute Necessity of all the other Instances of Goodness and Holiness.

IF, in any other Places of Scripture, or in the Apocryphal pious Writers, *Alms-giving*, or any sort of Charity, be spoken of as an *Atonement for Sins*; or particularly, in any of the first Christian Writers: it is evident how a Christian must understand such Expressions. Every thing that is commendable; Every singular Act of Piety, or Charity, may be, by a Figure

249

250

251

of speech, called a *Sacrifice*, as it is offered to the Honour and Service of God by those who perform it rightly: or an *Atonement*, as it may be said to make some Amends for a past Life of contrary or Vicious Actions; just as a present Regard and Friendship, and the serving any Man in a very remarkable Matter of Importance, may be called an Atonement for a past State of Disservice and Disrespect; without supposing any such single Actions to be any Satisfaction, or Atonement, for multitudes of Affronts which we continue, upon many more Occasions, still to offer Him.

IF any Writers, of good Authority, have parallell'd the *Atonement of Mercy* with that of *Baptism*; this shews still farther that they could mean it with respect to nothing but past Sins, forsaken and abandoned. For, as *Baptism* atones not for any Sins, but such as were committed before it, and are utterly renounced in it; not at all for such as the baptized Person continues in, after his Baptism; so, in like manner, cannot *Mercy*, or *Charity*, by any one who useth this Similitude, be thought, or said, to atone for any Sins, but what are forsaken by the merciful Person: not at all for such as He still continues to be guilty of.

FROM all which there cannot be any Consolation, or hope of Salvation, drawn to any such Christians, as still go on to allow themselves in the wilful Violation of any of the Laws of Christ: but, on the contrary, this Consolation of making some sort of amends to *God Almighty*, by signal Acts of *Charity*, belongs only to such as, tho' Sinners in Time past, yet have now actually reformed their Lives.

THIS, therefore, is the Christian Doctrine about *Charity* or rather, about that Part of it which consists in Forgiveness of others: that, on account of this, for the sake of *Jesus Christ*, God will cover and forgive our Sins, which we have forsaken and not without it. And this is so far from releasing us from the Obligation of forsaking them; that it supposeth it done, and adds to it the Obligation of our imitating God Almighty in forgiving one another: which God grant we may all do, & c.

252

253

254

255

*Of relying upon the Merits of Christ, for Salvation.*

## SERMON XII.

First Epistle of St JOHN, Ch. II. part of the 1st and 2d Verses.

*If any Man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the Propitiation for our Sins.*

IN this Passage; the Apostle declares that it is for the sake of *Jesus Christ*, and on account of his sufferings, that the Sins committed by his Disciples will be forgiven by Almighty God. Now from this, and the like Declarations in the *New Testament*, many professed Christians have taken occasion to frame to themselves such Notions concerning the Merits of Christ, and the Sacrifice of his Death; and his Intercession with the Father, founded upon these; as may comfort themselves in their Continuance in Sin, and take off from their Minds all that Uneasiness which might otherwise arise from the Reflexion on their own wilful Demerits, and Unworthiness. Which fatal Proceeding of Christians addicted to their Lusts and Passions, makes it necessary particularly to consider this Point; in order to rectify so pernicious a Mistake. And to this End, I propose at this time

I. To lay down the Doctrine of the *New Testament*, concerning the Merits of *Christ*, or the Effect of his Sufferings, with respect to the Pardon of our Sins, and our future Happiness.

II. To take more particular notice of that unworthy Abuse of this Doctrine, of which Christians, in these later Ages especially, have been, and are guilty.

III. To shew the Baseness and Absurdity of this Abuse. And,

IV. To point out to you the true, and good Uses that Christians, ought to make of this Doctrine.

I. THE Doctrine it self, concerning the *Merits of Christ*, or the Effect of his Sufferings towards the Pardon of our Sins, and our eternal Happiness, I have heretofore in effect proposed: when, under the former part of my present Design, I shewed you that, in order to our Acceptance and final Justification, thro' *Jesus Christ*, it is absolutely required of us in the Gospel, that we forsake those Sins which we have been guilty of; and practise sincerely an universal Obedience to the whole Will of God, any ways made known to us. This having been plainly made out from the most express Declarations in the *New Testament*; it is enough to observe from hence, that, in the Words of the Text, *Jesus Christ is the Propitiation for those Sins*, which we carefully and conscientiously endeavour to avoid, and forsake; not for those which we wilfully continue in: that the *Merits of Christ*, so much talked of by some, are so great, that, for the sake of his Sufferings, God will accept to his Favour and Mercy, such as lay hold on the Terms offered by the same *Jesus Christ*; such Christians as relinquish and abandon their Vices; and come up to that Condition of universal Holiness required by



Him; but not such as still continue, notwithstanding all his Calls, and all his Denunciations, to prosecute their own vile Lusts, and to oppose and contradict the Will Of God.

THIS, I say, most manifestly follows from the plain Proofs formerly given, out of the *New Testament*, concerning the indispensable Necessity lying upon Christians to forsake their Sins, in order to their Pardon; and to practise all Virtue, in order to their Happiness. For if these Conditions be plainly and expresly required in the Gospel-Covenant; then it is apparent, beyond Contradiction, that, upon the Gospel-Covenant, sealed by the Blood of Christ, and entered into for the sake of his Merits, there can be no Pardon, nor Salvation, demanded, or hoped for, but by such as forsake their Sins, and obey the Moral Laws of the Gospel; and, in other Words, that the Sufferings of Christ have actually procured these *Conditions* to be granted by Almighty God; that so those Sinners who have forsaken their Sins, and entered on a new Course of Action, may obtain Justification from the Guilt of their former Sins, and Eternal Happiness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

AND who will not say that this is sufficient Satisfaction to any well-disposed Mind, to be assured, in such a way, that He is accepted by God, and hath a Title to Happiness? without which Assurance, the Mind of a considering Person must be perpetually disturbed with Fears and Jealousies. And who will not own that this is all that could be expected, or reasonably wished for, from a God of Holiness, and Wisdom, well as of Mercy; to offer Pardon and Salvation upon these Conditions only? since by this Method He gives all the Comfort to Sinners that is possible, without encouraging them to continue in their Sins; and all the Discouragement possible to Vice, without making every Instance of it absolutely unpardonable.

IF any reply to this, that the Merits of so divine, and spotless a Being as *Jesus Christ* are infinite; and therefore every thing may be hoped for from them: I answer, that the Question is not, what the *Merits of Christ* are in themselves; or what they might possibly have procured; but what the Gospel declareth that they have actually procured for all sincere Believers. Let them be what they will in themselves; They can be no more to us, than what God Almighty thinks fit to make them, agreeably to the eternal Laws of Reason, and Wisdom. The Mercy of God is, in a good Sense, infinite: that is, it is bounded by nothing but his own perfect Wisdom, and Holiness: against the Laws of which Wisdom and Holiness it cannot act; and beyond which, it would not be a Perfection, but a Weakness. So likewise, supposing the Merits and Value of Christ's Sufferings to be unbounded, and infinite, considered without supposing the Gospel-Covenant actually made: yet, when it pleased God to be moved to make a Covenant by these Sufferings; the Merit of these Sufferings, with respect to such as God enters into this Covenant with, must be bounded, by the plain *Terms and Conditions* of this Covenant. It depends upon God's Will, and his Wisdom, what these *Conditions* shall be: and consequently what is procured for us by these Sufferings can be no more than what God sees fit; and what He declareth, they shall procure for us. And therefore, I say, let the

258

259

260



Merits of Christ be never so unbounded, before this Covenant is supposed; let the Value of his *Propitiation* be infinite; yet it is plain they are bounded, as to us, as soon as God declares what He will do, and what He will not do, for the sake of these Sufferings: which is the Business of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

NOW, when it declared by this very Person, whose Merits are so much pleaded by some, that God will accept returning Sinners, upon their Amendment; and that such as continue in their Sins shall be excluded from his Kingdom: I say, when He himself declareth this; He doth in effect declare to Christians, in other words, that He hath no Merits available for any who are not reformed according to his Moral Laws; that, tho' He be the *Propitiation* for their *Sins*, yet it is for their past, and forsaken Sins; that the Extent and Effect of his Merits, with respect to his Disciples is this, that, for the sake of his Sufferings, God will forgive the Sins of such as do at any time so turn to him as heartily to abhor and forsake them; and make happy all such as do sincerely set themselves to the Practice of Righteousness, and make an actual Progress in the Ways of his Commandments. Let any one but read the New Testament with a well-disposed Mind; and He will find that This is the whole Doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, concerning the Merits and Value Of his Sufferings, and their Efficacy towards the Pardon and Salvation of his Followers. But though this be so manifest, yet,

II. IT is as manifest, that there have been, especially in there later Ages, and still are, (in a very vicious Generation of Men) Multitudes of Christians, who are not content with this, that God should pardon the Sins which they have forsaken, for the sake of the Merits of Christ: but profess to believe that He will pardon all the Sins which they can possibly continue in, till Death overtakes them; if so be they can but have Time to declare their Trust in Christ's Merits to this Purpose; or, in the usual Phrase, to apply to themselves, with abundance of Confidence, the Merits of their Saviour, or the Promises of God made to Christians for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ. They seem to think that Christ's Merit excuseth them from attempting to have any Merit in themselves: nay, that it would derogate from, and disparage his Merits, if they should pretend to have any thing in themselves so much as agreeable to the Will of God; that it would be a piece of unpardonable Presumption in them, to pretend to imitate the Moral Perfections of God, tho' they are called *to be holy, as He is holy*.

SOMETIMES they urge that there is nothing perfect here; and no Man but what sins: and that, if they themselves stand in need of the Merits of Christ to screen them from the Divine Vengeance; so do their Neighbours likewise. As if, because the Value of Christ's Sufferings will atone for the Failings, and the forsaken Sins, of a sincere Christian; therefore, they must needs atone for the wilful and continued Transgressions of such as go on to disgrace that holy Name by which they are called, by a most unholy Life, and are every Day wilfully affronting their God and Saviour. How unaccountable is this? And yet there is hardly any thing more common, than for the most notorious and wicked Christians to profane his Merits, and his Sufferings, by openly professing their Trust, and entire Confidence in them.

261

262

263

And, what is very remarkable, the more unchristian and profligate Men have been in their Lives, the more strong and confident shall you often find them in that which they call *Faith*, and in their foolish Trust in that which belongs not to them, So that whilst many good Christians, thro' Excess of Modesty and Humility, or thro' bodily Indisposition, are almost sunk with the Imagination that they have not done enough to give their Hearts Ground for Confidence in the Merits of God: you shall frequently find many of those, who have stood out against all the Calls of God to Repentance and Amendment, and persevered to the End in Vice and Immorality, as secure of his Favour at last, and as satisfied with their Prospect into another State, by the help of their groundless Confidence in Christ's Merits, as if the Gospel had been calculated, not to engage Men to *deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly*; but merely to speak Peace, and Quiet, and Comfort, to the Minds of the most notorious Sinners, even whilst they know themselves not to be amended in any respect.

264

But how great must the Power of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, be upon the Hearts of Men, when they can influence them to believe, (as it hath happened to some) that the way to glorify the Grace and Mercy of God is to multiply their Sins and Vices; that the way most largely and effectually to partake in the Merits of Christ, is to add Sin to Sin, that there may be the more to be pardoned, and the more Thanks due to him who pardons? These, and the like Absurdities, contrary to the whole Tenour of the Gospel, hath a Love to Sin imposed upon some Men; as a Refuge from the Reproaches, and Forebodings, of a guilty Conscience; and these are often found to be fixed, without the least Ground, upon such general Declarations of the Value of the propitiatory Sacrifice of Christ, and the Merits of his Sufferings, as that in the Text

265

BECAUSE He is declared to be a *Propitiation for our Sins*; to be our *Advocate*, by virtue of that Propitiation, *with the Father; to have purged our Sins upon the Cross; and to have died for us Sinners*; because, in consequence of these Declarations; it hath been delivered and taught by the Churches of Christ, that, *by his one Oblation of himself upon the Cross once offered, He hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, and Satisfaction, for the Sins of the whole World*: therefore, they argue that their Sins cannot be too many for such a Sacrifice to atone for; therefore they plead that these Sins, thus atoned for, are of all sorts; as well those which they indulge themselves in, to the last Period of their Lives, as those which have been forsaken, and abandoned; abusing the Mercy of God, and the Merits of their Saviour, to their own eternal Perdition; as will appear, if we consider seriously,

266

III. THE great Unreasonableness, Baseness, and Absurdity, of this Abuse. That Christians should so far forget the nature of their Religion, which hath, in the plainest Words, made an universal Holiness indispensably necessary; that they should be so far from being led by the Goodness of God to Repentance and Amendment, that they should rather take occasion from his Love to treasure up for themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath; that those very

Sufferings of Christ, which were designed as the greatest Argument to affright them from all Sin, should be made as it were the Incentive and Motive to them to continue in Sin; that the greatest Instance of Love ever displayed before the Eyes of Men should be returned in Affronts, and Disobedience to God, and to his Son: These are such astonishing Marks of absurd Confidence, and Baseness of Temper, as cannot be parallell'd.



THE Nature, and End of Christian Religion, plainly established, must direct us in all our Interpretations of any of its general Declarations. And this Religion being holy, pure, and spotless; revealed by the Son of God from Heaven for the Conversion and Amendment of the World, and to teach us to forsake all Sin, and to live in all holy Obedience to God; the Wrath of God being often declared in it against all Unrighteousness of Men: it is impossible that any Comfort should be administred in it to such as continue in Sin; because this would be to destroy its own main Design, and to frustrate its own great End. From hence therefore it follows, that it is the highest Absurdity to argue from its general Declarations concerning a Sacrifice for Sins, and a Propitiation of invaluable Merit, that this Sacrifice will be available for those Sins of Christians in which they still wilfully continue: because this is to contradict the great End of their Religion: to make all Virtue unnecessary; and to turn all Christianity into a confident Appeal to the Merits of Christ.



AGAIN, It is the most absurd and unreasonable thing in the World, to fix such a thing as this upon Almighty God: or to suppose that He should send a Person from Heaven to live and dye here on Earth, and to teach Mankind an excellent Doctrine; and at the same time declare, that it is no great Matter, whether they imitate his Example, or obey his Precepts, if so be they do but trust in his Merits, rely upon his Sacrifice and put their Confidence in the infinite Value of his Sufferings; that this shall be their Comfort here, and their Reward hereafter. Who can believe this possible, I say, that knows and considers what God is; an holy, and wise Being; at an infinite distance from all Sin and Iniquity? From what would this be, but to reveal a Religion from Heaven, with the greatest solemnity, on purpose to assure Men that Virtue is of no great Importance; and on purpose to encourage Vice, and Immorality in the World? I say this because, in truth, such Pretences of Christians do manifestly, and effectually, tend to nothing else, but to render vain all the moral Precepts of the Gospel; and to bring a Contempt upon all that is substantially good in Religion.



AND if this be so absurd in any reasonable Creature, to fix such an Absurdity upon God, how much more absurd and intolerable must it be in a Christian, after this Revelation is made, in which the Nature of God, and his Hatred of Sin, are made known to him, to affront Almighty God with a Supposition which a very Heathen would be afraid to make? Nay, it receives a great Aggravation, when it is considered that it is by the Declaration of the Gospel only that we can know what the Merits of Christ's Sufferings are to us; and that in this they are so plainly limited, as to the Extent, and End of them, that a sincere Mind cannot mistake. I have already observed to you what is declared there; and, with how much

Plainness all who continue in their Sins, are debarr'd in that from any Benefit from the Sufferings of Christ, nay, how plainly they are assured that this very Gospel, and the Sufferings of Christ, shall be an aggravation to their Punishment hereafter. And if, notwithstanding all the Limitations which God himself hath set to his Mercy, and to the Merits of his Son; these Persons will make a new Covenant, and a new Compact, for themselves: what must we think of such an egregious and groundless piece of Folly and Absurdity?

270

BESIDES, how base and ungrateful a Temper must this proceed from; to make use of the Goodness of God, and those Sufferings which were the highest Instance of Christ's Love to them, as an Encouragement to themselves to take part with the great Enemy of God and of Christ? How would it sound in the Ears of any Man of the meanest Capacity, to hear Christians speaking thus; *God so loved the World that He sent his only begotten Son*; and this Son of God hath declared his Love in dying for Sinners, after an unparallell'd manner; therefore, let us affront him, and join our selves to his greatest Adversary; still trusting that his Merits, and Sufferings, will make him look upon us, and treat us as his Friends? Yet, after this manner doth every Sinner argue, who resolutely continues a Sinner; and yet pretends to trust in the Merits of his Saviour, for Pardon, and Salvation.

To make the matter yet more plain; put the Case that any Prince should send his own Son to a Company of professed Rebels; and for the sake of what He should do and suffer amongst them, offer to be reconciled to such of them as should be influenced by this Method to repent, and return to their Obedience: what greater Affront, or Indignity, can one well imagine, than, if these Person, professing to lay hold on his Offers, should yet continue to affront him, and disobey all his just Commands, as much as ever; and yet all the time plead before him the Sufferings of his Son, and argue that his Merit must screen them from Punishment, which was designed merely to make their future Obedience accepted; and which greatly increaseth the Guilt of their continuing such Affronts and Injuries? Would not this Appeal to those Merits appear only a piece of formal Mockery; and justify to all the World the severest Punishment of those who should have nothing else to plead? Let us therefore,

271

IV. LASTLY, from what hath been said, learn the true and good Uses which Christians ought to make of the *Merits of Jesus Christ*, and of Value of his Sufferings.

1. IN the first place, we may lawfully and justly plead before God the Merits of his Son, and his invaluable Sacrifice, as what He been pleased to declare that He accepts, as an Atonement for those Sins which we forsake, and abandon: and for the sake of this, we may beg, with a well-grounded Assurance, that He will pardon all our past Offences, and whatever is amiss in our whole Frame; and accept of our sincere Endeavours after an universal Conformity to his Will in all Things. This is a sort of *Trust*; and indeed the only *Trust* in the Merits of Christ, which we can justify, or from which we can reap any Comfort, or Advantage:

272

because indeed this is the only Trust agreeable to the Nature and Design of the Gospel and to the many plain Declarations of the New Testament.

THERE is nothing in that sacred Book, of the great Efficacy of applying the Merits of Christ to our selves, in all Circumstances, with an undaunted Confidence. This is a new and modern Addition to the Gospel of Christ. But if we look into any Page of it, we cannot but learn from thence, that we have no Encouragement to apply these Merits to our selves, nor any just Ground of Satisfaction from them, unless we find in our selves a persevering Resolution to forsake all Vice; and a constant Endeavour to perfect Holiness, whilst we have Opportunity: and that it is the uniform Doctrine of the same *New Testament*, that those who have wilfully continued Sinners to the last, have no part in the revealed Promise of God; nor consequently the least Right in the World to apply the Merits of Christ to themselves in particular, which are declared to belong only to such as have forsaken, and renounced their Sins. And if this be not true; then it must be true that the gospel makes no difference between a virtuous, and vicious Life; but makes Eternity depend upon such a Confidence as the best Christians often want, and the worst generally have most of.

2. IN the next place, we ought all to draw a strong Argument against all Sin, and for all holy Obedience, from those very Merits, and Sufferings of *Jesus Christ*, under which some Christians would hide their continued Iniquities. For if Christ be the Propitiation for our Sins; then what must Sin be to Almighty God, who took so severe a Method to be reconciled to Sinners? and what ought it to be to Christians, who know this? How hateful, and how abominable? If *God so loved the World, that He sent his only begotten Son*; if this Son voluntarily humbled himself to the vilest Death for us: how ought we to study to do every thing pleasing to him; and to avoid every thing which He hates and abhors? If so invaluable a Price were paid; that we might be reconciled to God upon any Terms: how ought we to be moved, by the Greatness of this Price, to come up to all his Terms, and Conditions and not to think so long upon the Price, as to forget the End for which it was paid?

*Ye are bought with a Price; therefore glorify God in your Body, and in your Spirit; which are God's*: saith St. Paul, *1 Cor. vi. 20*. The Price paid by Christ to buy Us into his Service, is, in his Account, the greatest Motive why we should serve such a Master faithfully. *Pass the Time of your Sojourning here in Fear*, saith St. Peter, *forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible Things, as Silver, and Gold, but with the precious Blood of Christ, 1 Peter i. 17, 18, 19*. This is the Use, which the *Apostles* earnestly direct *Christians* to make, of the Merits of their Saviour; but they never once advise, or command, or so much as permit, them to think that they shall be saved by these merits, after a Life spent in continual Disobedience to his Moral Laws.

LET this Doctrine, therefore, be fixed in our Minds. The Merits of Christ's Sufferings are so great, that they will atone for the longest Course of Sins; provided we have forsaken, and utterly abandoned them: but of such a nature, as terribly to aggravate the Guilt and

273

274

275

Punishment of those Christians, who take occasion to continue in their Sins, because *Christ* is declared to be the *Propitiation* for them.



*Mistakes about Man's Inability, and Gods Grace, considered.*

### SERMON XIII.

2. COR. iii. 5.

*Not that we are sufficient of our selves, to think any things as of our selves: but our Sufficiency is of God.*

THE *Apostle*, in this *Epistle*, was led, by the cunning Management of some evil-minded Persons amongst the *Corinthians*, to asset his own *Apostleship*; and his own Right to be their Director and Instructor, as He had been the Founder of their Church, and of their Faith. But lest they should think that He boasted of himself above measure; as if from Him, considered by Himself, came all their Good, and all their Happiness of being made Partakers of the *Gospel*; He thinks fit in this Verse to obviate this Insinuation, and to assure them, that by what He had now, or any time before, said to that purpose, He did not design to arrogate to himself the Glory of being the chief and principal Agent in this Matter; but that it was to the great Original of all Things, even to God himself, that they were obliged for so great and unspeakable a Blessing. *Not that we are sufficient of our selves to think .any thing as of our selves: but our Sufficiency is of God.* That is, Not that We *Apostles*, of our selves, did or could lay this Scheme of Salvation: not that it is to us that the Contrivance, and Administration of this, is to be ascribed. But our *Sufficiency*; our being able thus to contribute to your Happiness, and thus successfully to minister to your good, by preaching the *Gospel*, is owing to God.

278

THAT this is the meaning of the *Apostle*, in these Words, will be evident to any one who will be at the Pains to lay together what goes before, and what follows after this Verse. For whoever doth that, will find that the *Apostle* is not here speaking, or thinking of the Duty ordinarily required of Christians, in order to their final Acceptance; but of a Subject entirely different from this; *viz.* of the Work of an *Apostle*; of the first Original of that *Scheme of Salvation* which the *Apostles* preached to the World; and of that Knowledge and Sufficiency which the first Preachers of the *Gospel* had in order to the Performance of their great Work. But tho' this be so plainly the meaning of the Words; yet many Christians, of later Ages, have been led from this Text, and others of the like Sound, into such Errors, as tend, in their own natures, to obstruct and hinder the great Design of the *Gospel*; and to make Men easy and careless about the Performance of those Terms of Acceptance, Holiness and universal Righteousness, which are so plainly required in the *Gospel*.

279

IT is, therefore, of great Importance, to examine, and confute such pernicious Mistakes; and to shew that there is nothing in the *New Testament* to favour them. The Mistakes at which I now particularly point, are such as are founded upon a very fatal Notion of the

Weakness, and Inability of Man; and of the part which Almighty God is to act in the Business of Reformation, and Holiness. For many Persons have not been content with saying that their Natures are weak and frail; too easily carried away by the Force of that multitude of Trials which surround them in this State; that the *Flesh is weak*, and their Inclinations directed with a strong Bias towards Sin and Wickedness; but are likewise pleased with representing themselves in such a State of Inability, and Insufficiency, as that all Motives, and all Calls to Repentance are in vain; in such a State, as that it is impossible for them, by any Act of their own Mind, either to pray effectually to God; or successfully to bear any part, in the great Work of their Salvation, themselves.

280

So likewise, with, respect to *Almighty God*; they are not content with acknowledging that the great Design of their Happiness is owing originally to Him, and is his Work; or that all their Powers and Faculties come from Him, who made them what they are; or that He is ready to assist their Endeavours, whenever they exert them; to answer their sincere Prayers; and to impart to them whatever is necessary to their successful running the Race that is set before them: but they take a sort of Delight in thinking, and speaking, as if Almighty God were to do all for them; as if He, in his own Time, will irresistibly move them to do his Will; and as if, unless he thus interposeth, they have Power, or Strength, to do any thing towards forsaking those Sins to which they have made themselves captive.

281

IN these Senses do they think it for their Purpose, to understand the Words of this Text, and some other Expressions of the *New Testament*, concerning the Insufficiency, and Weakness of Man; and the Sufficiency, and Power of God, in the Matter of Salvation. In order, therefore, to put a Stop to such Notions as these, which naturally tend to render Men indisposed to all Attempts and Endeavours to do their Duty; I have the following Observations to make:

1. ST. *Paul* himself builds no such Doctrine upon that great and strong Notion. He had of his own Insufficiency; and of the Sufficiency of God. This *Insufficiency*, I have shewn already, had reference to the Work of his *Apostleship*; and to his successful Performance of it; that is, to his publishing and enforcing, the Terms of Salvation, amidst a Thousand Difficulties, and a World of Hazards. But because this great Work of Redemption was originally the sole Design and Contrivance of Heaven; because his being an *Apostle* was owing immediately to God; and the Success of his Labours, and his own Courage and Conduct in his Office, depended upon the Providence, and the Favour of God: He doth not presently infer that nothing was to be done by Himself, considered as distinct from his great Patron. But, in this very *Epistle*, He represents Himself, and the other *Apostles*, as *Workers together with God*, [ch. vi. 1.](#) and often speaks of his indefatigable Endeavours to answer the Ends of his Office. And if He were a *Worker together with God*; He had certainly a part of his own distinct from that of *Almighty God*, in this great Affair. And consequently, as He had God Almighty's *Sufficiency* to support Him, and make up his Deficiencies; so He had likewise some Strength

282



and Ability of his own, for his own part. And as *God* was the *Architect*; the chief Builder, Director, and Encourager of the whole; so likewise was the *Apostle*, a *Worker*, under and *together with*, Him.

IF, therefore, in that great Work of the *Apostleship*, encompassed at that time with so many Difficulties and Hazards, St. *Paul* did not mean by such Expressions to signify that he himself had no part to act, but as forced, and impelled irresistibly, by *God Almighty*; but left a part for himself, as well as gave to God the chief Part, and Glory, in it all: much less will it follow, that he meant these and the like Expressions, to signify that, in the Business of every ordinary Christian, so much less difficult than that in which he was engaged, God Almighty was to do all, without the Concurrence of the Man himself; and without his having Strength and Power to bear any part in his own Happiness. If the *Apostle* had such Power, as to be a *Worker together* with God, in that vast and boundless Office; much more many Christians, in their ordinary Spheres of Action, be supposed to have Ability to bear some part in the carrying forward their own Perfection here, and Salvation hereafter.

2. BUT supposing that St. *Paul* had referred the whole to Almighty God, in the literal and strict Sense of the Word; and left himself nothing but a passive Character; and represented himself as irresistibly moved by his Almighty Arm: this having been said by him merely with respect to so great, and difficult a Task, as was that of an *Apostle*, in those first Days; it will not at all follow from hence, that the same is true, with respect to an Office, or Business, not so difficult, and hazardous. It will not so much as follow, that the same is true with respect to succeeding Ministers, and Pastors of the Church, in the ordinary Course of God's Providence; much less will it follow, with respect to the Body of Christians, whose Task doth not take in so great a Compass. It doth not follow that because Almighty God takes the whole upon himself in a great and immense Difficulty; therefore, He likewise takes the whole upon himself, in a Matter of much less Difficulty; and of a much more confined Importance.

3. THE Assistance which God affords to Christians, and the part which He bears in the Work of their Salvation, is so far from being a Proof that they can do nothing towards it themselves; that it is a most powerful Argument, and made use of in the *New Testament*, to engage them to do something for themselves. *Work out your own Salvation*, saith the same St. *Paul*, *with Fear, and Trembling: for it is God that worketh in you both to will, and to do*, [Phil. ii. 12, 13](#). On this very account, use your own Strength and Power, in the Affair of Religion; because God himself, in the Christian Dispensation, affords you his Influences, and his Assistances. And indeed, what more powerful Motive can there be thought of, to engage us to hearty and uninterrupted Labour in our Christian Warfare, than this, that we are carrying forward a Work, in which God himself is engaged; that if it fail at last, the Gracious Design of God will fail thro' our Negligence; that we have so powerful an Assistant and Patron, that the Difficulty of our Work need not discourage us from attempting it, or per-



severing in it; that we are *Fellow-workers* together with God; and therefore should be animated to exert our selves, as all are incited to do under the Eye and Encouragement of their Superiors; and to do even more Work, and with more sollicitious Concern, than we could do, if we had not such a *Patron*, and such an *Assistant*?

To take away the Despair of Success, is so far from Encouraging the Idleness or Neglect of any Person engaged in an Enterprize, that it is absolutely necessary towards their having any Heart, and Courage, for the Execution of it. This *God Almighty* takes from us, by representing himself as our Director, and Assister: and it is this which should fill us with more Concern lest the Enterprize should fail; and animate us with a stronger Resolution to use all our Endeavours. It is because we have such Hope of good Success, under the Patronage of so much Wisdom; and so much Power, that we should be much more vigorous, and resolute, than if we had not such an Encouragement as is included in God's *working in us both to will, and to do*. And,

4. How weak soever we may be; since it is plain from what I have already said, that the Gospel doth not suppose us in a State of utter Inability to bear any part in our own Happiness; I say, our Weakness, or Inability to perform the whole, our selves, is no Argument why we should leave the whole to Almighty God and not think our selves obliged to work together with Him. And yet this seems to have been the Ground of Mistake in this Case, that the Evangelical Dispensation, and consequently the Salvation of Men, is represented as the sole Contrivance and Work of God, in which we bear no part, and were incapable of bearing any. This, without doubt, is true; that we could not have thought of, or entered into, such a Scheme for our own Happiness. But it doth not follow that, when He offers this Happiness to us, He offers it to Beings, as incapable of laying hold on it, as the very Stocks and Stones. It doth not follow, because our great Benefactor prevents us with his Kindness, and voluntarily offers us his Benevolence, and his helping Hand to free us from the greatest of Evils, and enstate us in the most complete Happiness; that therefore we are unable to accept this Kindness, and to help forward so good, and merciful a Design. No, let us acknowledge, as much as we please, our own Insufficiency, and Inability, for so God-like a Work as that of recovering us from Misery to Happiness; to the Glory of Him who is the *Author, and Finisher of our Salvation*: but let us not sooth ourselves in Vice, under the Pretext of a false Humility; and look upon our selves as too weak to do the least thing towards our own Pardon, and Salvation. For our Inability to do some Things, doth not infer our Inability to do others; nor doth our being incapable of the whole, taken all together, prove that we are incapable of any part.

BUT, in return to what hath been said under these two last Heads, I am sensible that some other Expressions of the *New Testament*, may be objected. As,

I. IT may be said that the whole of this great Work of Repentance, and Salvation, seems, in some Expressions, to be ascribed to God: and He to be represented as the sole Agent in

286

287

288

it. In answer to this I have all ready observed that the Contrivance, and Scheme, of the whole Dispensation in which we have Salvation offered us, and the making and proclaiming the Terms of it, are wholly owing to Him, and to his Goodness; previous to any Work, or Merit, of ours: and consequently, it is no Wonder that this is wholly attributed to Him, which is, indeed, literally speaking, solely, and wholly, his Work. When any such Expressions, therefore, come in our way, we should consider whether the Writer be not speaking of this *Christian Dispensation*, as the Work of God: And if he be, we may be sure that this signifieth nothing to the present Question. For God might be the sole Author of this Offer, and this whole Scheme: and yet we may have Strength and Ability to do something towards the laying hold on the Terms of it; towards the complying sincerely with his Offers; and towards the finding out, and Performance, of his Will.

289

BUT if such Expressions should be used, concerning *Almighty God*, with respect to our receiving Benefit from this Dispensation, and the like; it is to be considered farther, that there is nothing more common in all sorts of Writers, than to speak of the chief Leader, Directer, and Performer, of any Work, as if no other deserved to be mentioned. Thus God Almighty's Favour and Holy Spirit, being the great Support and Strength of Christians; it is no wonder if, according to the general Custom of speaking, the great Affair of Salvation be spoken of, as all owing to that. Just as any great Action, tho' executed by a great many in Conjunction, is yet frequently said to be owing to *Him* particularly, who was the great Disposer of all Things concurring to it; and had the chief Hand in it: so may it be in this Case, without inferring that, strictly speaking, no one besides him hath any Concern in it. It is because, comparatively speaking, He bears the chief part; and because without his favourable Concurrence nothing could successfully be done, that He may well, agreeably to the Rules of speaking, be sometimes represented as the Doer of the whole. But it doth not at all follow, from such customary Forms of speaking, that He neither expects, nor requires, the Concurrence, and hearty Endeavours, and Pains, of those to whom He is so good.

290

AGAIN, It is proper to consider that whatever Powers, and Capacities, we have, are originally his Gift; and therefore all the good Effects of them may justly be ascribed to *Him*, as to the first and original Author of all that we have, and all that we can do; that it is to the Concurrence of his daily Providence, and to the Disposition of all Circumstances, which is his Work, that we are indebted for every thing. Without this, we could not have the Opportunity, or Possibility, of knowing the *Terms of Christian Salvation*; or of complying with them. And therefore, it may justly be ascribed to Him, whatsoever is done towards our Happiness, even .by our selves. And, in this Sense, without *Him*, we could neither think, nor act, to any purpose, in our great and most important Concerns. But all this is very consistent with our being moved, after the manner of free Agents, by the Motives he proposeth; and by the Circumstances in which he is pleased to put us.

291

AND then, in all those parts of our Christian Duty, and in all those Cases, in which his Interposition is requisite to our Success, He hath promised his Holy Spirit to them that ask it, and make use of it: a Spirit, which, as it was to be the Support of his *Apostles* in their greater Work; so is it, in proportion, to be the Guide, and Assister of all Christians, who are sincerely desirous to follow it. But this implies in it that we are able, at least, to ask for this *unspeakable Gift of God*: because otherwise it would be but mocking us to promise it to our Prayers, it implies indeed that this Spirit is the great Agent; the great Help to Perfection; and to a Renovation of the Mind of Sinners, and a Reformation of their Practices; so that great things may be spoken of it: but it doth not imply that those to whom it is given are only the mechanical Instruments of it, or any thing to that effect; any more than the Assistance of one Man granted to another, in any Affair, in which without it he could not succeed, supposeth that this other must do nothing himself, and make no Steps, as a voluntary Agent, towards the accomplishing his own Ends.

292

WHATEVER, therefore, is said, in the *New Testament*, or supposed to be said, of *Almighty God*, as the *sole Author* of all relating to our Salvation, may, we see, very justly be accounted for, by the common Usage of speaking, without drawing so strange and absurd a Consequence from it, as divests Men of all Pretence to any part in it: especially considering, in the last Place, that in the same *New Testament*, the greatest Care is taken, when any parts of it are addressed to Christians themselves, to urge, and press, and incite them, as free Agents, to the performance of their Duty; to deal with them as if on themselves, and on their own Endeavours, depended their Happiness; to charge them not to be so ungrateful to God, as to think of leaving all to Him to do: and to threaten them with eternal Damnation, if they neglect to do what is required of them. This likewise will help us,

293

2. TO answer the *Objection* which may be made to what I have said concerning the part of Christians themselves in the Affair of Salvation: *viz.* That the *New Testament* seems to represent them in a *dead* and *lifeless* Condition; unable to help themselves; and the like. For, supposing this, yet, that these, and the like, Expressions were not designed to be understood in any Sense contrary to what I have said, is plain from those multitudes of Addresses, and Appeals, to Christians themselves; and from those many earnest Entreaties, Motives, Promises, Threatnings, in the same *New Testament*: all contrived to make them exert themselves; all such as are inconsistent with the Supposition that God will help them without their own Help; or that they are not able to do that part, which God requireth, and inciteth, them to do.

294

BUT I must remark farther, that, if you consider those Passages which have this Appearance, you will find that they are chiefly, if not always, such as respect only the State of Mankind, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, before the Light of the Gospel brake in upon them; and before the Offers of Salvation were made, or accepted. Before that, the World was universally *dead in Trespasses and Sins*: and the Motives, to induce them to arise from this Death, came

solely from God; not from themselves. But yet the very offering them. *Spiritual Life*, supposed them capable of accepting it; the very pressing, and inciting, them to revive from that Death of Sin, supposeth that they could do what they were so incited to. Almighty God quickened them by these Motives, and Offers; but then, even in this, their accepting and complying with them must be, in part, their own Work; or it could never be made their Reward. As a Man that is stupid and insensible, in some considerable worldly Concerns, may be said to be *dead*, and *lifeless*; and as the Motives, and Arguments, and Persuasives, of Men can quicken and put Life into him, actuating him into good Resolutions, and setting his Zeal on fire and yet the Man himself not supposed to be unable to do any thing for himself, but the contrary: so, in the Case before us, a Man may be called *dead in Trespasses and Sins*; and the Wrath of God, or the Joys of Heaven, and all the Offers of the Gospel, may quicken him; and to these may the thing be ascribed; yet, all this while, without supposing him *dead*, in a literal Sense, or incapable of bearing any part in the accepting these Offers, in the regarding these Motives; and in helping forward his own Happiness. This is a figurative Expression, applied to the State of Sinners: who, as they are said to be *quickened* by God and his Gospel; so are they very frequently called upon to consider their Ways; to rouse themselves out of their supine, and slothful state; to *forsake that which is evil, and practise that which is good*. Neither, therefore, is the great Part which *Almighty God* bears in our Salvation, an Argument that *He* will do all, without *Us*: nor is our Weakness, and Inability, a total Incapacity to join with Him, in our hearty Endeavours and Labours. But as his Hand is necessary; so is our own. As his Arm is powerful to save; so is our own requisite to our Happiness. As our Weakness is nothing without his Strength; so his Strength will be nothing to us without our Weakness. As he is the great Contriver, and Disposer, of the whole Scheme of our Salvation, and is ready to give the *Sufficiency* of his Spirit to all who sincerely ask it; so we are required, and consequently, are able, both to ask it heartily, and to join our own Endeavours with it on which, together with God's Assistance, our Holiness now, and Happiness hereafter, most certainly depend.



*Mistakes about Man's Inability, and God's Grace, considered.*

## SERMON XIV.

2 COR. iii. 5.

*Not that we are sufficient of our selves, to think any thing as of our selves: but our Sufficiency is of God.*

I N my former Discourse upon these Words, I shewed you that it was the sole Design of St. *Paul* in them, to declare, that, in the setting about, and executing, the difficult and laborious Work of an *Apostle*, He did not arrogate to himself the Power, and Ability, and Success, which he had: but that he ascribed his Sufficiency for this great Work, as well as his being designed to it, to God himself, who was the great Contriver of the whole Scheme of Christianity; who miraculously called the *Apostles* to the carrying forward his Design in it; and who endowed them with Powers from above for the Execution of it. This being laid down, as the true meaning of the *Apostle's* Words; I did from hence take occasion to examine and confute the Mistakes of such Christians, as have pretended to be led, by this and such like Expressions in the *New Testament*, into such Notions of their own Weakness and Inability to perform the Will of God; and of the part God Almighty is to bear in their Reformation and Amendment as induce them to indulge their vicious Inclinations, and retain their evil Habits, under the Pretext of waiting for the Interposition of Heaven, and the irresistible Motions of God's Spirit without which, they think, they can do nothing towards their Salvation; and for the obtaining of which, they imagine that nothing can be done on their Parts.

I HOPE, I then made it appear that what was said by St. *Paul* with respect to the Work of an *Apostle* in those Days, in which almost insuperable Difficulties attended it, ought not to be applied to the common Duty of all Christians, in the ordinary Course of God's Providence; that St. *Paul* himself never spake of the Obedience of Christians to the Moral Commands of the Gospel, after such a manner as to give Encouragement to any such Opinion, as that of some who are not content with the Help of God, but would willingly have all irresistibly done by Him; and that the Assistance afforded God to all the honest Endeavours of sincere Christians, in the Gospel-Dispensation, is so far from being an Inducement to them to leave all to be effected by *that*, that it is the most powerful Argument possible to them to exert themselves to the utmost for their own Good; and made use of to this Purpose by the *Apostles* themselves, and particularly by St. *Paul*.

AFTER this, I answered more particularly to *Two Objections*: for the present, supposing that in the *New Testament* there are some Expressions which ascribe the whole Work of Salvation to God, and represent Men as dead and unactive in it. And I shewed, either that those Expressions were designed solely to give to God the Glory of designing and contriving



the Dispensation of the Gospel, and the Work of Redemption; and to describe the State of the World before the Gospel, buried in Sin, and without any Prospect of Help, or any Possibility of such a Relief unless it had come first from Him: or, if any high Expressions of this sort be used concerning the ordinary Task of the Body of Christians, that they may be justly interpreted, by all the Rules of speaking, without recurring to so great an Absurdity, so destructive to the Cause of Virtue; and particularly that they must be explained by the Tenour of plainer Texts, which all represent a great deal to depend upon the Endeavours of Christians themselves, as well as upon the Aids of God's Spirit; and are constantly pressing the labouring part upon all who pretend to be in Pursuit of Happiness.

THERE is one more Objection which deserves a very serious Consideration in this Debate: and which, therefore, I design particularly to answer before I proceed; and that is this, that it is more for the Glory of God, that the whole Work of our Amendment, and Reformation, and Salvation, should be left to *Him*, than that any part of it should be claimed by our selves; and that upon this Account it seems more probable that it all depends upon his irresistible Arm; and more pious and humble for Men passively to permit it to do so. But all this is founded upon Two Errors; *first*, the not judging rightly what is the true Glory of Almighty God; and *secondly*, the imagining that to suppose Man capable of acting together with God in this great Work, is to exclude God from being the Original Fountain of every thing: and therefore, may be fully answered by some Observations, relating to these two Points. And,

1. THE Glory of God is to be measured by his Nature, and Attributes; and by the Declarations of his Word. If we consider his *Attributes*; we must fix nothing upon him but what is perfectly consistent with the united Harmony of them all. He is perfectly wise; perfectly just; and perfectly holy. Now it is a greater Glory to his Wisdom, to make Creatures capable of Freedom in their Actions, than to make only Clockwork, and Machines, to be moved by the immediate and constant Interposition of the Artificer. It is a greater Glory to his Holiness, (that Attribute by which He is represented as a Lover of Virtue, and Hater of Vice,) to assist Men in their Endeavours after Perfection; than to force them to be perfect, whether they will or no. Nay, the contrary seems utterly inconsistent with the Supposition of his loving Virtue more than Vice. For if Virtue be not something, in some degree depending upon our selves; there is no reason why he should love it, as it is in us, more than the contrary. For Justice requires that every one should be valued, and rewarded, according to what is in himself good, or evil. Now, if Virtue be nothing but the irresistible Operation of God upon us; there can be no Reason in the World assigned why he should hate and punish a wicked Man, and love and reward another: because, as to themselves, they are exactly alike.

THE only difference here supposed is this, that God is pleased, after an arbitrary manner, to work upon one: and wholly to pass by the other. If any Parent should heap his Favours upon one Child, and then shew the greatest Fondness to him, merely because those Favours

300

301

302

have been heaped upon him; and absolutely refuse to bestow the least degree of the same upon another of his Children, and yet hate and punish him, because he had not what he could not have without his Will; would not all the World condemn such a Parent of the most partial Fondness, and of the most arbitrary Proceeding; and attribute it to nothing but Weakness of Understanding; or Strength of Passion? And yet this is what we are not afraid to lay upon Almighty God, when we represent Him as doing all for some, with in irresistible Arm; and then loving them for what they have no part in: and, on the other side, as passing by others, and refusing them that same Strength, without which they cannot move; and yet hating and condemning them for not being what they cannot be, and not doing what they cannot do. If we could not think of this in any Earthly Parent, without calling in question his Wisdom; or his true Regard to what is praise-worthy: how can we fix it upon Almighty God? It is indeed to call in question his Wisdom; or his Impartiality; or his Love to what is truly lovely; or his Aversion to that only which is truly the Object of it. But if a Father hath an equal Regard to all his Children; and is ready to assist them all in their honest Endeavours; to put them in the way of pleasing him; to encourage them to do it; to deter them from the contrary; and to reward, or punish them, according as they have voluntarily chosen to make use of, or to abuse, his Favours: This we account Wisdom, and Equity; and a true Notion of Virtue; and a true Love to what is Praise-worthy; and a true Abhorrence: of what deserves Hatred and Discouragement.

WE cannot help; having such Notions of Wisdom, Justice, and Holiness; and if, whilst we have such, we can fix any thing upon. God contrary to these; we certainly rob Him of the Glory of what we constantly account Perfections; and of what we ever esteem to belong to Wisdom, Equity, and Holiness. Let any one therefore think, whether it can be a Glory to God, to represent Him as acting a Part amongst his Children, and Creatures, which we should severely blame in any Earthly Parent? *If I be a Father*, saith Almighty God, upon a different Occasion, *where is mine Honour?* It may be said, if God be a Father, and so thought by us; where is the Regard to Him under this Notion, when that Conduct is attributed to Him, which would not be seen in an earthly Father, without great Detestation, and Abhorrence? If we think, therefore, of God, as of a Being vested with all Perfection of Wisdom, Equity, and Holiness; we shall find it greater Glory to such a Being, to suppose Him assisting his Creatures in the Way to Happiness; joining his Strength to their Endeavours; and expecting their sincere Endeavours to be joined to his Strength; than to represent Him as doing all Irresistibly for them; and then loving them and rewarding them, for what was forced upon them whether they would or no: and, on the other hand, as neglecting many others, who could not stir one step without the same irresistible Arm to work for them; and, after this, hating and condemning them for lying in a State, in which they could not but lie, unless He himself forced them out of it. The one is the Glory of an equitable Distributor of Favours, and Frowns; of Rewards, and Punishments: the other is the Glory of a Tyrannick and Arbit-

303

304

305



rary Mind, which raiseth to it self Favourites out of Humour; and loves and hates entirely at the Influence of Prejudice, and without Regard to any thing, but what is in itself base and unreasonable.

AND, as we should not fail to judge thus in the Case of any Earthly Parent; so we cannot help it in the much higher Case now before us: nay, we must lose all Notions of good, and equal, and wise; and leave off to speak of God at all, if we can think otherwise. If, therefore, we have any Regard to the Glory of God; *the Glory due unto his Name*; the Glory of his real and unalterable Perfections: let us not, under Pretence of making Him great and powerful, divest Him of Wisdom, and Equity; let us not, under Pretence of making Him the sole Actor in the great Affair of Salvation, rob Him of the Glory which is much greater; the Glory of regarding, and loving, and rewarding, his reasonable Creatures, (not according to mere Will and Power; but) according to what degrees of good, and sincere, are in them; and according to what depends, in some measure, upon themselves. What we call Virtue, if it be necessarily produced by an Agent distinct from ourselves, is not Virtue, nor commendable, nor rewardable, in us; nor any more to us, than that Vice which is supposed as necessary in another. And if so, we cannot be loved, or rewarded by a wise and holy God, for what doth no more deserve Love in us, than the contrary. But Almighty God is wise, and holy, and equal; and certainly loves, and regards Virtue; as a thing Praise-worthy in us. From whence it follows that it is not so wholly his Work in us, but that He expects Labour from our selves; and looks upon it as depending in some degree, upon our selves: tho' always under the Influences of his good Spirit; which is ever ready to attend upon our sincere Endeavours.

AND thus, indeed, is He represented in *holy Scripture*; as delighting in the Man that doth his Will, and walks in the Paths of Virtue; and as abhorring the Man who acts a contrary Part: neither of which could he do, were it equally impossible to both sorts to be virtuous; and were He himself the sole Mover, and irresistible Worker, of al that is good. But,

2. THE other Consideration I mentioned was this, That the *Objection* I am now answering, is founded upon the Imagination that the giving to Man any part in his own Amendment, and Salvation, implies in it that it is not owing to Almighty God: which seems to derogate from his Glory. Whereas, as I have before observed to you, Almighty God is not at all excluded by this Supposition. For Man, having no Powers, and being possessed of no Faculties, but what are originally owing to this great Creator; he can arrive at no Happiness, but what He in must acknowledge to be owing to that first Original of all his Powers, and all his Faculties.

To say, therefore, that Men can bear an active, and a voluntary Part, in their own Reformation, and Happiness, is not to derogate from God; because it is no more than to say that God hath so made them, and endow'd them with such Powers, as that they are able to do something for themselves. It is not to detract from their Obligations to their great Creator,

306

307

308

and Redeemer; but it is only to shew what He hath made them capable of doing; and still, the making of them so, is entirely his Work; and all the happy Result of it, his Glory. Their Use of these Faculties is indeed made, in some measure, their own Work; and voluntary Part; that so it may make them the *Subjects* of Reward: but the Grant of these Faculties is the creating Work of God; ascribed to him; and a perpetual Fountain of such a Glory as He delights in, when they are used well, and as he requires them to be used; and this a more *rational Glory*, and a more worthy Honour, than if He had made them only as *Machines* to be Instances of his Power, and Arguments merely of his Greatness. And besides, I am far from contending that, in the present Degeneracy of Human Nature, these Faculties can do all. For I maintain the Necessity of God's gracious Concurrence. I am only arguing that they can act together with God's holy Spirit; and that our Holiness depends upon our own Labour, together with the Assistance of That.

THUS much may suffice to shew the Weakness of this *Objection*, which pretends to sacrifice Virtue it self to the Glory of God; and to prove the Truth of this Proposition, that it is the truest Glory to such a Being as we are taught, by Reason and Revelation, to esteem Almighty God to be, to have made Men capable, in some degree, of a voluntary Motion towards Heaven and Happiness; and to love and reward him for something which depends upon himself, as well as upon the friendly Assistance of God; which is still made equally necessary to his Attainment of *Christian Perfection*.

BUT because the Perverseness of habitual Sinners is such, that they are not only glad to lay hold on such Pretences, as I have already examined, to fortify themselves in Sin, which they love, and embrace, as the Effect of their unavoidable Weakness; but to argue from some other *Passages* of the *Scripture*, relating even to good Men; from which they hope for Comfort, and endeavour, to flatter themselves that their present deplorable Condition is no worse a State of Weakness than what some in a very safe Condition have been in: I shall, therefore, before I conclude, take notice of *Two*, or *Three*, of these abused and perverted *Passages*.

1. THE *first* I shall mention, is That in [Prov. xxiv. at the 16th ver.](#) *For a just Man falleth seven times.* It is almost a Shame, indeed, to mention it: but that some have been so extremely weak as to lay hold on it, to administer Comfort to themselves in their falling into Sin. Nay, they generally cite it thus, *The just Man falleth seven times a Day:* whereas there is no such Word as the last, either in the *Original*, or in any *Translation*. I need only direct any one of the most ordinary Capacity to the Passage, as it lies in that *Chapter*: For whoever turns to it will presently find that the *falling*, there spoken of, is *falling* into Trouble, and Affliction, and Misfortune; and not into Sin. For the whole. Verse is thus: *For a just Man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the Wicked shall fall into Mischief.* The Verse before is Advice to the Wicked: *Lay not wait, O wicked Man, against the Dwelling of the Righteous; spoil not his Resting-place. For a just Man falleth seven times, & c.* It is designed plainly to represent to us; that God preserveth the good Man from the Attempts of the Wicked; and that the

309

310

311

Wicked often fall into that Mischief, which they design against the Righteous. The *Verses* following do likewise go on to speak wholly of Temporal Evils; and of falling into Affliction. The whole Ground, therefore, of this Pretence is taken away. For here is nothing said of the wilful Sins of good Men; but of their being frequently afflicted; and frequently supported in, and raised out of, their Troubles.

BUT, supposing it were said, that even good Men are frequently, or sometimes, surprized into Failings: this can be nothing to those wretched Persons who indulge themselves in an Habit of sinning. For whatever Failings a truly sincere Christian may have been surprized into; they always render him much more careful, and more arm'd against them, for the Time to come: whereas the Sinner is confirmed and settled more and more, in his wicked Course, by every Step he takes in the paths of Sin. Nay, He aggravates the Guilt of his sinful Course, by making those Failings of good Men, which are their Grief, and the Arguments of the greatest Care and Caution to themselves, to be the Ground of Encouragement to him, in a careless, and supine Neglect of *God's* Laws. But,

2. ANOTHER as weak Pretence is founded upon that passage in the *Acts of the Apostles*, [ch. xiv, the 15th verse](#), where *Paul* and *Barnabas* say to the *Lycaonians*, *We also are Men of like Passions with your selves*: from whence some have concluded themselves to be in as safe a Condition as some of the best of Men; even whilst their Passions and Lusts were in full Power. Whereas, this Passage hath no relation to the Distinction between *good* and *bad*; *passionate*, and *well-temper'd* Men: but between *Men* and *God*; between *Human Nature*, and the *Divine*. It was spoken to deter the *Laycaonians* from offering Sacrifice to *Paul*, and *Barnabas*, as if they were *Gods*. The Words in the *Greek* signify, We are Beings liable to the same Imperfections the same Sufferings; and particularly to Death it self; as you are. We are weak, and mortal; even Men, as well as your selves: and therefore, do not pay what you account Divine Honour, to us. Then follows immediately, *who preach unto you that you should turn from these Vanities unto the living God*. This again shews that the *Apostles* did not level themselves with these Sinners: for it would have been to no purpose to have endeavoured to convert them, if, at the same time, they acknowledged themselves to be in the same Condition of *vicious Passion* and *indulged Sin*.

So that, whether, we consider the Words themselves; they were designed to signify nothing but that the *Apostles* were mortal Men, and not *Gods*: or the Circumstances of the Place; they shew us that the *Apostles* were at the very time preaching to the *Lycaonians* the absolute Necessity of forsaking their Sins. How unjust, therefore, is it for a Sinner to lay hold on so foolish a Mistake; and to chuse to fix the greatest Blot and Absurdity upon the *Apostles* themselves, rather than become truly good and virtuous.

3. ONE *Passage* more I shall just mention; and that is, *St. Paul's* calling himself, the *chief of Sinners*. [1 Tim. i. 15](#). *Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners; of whom I am chief*. Now whoever turns to the [13th Verse](#), will find that he speaks there of himself, not in his

312

313

314

present Condition; but, before his receiving of the Gospel. For there he describes himself, (the *Sinner* on whom Christ had Mercy,) as one who was *before a Blasphemer, and a Persecutor, and injurious*: not that he was such an one at that time he spake this; but before he was a *Christian*. So that this can administer no Comfort, but to one who hath left that sad Condition; and is become what St. *Paul* at that time was: who was be an Instance of God's Readiness to forgive the greatest Enemy, upon hearty Amendment; but not whilst he remains in that State of Enmity.

315

BESIDES, St. *Paul* speaks not this with relation sinful and vicious acting against the Dictates of his Conscience: but solely with regard to his having been a Persecutor, and Blasphemer, of the Christian Religion. As for other Parts of his Conduct, he often declareth that he was an exact Observer of that Law of which he was then a professed Disciple; and therefore this is not to be interpreted of that which we commonly call *Vice* and *Immorality*, in profess'd *Christians*. But the Influence St. *Paul's* Example should have upon *Christians*, should all be taken from what he was after he was a *Christian*. And thence let all Sinners learn their Shame. For they will find him describing himself, as an Example to all to whom he addressed himself, and they will see Him to have been as great an Instance of Labour, Humility, Meekness, Charity, Piety, and every Virtue, as ever blessed the *Church of Christ*. His State, as he was a *Christian*, is what *Christians* should regard: and in this, they will find him so perfect, that they will have but little Encouragement from hence to flatter themselves in those Vices which he abhorred; or in that foolish Notion of their Weakness, of which his Example, as well as Precepts, is the greatest Confutation possible. If Men be Heathens, and Infidels indeed, they may learn from St. *Paul's* Example, that God will make allowances for their Prejudices; and accept them, whenever they sincerely comply with the Offers of his Gospel: but if they be *Christians*, they can learn nothing from his Example, but a continual Watching, and Care, *lest they become Cast-aways*; and an Assurance, that they have Strength enough to be *Fellow-workers together with God*, in order to all things required for their Happiness, and Salvation.

316

BUT how unwilling do we find Men to think themselves able to bear any Part in what is good? In the Paths of Vice; in the Projects of Iniquity; in the Execution of what is evil; their Feet are swift, and their Hands strong; and their Heads able: but when God's Will is to be performed; nothing is so weak, so impotent, so unable as they. Thus, if you ask a worldly-minded Man for a Gift of Charity, or true Generosity; he often pretends Inability, and Incapacity; whilst he hath enough to lay out upon any Trifle, or useless piece of Vanity; or a great deal laid up, a Sacrifice to Covetousness, and Uselessness. The voluptuous Man hath Power and Spirit to encounter Difficulties without Number; to watch incessantly; to labour without Intermission; to deny himself in many Instances, in order to come to some imaginary Pleasure: but if you speak of self-denial for the sake of Religion, or Virtue; presently the Weakness of Human Nature is pleaded, and the Impossibility of undergoing the least

317

part of the same Labour, for the sake of the greatest Good possible. If ever they think of Amendment, they desire to wait God's Time.; till his irresistible Arm moves them, against their Will. As for themselves; they are dead; and without Life: unless it be to offend God, and provoke his Anger. Foolish and unwise! to think that such Excuses can ever pass upon the Searcher of all Hearts! to think that their own wilful Habits will be an Apology for their continuing in them! No, The more difficult we find it, the more immediately must we set about the Work: considering that the Difficulty hath been created by our own Folly, and Wilfulness.

LET us not, therefore, pretend Weakness and Inability, in a Case which should fire and animate us to do Wonders. Let us pray to God, in Sincerity, for his holy Spirit; and heartily labour, our selves, under its Directions, and Influences. Let us not think that a *vicious Inclination* is a better *Excuse* on *one* side, than the Dictate of a good Conscience is an *Argument* on the *other*. Let us not be so ungrateful to that God who is our Maker, as to think he frames and fits us for nothing but Sin; and leaves all that is good intirely out of our Composition. Let us not be so base, and ingrateful to our Redeemer, as to take occasion, from the Assistances offered us in the Gospel, to *continue in Sin*; and so blasphemous, as to neglect to do our Duty, under Pretence of consulting the Glory of God. But let us remember that our acting our Parts well, is his greatest Glory; and that the gracious Aids of his *Spirit* are the greatest Encouragement to us to work out, together with Him, our own Salvation: Which God grant we may all do, & c.

318

319

320  
321

*The true, and false, Notions of Repentance, considered.*

## SERMON XV.

ACTS iii. part of the 19th Verse.

*Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your Sins say be blotted out.*

THE great Concern of all Christians is, so to pass through Things Temporal, that they finally lose not the Things Eternal: And the most important Enquiry in order to this, is that which leads us to the certain Knowledge of those *Terms* upon which God will pardon, and accept us. But though this be a Point of infinitely the greatest Importance of any that can come within the Thoughts of a Christian: yet there is no Point, in which Christians act a more careless, and surprizing, Part than in this; and none in which they more willingly contribute to their own Deceit, and Ruin. Nor in any thing is this more visible, than in those false Notions which many give themselves leave to entertain concerning the Nature of that *Repentance*, to which they find the Promise of Forgiveness to be annexed in the Gospel. As it is our Duty, therefore, to put a Stop, as much as we are able, to such mistaken Apprehensions; as may endanger the Eternal Happiness of Men; so, I shall now endeavour it, in this Particular, in Pursuance of what I have, in some former Discourses attempted, in order to establish in our Minds the true Notion of those *Terms* which are required of us, in order to our final Acceptance with God. And,

I. I shall endeavour to shew you the true Nature of that Repentance, which is of Force for Remission of Sins. And,

II. FROM hence, I shall make appear the great Weakness of those mistaken Notions of it, by which many Christians have been deceived,

I. IN order to shew the true Nature of that Repentance which is spoken of in the *New Testament*, I shall premise *Two* or *Three* Observations, *Viz*:

1. THAT our *blessed Lord*, and his *Apostles*, preaching to a World of Men, grown up in Heathen Impieties, and arrived at full Age, without such bright Light and Conviction, as the *Gospel* brought along with it, constantly speak of *Repentance* in their discourses to them; as the first Step towards their Acceptance with God. This We may see in the *Gospels*, and all thro' the *Acts* of the *Apostles*; that, when Heathens, or wicked Jews, are spoken to, and instructed what to do, in order to Salvation, the first Word generally is; *Repent*: is here, in the *Text*, St. *Peter* calls upon the *Jews* who had hitherto *rejected the Lord of Life*, to *repent*; and that in order to their Being *converted*; as it follows. For the first Step that a vicious Man can take towards a Change of his Life, is to be truly sensible of the Unreasonableness of that Course of Sin and Iniquity, in which he hath formerly lived; and to have due Sentiments of his past Behaviour: because, without this due inward Sense of it; He can never heartily

322

323

consent to forsake; and amend it; or, in the Expression used in the *Text*, to be *converted*, or turned, from it Thus in the *Second Chapter of the Acts*, the same St. *Peter* exhorts the unbelieving *Jews*, *Repent and be baptized*. *Repentance* is the first Step: because, as I have already observed, without a Sense of the Unreasonableness and Wickedness of their former State, they could not possibly, with Sincerity, think it worth their while to believe in *Jesus Christ*; and to be *baptized*, and entered, into his Religion, so different from their former Condition.

324

AND this being the first Step that could be taken by an unbelieving, or wicked Man; no wonder that this is pointed out as the first, in order to Salvation, or Remission of Sins. Upon this first *Repentance* of Unbelievers, they were baptized, and by Baptism put into a State of Salvation; and a Capacity of being happy upon the Conditions of *Jesus Christ*: and therefore this may well be spoken of; as the Road to Salvation, and Happiness; because without it there could be no entering into the *Christian Dispensation*. This, then, is that *Condition* of Acceptance; which is chiefly spoken of thro' the *Gospels*, and the *Acts* of the *Apostles*; which give us an account of what was said to *Unbelievers*, and wicked *Jews*, or *Gentiles*. But,

325

2. THE next Observation I have to make is, that, as soon as this first *Condition* was complied with, and Men were persuaded by the *Apostle's* Preaching into a due Sense of their past evil Courses, and into a thorough Renunciation of them; that, as soon as they were, in consequence of this, entered into the *Christian Religion* by *Baptism*, and were professed Members of Christ's body, the Church: that then, I say, all the Exhortations of the *Apostles*, and all their Persuasions, ran perpetually upon *Newness of Life*; upon *working out their own Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; upon the Danger of falling back into their former State; and upon the Perfection of Virtue required of them. This is plain from the *Epistles*, written by the *Apostles* to professed Christians: which are full of the most pathetic Exhortations to all Virtue; and of the most severe Reprehensions of all Vice; and of the plainest Condemnations of Christians, who am wilful Sinners, to the greatest Degrees of God's Displeasure.

326

SO that from your Observation of what you read in the *Acts* of the *Apostles*; and of what you find in their *Epistles*; you cannot but make these Two Conclusions: That *Repentance* is the Subject of their Sermons, when they are preaching to unbelieving, or wicked, *Jews* and *Gentiles*; in order to persuade them to leave off their former Behaviour, and come over to the Christian Religion: and that, after they are Christians, they are with the same Earnestness pressing upon them the absolute, indispensable, Necessity of Holiness and Virtue; as they were before inculcating the Necessity of their renouncing their former State of Infidelity, and Vice. The frequent mention of *Repentance* is made to those who were not already Christians: but to Christians, the Practice of all Virtue, and the positive Improvement in all that is good and Praise-worthy, is vehemently recommended. But,

3. THO' this be so in fact; as will appear to any one who will compare the Preaching of the *Apostles* to *Unbelievers*, with the *Moral Rules* and Instructions given to *Believers*; yet I

must observe that there was place found for *Repentance*, in favour of such professed Christians as wilfull sinned, upon their giving evident Tokens of the Sincerity of it. But then, there was no other Token of it supposed to be sincere but actual Amendment, and Reformation; without which it is evident, from the Tenor of all the *Apostles* Declarations, in their *Epistles*, that there was no Hope of Acquittance at the last Day of Accounts. Thus the sinful *Corinthian* was restored to Peace; not till He was in danger of being *swallowed up with over-much sorrow*, [2 Cor. ii. 7](#); and after much more Difficulty, and Severity of Discipline, than was used in admitting the *Repentance* of one who had not before professed himself a Christian. If any one who was *called a Brother*, i. e. a Christian, was a habitual Sinner; His Company was to be avoided by other *Christians*, as one whom they were not to own for a Christian, in those Days when it could be done, [1 Cor. v. 11](#) But this was upon Supposition of the Person's not amending his Life: for it is evident that, upon the Tokens of a sincere Amendment, He was admitted again to Hopes of Happiness. *Let him that stole steal no more.*, was the Method which St. Paul prescribed in the Case of the Sin of Theft: [Ephes. iv. 28](#). which implies in it, that Amendment is the Sum of the *Repentance* of a Christian, and that upon that Amendment, He is in a safe Condition.

I COULD give more Evidence of this from the first Records of Christianity: but this one Argument is sufficient, which I have heretofore enlarged upon; *viz.* that the Gospel would in vain profess to bring Salvation to mortal Men, if every wilful Deviation from the Rules of Virtue were so unpardonable, that no future Amendment were sufficient to entitle the Sinner to the Forgiveness of what was past. For, as to forgive Sinners without actual Amendment and Reformation, would be to encourage them to continue in Sin: so, absolutely to deny Forgiveness to every wilful Sin, tho' sincerely repented of, and forsaken, would be to drive Men by Despair into the same State of Sin; and to defeat the Designs of the Gospel. And therefore, we may be sure that, as nothing but Amendment, and future Holiness, can entitle a Christian to Forgiveness of his past Sins; so these most certainly will do it.

THUS then the Case stands. The unbelieving World of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were supposed by the *Apostles* to be great and wilful Sinners: and therefore, *Repentance* was the first thing spoken of, to them. Believers, or Christians, entered into, and solemnly engaged in, the *holiest* of all Institutions, were not supposed by them to be *Wilful Sinners*; or to continue in those Sins which they had renounced at *Baptism*: as the *Apostle* himself argues, [Rom. vi](#). And therefore little mention is made to them expressly of *Repentance*; but much of living worthy of their Profession, and of fulfilling all the Laws of Morality, and Virtue, in the highest degree possible. But if any of them were overcome by Sin, and tempted to transgress the Rules of their Institution; Amendment was required and accepted, for the sake of that *Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*.



WHAT, therefore, remains for us, who are professed Christians, to do, in this Matter? Certainly, We are to look merely to that which was recommended to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, as the first Step only towards Happiness: but to those Injunctions laid upon such as became professed Christians; and to the Methods prescribed to Them. And then, we can never mistake in this great and Important Affair: because we can never think out selves at liberty to dispense with that Holiness, and Perfection of Virtue, which is constantly press'd upon Christians. If therefore, we take in the whole of this Matter; and consider *Repentance*; with relation to professed Christians, who have been Sinners; as something which will entitle them to God's Favour; it must certainly equally suppose and imply in it these following Parts:

1. AN hearty Sorrow and deep Concern, for all past Transgressions of the Laws of God.
2. AN unfeigned Disposition of Mind, opposite to that of Sin and Wickedness, and tending to fulfil his Will. And,
3. AN actual avoiding, or resisting, those Temptations, by which they have been formerly over-powered; and an actual Practice of the contrary Virtues.

1. WITH respect to the *first* of these, all are willing enough to admit that *Repentance* must suppose and imply it; because a little Sorrow, and a short-liv'd Passion, will cost them little Pains, and Trouble. The lowest Notion of *Repentance* takes in that of being sorrowful; and having a tender Disposition of Mind, for the present, whilst that Sorrow lasts. About this, therefore there needs no Debate, because this is the part of *Repentance* which the weak side of Human Nature is the most pleased with. But,

2. THERE must be a Change of Disposition within. The Word used in the *New Testament* signifieth an Alteration of the Purpose, and Frame, within.

ST. *Paul* reckons not Sorrow a part of Repentance; but Repentance an Effect of Sorrow: *2 Cor. vii. 10.* For godly Sorrow, (and that is the Sorrow, we are now speaking of) *worketh Repentance to Salvation, not to be repented of.* It worketh such a Disposition of Mind, as manifestly shews what it is that produceth it. If any Person be concerned, and sorrowful at any thing that hath pass'd him; it never fails to work in Him a Disposition leading to the contrary for the Time to come. And, if you consult the Movements of your own Minds, you must find that a true Concern within, at any past part of your Conduct, is never without a firm Thought, and Disposition, contrary to that which hath caused that Regret, and Concern, in you. If this be so, in all other Cases; we may depend upon it, it is the same in this now before us. If we be truly sorrowful, and heartily concerned, that we have offended God, and sinned against his Laws; this will certainly be accompanied with as sincere, and as hearty, a Disposition to please Him, and obey his whole Will for the Time to come. And it cannot be supposed to be a sincere Sorrow without this. Now is this all; for,

3. THIS Sorrow, and this Change of Mind, if they be sincere, must unavoidably produce a Course of Behaviour contrary to that which caused this Sorrow, and this Disposition: and

330

331

332

if this be not the Effect of them, they are of no Account; unless it be to increase the Condemnation of those who pretend to them. Thus St. Paul, in the forecited *Seventh Chapter* of his *Second Epistle* to the *Corinthians*, [Verse 10](#). declareth, that *godly Sorrow worketh Repentance to Salvation, a Repentance not to be repented of*: perhaps the Words more properly signify, such a *Repentance* as implies in it no occasion for *Repentance*, afterwards; such a *Repentance* as implies in it a *Conduct* and *Behaviour*, of which there is no reason to repent. And He goes on, in the next Verse, to prove their *Sorrow* for having offended to be sincere, and genuine; not from their Words., but from their *Actions* and *Behaviour*: by which only it was that He judged that they *sorrowed after a godly sort*.

333

BUT what need I appeal to Him? We our selves are Judges of this Matter, if we be not foolishly partial to our selves, by our intimate Acquaintance with the Springs, and Frame, of Human Nature. There are none of us all, who, in the Case of other Persons, do not constantly judge of the Bent of their inward Thoughts, and the Sincerity of their outward Professions, by their *Actions* and *Behaviour*; and by these only. In any Matters that concern our selves, we never take the Professions of others concerning their inward Dispositions towards us, to be the true Representations of them, unless we see the Fruits and Effects, which, in such Cases we cannot help judging, would follow upon such Dispositions of Mind. How then can we possibly think our selves sincere in our *Sorrow*, and inward *Repentance* towards God; whilst we see them void of those good Effects, by which only they are as certainly known amongst Men themselves, as a good Tree is known by the Fruit it produceth?

334

AND if we proceed in our Enquiries; and examine farther into the Constitution of our own Natures; we shall find that all the Powers and Faculties of our Minds were given us for no other Purpose, but to regulate our *Behaviour*, and *Conduct*; and that they are all of no account; but as tending, and employed, that way. We never think any Persons arrived at the use of their inward Faculties, till they are fit to act, and shew themselves in the World: and we never judge any to be prudent, or imprudent; mad, or sober within; but by their outward *Conduct* and *Demeanor*. What signify all our inward Powers? Of what Importance is it, to judge and determine, within our own Minds; to reflect and censure our own *Actions*; unless it be in order to have an Influence upon them? As sure, therefore, as it is, that any Person hath a Power within, to judge which way of *Action* is best: so sure is it, that this Power could be given for nothing, but to determine his *Actions* the best Way. As sure as it is that have, all of us, a *Conscience*, or *Reason*, to direct us before we act, and to applaud, or condemn us afterwards: so sure is it, that this hath solely a respect to our *Actions*, and *Behaviour*. If, therefore; we cannot but reflect with *Sorrow*, and *Concern*, upon some part of our *Behaviour*; which we find contradictory to the *Laws* of *Reason*, and of *God*: it is certain that this very Power of *Reflexion* was designed to influence our *Behaviour* for the Time to come. For, to be sorry for any part of our *Behaviour*, implies in it that it was unbecoming, or sinful; and

335

to account it unbecoming, or sinful, implies in it that it ought never to be practised again: and so it cannot be, but that this inward Affection must be designed for the Alteration of what is amiss in us.

AND if to this we add a Consideration, or *Two*, upon the Nature of *Almighty God*; we shall find it yet more certain. For, his Nature being all Perfection; there cannot be an higher Indignity offered to Him, than to suppose that our Sorrow, or Grief, which is, in the degree of it, Misery it self, is for its own sake acceptable to Him. No, If we think rightly of Him; we cannot but think that bare Sorrow is what He rather dislikes, than likes: but that it is that *godly Sorrow* only, which worketh Amendment, and Alteration, that is approved of by Him. Can our Grief, or Sorrow, advantage Him? Or, can any thing of ours affect Him? No, But it is only, as our Grief may advantage our selves; and as our Sorrow may lead us to avoid all Occasions of such Sorrow for the Time to come; that it can be well-pleasing in his Eyes.

WILL you then judge from the Nature of Man? You see, all, the inward Movements of his Mind are calculated for nothing but to influence and govern his Behaviour: and so, a *Sorrow* without an Effect of it upon his Life, must be as insignificant, in his own Account, as the Faculty of Reasoning itself, separated from all Effect upon his Conduct, and Behaviour. Or, will you judge of this Matter from the Nature of God Almighty? cannot take any Pleasure in our Sorrow; but as it tends to our real Joy and Happiness. It can be of no account in his Eyes; but as it makes us better, and wiser, for the future;

OR lastly, will you judge of it from the great Design of Christianity? How unworthy must you think it of God, to send his Son into the World, to live, and dye, in order to lead Men to a bare, pretended, Sorrow, and Grief for their Sins? Is it not the doing his Father's Will, which He presseth upon his Disciples? Is it not declared that the *Grace of God appeared to Men in the Gospel, to teach them to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this World?* And is it not to contradict all this, in the most flagrant manner, to imagine that the End of Christ's coming could be, to lead Men only to a little vain empty Sorrow? That is, to lead Men to what doth, in its own nature, aggravate their Guilt, if they stop at it, without proceeding any farther. Aggravate their Guilt, I say: for when we are sorrowful on Account of our Sins: this Sorrow supposeth in it that we ought not to commit them; and that there is a foul Evil, and Guilt in them: and this tacit Acknowledgment that their Nature is foul, and evil, and makes us guilty before God, cannot but help to condemn us for returning to what we our selves think so Blame-worthy. So that when we have Opportunity to do better, and do not; but return again to the same Sins that we think deserve, and call for, our Sorrow; we are self-condemned. The Sorrow, by which we hope to cover them, must help to make them the more meritorious of Punishment: as it implies in it Self-condemnation, and an Acknowledgment of Guilt. But when it leads to Amendment, and a gradual Increase in Virtue; then only is it the Parent of good Fruit, lovely in the Eyes of God,

336

337

338

and pleasing, in the Reflexion of the Man himself. How plain, therefore, is it, if we will but consider Things, as they truly are, in their Nature, and Consequences, that the Repentance of Christians, who have been Sinners, necessarily implies in it, an actual forsaking of their Sins, and an actual Progress in all Virtue, and Godliness of living.

339

II. HAVING thus given as true, and as plain, an Account, as I could, of the *Repentance* which alone can avail any professed Christians; I shall now only make *Two* or *Three* short *Inferences* from what I have laid down, with respect to those *mistaken Notions*, by which many Christians deceive themselves in this *Affair*. And,

1. FROM what hath been said we see the Vanity, and Misery, of those who place their Hopes of Acceptance with God, upon the Sorrow, and Grief, which they sometimes conceive for their Sins; and call by the Name of *Repentance*, because, in our Language, when we are sorry for any past part of our Conduct, we are said to repent of it. If a Man, proposing to Himself to travel to a Place at some distance from his present Station, should conclude himself to be arrived at it, when He had set but one step out of his own Home; and there make a full Stop, contented, and satisfied that this would be sufficient: would you not think such a Person distempered in his Brain? Why, just thus it is in the Case we are considering. We pretend to be travelling towards Happiness: and Repentance, in all its Parts, is the Road to this Happiness. The *first* Step, in this Road, is *Sorrow* for our Sins. He that stops at this Sorrow, therefore, and rests himself contented with it, stops at the first Step in his Journey: and how likely He is to arrive at his Journeys End, you may easily judge.

340

2. THUS again, if the second Step be a good Disposition of Mind to go forwards; He that stops, without putting in Execution this Disposition, is still as unlikely to arrive at the End proposed. This is another *Mistake* of Men in this *Affair*, that a present good *Disposition*, and *Resolution* of Mind, is sufficient for their Purpose. But certainly, it is not going one Step, or two Steps, that will bring us to the End of our spiritual Journey; but the proceeding as far as Time, and Strength, give leave.

3. FROM what hath been said, we are led not to place any Hopes in what we call a *Death-bed Repentance*: For this *Repentance*, extorted from us by the Prospect of Death, can be only a Sorrow for Sin perhaps rendered more passionate by our present Fears. And this being only Sorrow, and Compunction, and perhaps a good Resolution; it is plain that still these are only the first Steps in the *Repentance* of a Sinner; and not complete *Repentance*, in all its parts. I confess these are not ill Signs: but it ought plainly to be declared that Sorrow, and good Words, are not the End of the *Gospel Institution*; but an holy Life and Conversation. Indeed, where a Person hath had no Calls to Repentance and Amendment before; but been inevitably blinded by unhappy Circumstances of Education, and hardly known what the *Gospel* pretends to: if such a Person be awakened by his Danger into serious Enquiries, and

341

an hearty Conviction of the Truth of the Gospel; and a great Detestation of his former Courses; one might reasonably hope good Things. But in the Case of most professed Christians, who are called, day after day, to Amendment, and have all the Arguments imaginable represented to them; and yet, day after day, shut their Ears; spend all that time and Health, which God allows them, in Vice and Iniquity; and then at last are sorry for this, when God thinks fit to try them no longer: In such Case, I say, all that can be said is, that they are sorrowful for their Sins; and that if that Sorrow be sincere, they are got one Step towards Happiness. But to give greater Hopes; or to say that they are the Christians whom God hath declared, He will accept, in his Gospel, is to render vain all the Threatnings of his Son; to place the Sinner and the Saint upon equal Terms; to put all upon a Man's having a little longer Sickness than his Neighbour: and to undo the great Design of reforming Men's Lives, the only End worthy of the Son of God's Incarnation.

THE Result of the whole, is this. Since *Almighty God* hath plainly declared, in his Gospel, what it is He expects of those who have been Sinners; I need not tell you, how great a Weakness, and how extreme a Folly, it is, to have recourse to vain, and flattering Hopes of our own. Since we are Christians, and have a Gospel open to us, to have recourse to, upon this Occasion; it is the greatest Weakness imaginable to consult our own Passions and our own Lusts, what it is fit for us to hope for, at the Hands of God. And yet, I am persuaded this is the Case. Were not Men inwardly captivated to some Vice; Covetousness, or Ambition, or Sensuality; there would not be any thing, in the nature of Things, more evident to themselves, than that *Almighty God* cannot be supposed to accept any Thing at our Hands, without a sincere Amendment of what we know, and acknowledge, to be amiss in our selves. And yet, such is the Effect of our own evil Habits, and the Prevalence of our beloved Vices; that we first desire, and at last come really to hope, to be accepted for some superficial Circumstance, without a real Reformation of our Lives.

BUT how long will Men thus deceive themselves, in a Case in which all Deceit is the Ruin of Soul and Body for ever; and in which they can impose upon none but themselves? *Behold, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* This was plain under the Law. How much more plain under the Gospel? As we are *Christians*, we are not so much as supposed to be Sinners. But if, we have transgressed against the plainest Light; God is so merciful as to allow a Place for Reconciliation to his Favour, upon our Amendment. Is this so hard a Condition? Is this so great an Injury to us, that we should turn against it, and abuse the *Gospel* to our own Destruction? *Shall the Goodness, and Long-suffering of God*, instead of leading us to true *Repentance*, only lead us to a false Image of it; and to *treasure up Wrath to our selves against the Day of Wrath?* *Shall we continue in Sin*; and pretend that Sorrow for it is sufficient? *God forbid! How shall we, Christians, who, by our Profession, are dead to Sin, live any longer therein?* Let not such an Use be made of our great Lord's indulgent Kindness to us in the Gospel: but let all who

know what *Repentance* is, and what it implies in it, live worthy of that *Repentance*, by which they hope for Salvation; and of that *Vocation wherewith they are called*.

IN a word: If you will have *your Sins blotted out*; you must *repent, and be converted*, in the Words of the *Text*: that is, actually turned from them. If you have been wilful, habitual Sinners; and think of being saved by *Repentance*; here is the Line marked out. The *first* Step is *Sorrow* for your Sins: but it is but the *first*. The *second* is a Disposition to amend your Lives. But there is no stopping here. You cannot think this Sorrow, and this Disposition, sincere, unless they shew themselves in good Effects. There must be an actual amendment; an actual entering upon, and Progress in a virtuous and holy Life; whilst God gives Opportunity. Without this, there is not the least Security of Happiness: and, if you trust to any other Methods, you rely *upon other* Terms than what are proposed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



*The Example of the Thief upon the Cross, considered.*

## SERMON XVI.

LUKE xxiii. 42, 43.

*And He said unto Jesus, Lord,. Remember me when Thou comest into thy Kingdom.*

*And Jesus said unto Him, Verily, I say unto thee, To day halt thou be with me in Paradise.*

THESE Words contain in them an Account of the happy Ending of the Life of *one* of those *Malefactors*, who were crucified with our blessed Lord. For; tho' we read, in *Two* other of the *Evangelists*, that the *Thieves which were crucified with Him, reviled Him*; yet, that we are not necessarily to understand this of *both* the *Malefactors*, is evident from the like Form of Speech used by the same Writers, concerning any Matter, the minute Circumstances of which they do not undertake exactly to relate. Thus, in the same *Gospels*, that is sometimes said to be spoken by the *Disciples*, to *Jesus*, which was spoken by *one* of them only: because it was not thought necessary to be more particular. And the *Plural Number* is often thus used for the *Singular*, either, when the Story related is so known, as that no Mistake can proceed from thence; or, when the Matter spoken of, is of that nature as not to admit a literal Interpretation without a gross Absurdity; or, when the *Historian*, as I have said, doth not undertake to relate every particular Circumstance of a Story, especially of one generally and universally known at the Time of his writing. On these Accounts, this Way and Figure of speaking hath been allowed and practised.

BUT St. *Luke*, designing, in this part of his History, to be more particular, hath transmitted it down to us that what the other Evangelists record concerning the *Malefactors*, is to be understood only of *one* of them; and that the *other* was of a much better Disposition; that He reproved his Fellow-Sufferer for his rude and unjust reviling; and laid hold on that Opportunity to confess a great Degree of Faith in a crucified Saviour.

THE favourable Reception which this penitent Believer met with, in his last Moments; and the comfortable Answer which He received from our Lord, seems to have had an Effect, quite contrary to what our Lord intended, and wished, upon many Christians of later Ages. And therefore, this part of the *Evangelical History* deserveth our particular Consideration: that We may judge truly what is to be concluded from it: and avoid any Mistake that may prove fatal to our Eternal Interest. And, after having, in my last Discourse, laid down the true Notion of *Repentance*; I cannot do any thing better than to endeavour to obviate, or refute, the common Error, received and embraced by too many, *viz.* that the Acceptance of this Malefactor is an Encouragement to any Christians to place their Hopes of Salvation, upon a *Death-bed Sorrow*, which they mis-call by the Name of Repentance. In order to this End,

348

349

350

I. I SHALL endeavour briefly to give a true and just Account of the Case of this *Malefactor*, who was thus mercifully received by our Saviour, in his last Moments.

II. I DESIGN to shew that this was not an extraordinary Act of Favour, out of the General Rule; nor any thing depending on the secret Will and Intention of Almighty God: but perfectly agreeable to the professed and declared Tenour of the Gospel-Covenant; and what any Person, in the same Circumstances, may claim, upon the express *Terms* of the *Gospel*.

III. IN order the more effectually to prevent all Mistake, I shall point out to you, and describe, the Persons who are in the same Circumstances; and may be as certain of Favour as this *believing Malefactor*. And,

IV. I SHALL endeavour plainly to shew, the extreme Unreasonableness, and great Danger, of the common Mistakes about this Instance of God's Mercy and the Vanity of those Pretences which are built by some Men, upon this Example.

I. I SHALL endeavour briefly to give you a true and just Account of the Case of this *Malefactor*, who was so graciously received by our blessed Saviour, in his last Moments.

AND here, there is no reason to doubt but that He was a Person who had never enjoyed, before this, a fair opportunity of hearing a just Account of our blessed Lord, and his Actions, and Pretensions: it being much more likely that a Person of his sort of Life should firm hear and consider, the Character, and Works, and Behaviour of our Lord, during his Imprisonment, than at any time before, whilst He was following his wicked Trade of Robbery. It is manifest from his own Words, as well as to his Fellow-Sufferer, as to our Lord himself, that He had gotten some Knowledge, both of our Lord's Personal Character; and of his professing himself a King. Now, the Way of Life which he followed, before his Imprisonment, engaged him to keep as much out of the Cities and Places of ordinary Conversation; as much out of the Eyes and Observation of the World, as He could possibly do; and consequently must necessarily be supposed to have hindered him of all fair Opportunities of knowing the Truth concerning our blessed Lord. But, just before his Crucifixion, He could not well avoid hearing the Rumours spread about concerning Him, and learning the true Character, and Pretensions of our Lord. And He seems to have weighed all that He heard, before his Crucifixion, so well, as to bring with Him to his Cross, a Resolution to profess himself his Disciple; and a sincere Disposition to shew himself such, in all respects possible, in that small Remainder of his Time.

FROM such a Resolution as this, such a Person as He might well have been removed by the Behaviour of his Fellow-Sufferer; and by that Current of Affronts, which at that time ran so violently against our Lord, now seemingly destitute of all Help from *God*, and condemned and outraged, as an Impostor, by *Men*. Or, at least, He might have been led to have contented himself, with entreating our Lord, tho' somewhat more seriously than others, *to come down from the Cross*, and to *save himself*, and his Fellow-Sufferers. But He appears to have understood a great deal, in a very little Time, concerning the true Nature of Christ's

351

352

353



Kingdom: and so, acknowledging the Heinousness of his own Sins, and the Justice of God in his Punishment of them; all that He desires of our Lord, is, that He would remember Him, when He should come into his Kingdom.

THIS Malefactor, therefore, you see, cannot be supposed, in the former Course of his Life, when his evil Designs kept him out of the City and out of Society, to have had any Opportunity of enquiring, or hearing, concerning our blessed Lord. But after his Imprisonment, it is very possible, and very probable, that He came to a Knowledge of our Saviour, and of his Offers to Mankind. It is certain, from the express Words of the *Evangelist*, that, on Cross, He gave Testimony to the unspotted Character of our Lord; and Proof of believing the Truth of his Pretensions. And laying these Things together, his Words to our Saviour may reasonably be supposed to imply in them as much, as if he had said thus: “ I believe that thou art truly the Messiah, and Saviour of the World; as thou professest thy self to be: And, notwithstanding this thy ignominious Death upon the Cross, that thou hast a glorious and happy Kingdom to enter upon; though not of this World. I take this Opportunity of professing my self thy Disciple: which is the first I have enjoyed. This I do, amidst the Reproaches of thy Enemies, and the Insults of my Fellow-Sufferer. And, therefore, I beg that I may have the Benefit of this my Profession; and may be accepted by Thee, as thou hast promised to accept all such as do sincerely believe in Thee, and to acquit them from the Guilt of all their former Sins for the sake of this Belief.” This, I say, may most reasonably be supposed to be implied in the Words of this *Malefactor* to our Lord: it being certain from the *History* that He had enquired both after the *Character*, and after the *Proposals*, of our Lord; and found the *former* to be unspotted; and the *latter* to be Offers of Mercy, and Happiness, in his Kingdom, to his Disciples.

IT appears, therefore, that He was one, who was called to the Knowledge of *Jesus Christ*, in the last Hours, and had no Opportunity of professing his Belief in Him, but in the last Minutes, of his Life; when the *Night* of Death was just coming upon Him, in which *no Man can Work*: one, who believed, as soon as He possibly could hear a true Account of our Lord; and courageously professed his Belief, as soon as He had Opportunity to do it; and this at a time when all about him were reviling Him. In short, He did whatever it was in his Power to do, during that Space of Time, which He had left, after He was called to the Knowledge of the Gospel: and therefore, was accepted to Favour by our blessed Lord; and a Promise was made Him, that he should immediately upon his Death, be in an happy Place with Him. And here, you will easily observe that this gracious Acceptance of him was not merely or chiefly, on the account of his Sorrow for his past Sins; but for the sake of his believing in *Jesus Christ*, as soon as he could; and of his taking this first Opportunity of professing himself his Disciple; that is, for the sake of his doing all he could to manifest the Sincerity of his Faith, from the Time of his believing, to the End of his Life. And this leads me to the *second* thing which I undertook to shew; *viz.*

II. THAT this was not an extraordinary Act of Favour, out of the general Rule; nor any thing depending upon the secret Will, or unrevealed Pleasure, of *Almighty God*: but perfectly agreeable to the professed, and declared, Tenour of the Gospel; and any Person, in the same Circumstances, may claim, upon the Promises of God, sufficiently promulgated in the Gospel. This I would willingly spake as plain as possible, because this Instance of the Thief on the Cross hath been generally interpreted as an Instance of Almighty God's professed Acceptance of the Sorrow of a Sinner at his Death, instead of the Practice of Holiness, and Virtue, during his Life: and, under this Notion, hath been so recommended to the guilty Consciences of the most habitual Sinners, as to give them as strong an Assurance of God's Favour, on their Death-beds, as the best of Christians can in reason possess; and so applied to themselves, by wilful Sinners, in the Time of their Health, as to encourage them to place all their Hopes in the bitter Sorrow of their last Moments, instead of rectifying the Disorders, and Wickedness; of their Lives. But that this all proceeds from a mistaken Notion of this Matter, will appear to you, by proving, as I design under this *second* Head, these Two Particulars; *viz.*

357

1. THAT it is highly absurd to imagine that Almighty God should, by any such publick Instance as this, profess to the World that He doth, on any account, or in Mercy to any Person, depart from those Measures which He hath, as publickly, fixed, and promulgated. And,

2. THAT this Instance, as I have before represented it, is perfectly agreeable to the *Terms* of the *Gospel*, offered equally to all who hear of it; and plainly laid down by Christ, and his Apostles.

1. I SAY, it is highly absurd to imagine that Almighty God should, by any such publick Instance, as this of the Thief on the Cross, profess to the World that H doth, on any Account, or in Mercy to any Person, depart from those Measures, which He hath, as publickly, fixed and promulgated.

358

WHETHER any Being be obliged, in the nature of the thing, to execute his Threatnings in their utmost Rigour, as he is to perform his Promises to the utmost; is another Question. Nay, whether it may not be actually so, in fact, at last, that Almighty God will remit of that Punishment he hath threatned; and not execute the utmost of that Wrath which He has declared by his *Son* against harden'd impenitent Sinners, is a Point wholly distinct from that before us. I must own that the affirmative side of this Question seems to derogate from the Sincerity of the Divine Revelation; and not well to consist with the Nature of the highest Simplicity: it being a much worthier Supposition concerning Almighty God; that he should declare the exact Truth of the Matter; and leave it to work upon the Minds of Men as far as it could; than that he should declare what will never come to pass, and so endeavour to work upon them by a false Persuasion, which hath nothing in Nature to answer it. But I say that it is not so absurd to maintain that so it may possibly, or probably, be found at last; as to

359

say that Almighty God hath declared, by any public Instance, that he doth, in the Case of some of the most notorious Sinners, depart from the measures which he hath openly declared he will stand to.

To come to the Case before us; Almighty God declareth, as plainly as Words can declare any thing, that *without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord: that his Wrath shall be upon all the Workers, of Iniquity*; especially upon such as profess his Gospel, and yet live in an open Violation of the Laws of it, and an open Neglect of these Declarations in it. And yet, this Instance, of the Thief on the Cross, hath been sometimes so interpreted, as to make Almighty God declare by it to the World, that he will accept of the Death-bed Sorrow of a Sinner; though he hath had sufficient Warning through his Life, though he hath been a professed Christian, and hath had the fairest Opportunities of knowing the true *Terms of Christian Justification*. Now this, I say, it is absurd to imagine concerning Almighty God: because this is publickly to destroy the Effect, and Design, of his other Declarations; and to give as public an Encouragement as possible, to Men, to continue in their Sins.

FOR, when once a Man hath entertained this Notion, that the Case of this *Malefactor* is thus to be interpreted; how easy is the Passage of his Thoughts from this, to the Imagination, that his own Sorrow on his Death-bed shall, after the same manner, be accepted, instead of a religious and virtuous Life? For, why should he not think so? Or, what should hinder? Almighty God must not be supposed an arbitrary Being; a Power acting by Humour, and not guided by just and equitable Maxims: but equal in his Regards to all, in Circumstances exactly equal. And if so, his Proceedings, upon those Maxims, must be the same with all in the same Condition. He hath no respect to the Persons of Men: nor can there be any Reason in the World assigned, why he should deal, in the Distribution of his Eternal Rewards or Punishments, more favourable with one, than with another, who is not under the Circumstances of greater Guilt, at his Departure out of this State. And, therefore, if he hath shewn such Favour to one of the vilest of Sinners, on account of a pungent Sorrow, at the Hour of Death, contrary to the seeming Tendency of all his Declarations; so will he likewise to me, may the vilest of Men still say. And what can be the Consequence of this, but an Impenitent Life, and profligate Manners, in the Time of Health?

AND thus far, indeed, I agree with such Persons, that whatever the Case of this *Malefactor* was; all who are exactly in the same, or a like, Case, may reasonably expect, and will certainly experience, the same Favour which he did. But the Supposition, that Christians, who have Repentance and Amendment, day after day, inculcated upon them; who stand out against all Calls to Reformation; and rely at last upon the Sorrow of a sick Bed, are in the same Case with this *Malefactor*; or that he, considered as in the same Case with them, is declared in the *New Testament*, to have found Favour with God, and to have been entitled to the Happiness of Heaven: This Supposition, I say, will be ever incredible to us, till We can come to suppose Almighty God declaring against his own plainest Declarations; and ruining his own

360

361

362

Design of the World's Reformation; or else acting after an arbitrary and humoursome manner; accepting of one Man to Eternal Life, and condemning another to Eternal Death, who is, as to himself, in the same Circumstances; and hath been led, by this Example, to expect the same Acceptance. But who can suppose this of the God of Mercy, Truth, and Equity? Or, of that God, who hath revealed Wrath against all the Workers of Iniquity? But,

2. As those Absurdities should affrighten us from fixing such a Procedure upon Almighty God; and make us rather willing to suppose our selves wholly mistaken in our Interpretation of this Dealing of his with the Thief on the Cross, than to suppose any such Inconsistencies in his Ways: so, I must observe that there is another very good Account to be given of this Matter, perfectly agreeable to the Tenour of the Gospel, as the *Terms* of it were plainly preached by our Lord and his Apostles; and vastly distant from any such Interpretation, as that which I have now been mentioning.

IN order to make this evident, I must observe to you that it is the declared Tenour of the Gospel, that God would justify all who sincerely comply with the Offers of it, and heartily profess Faith in *Jesus Christ*; that all, I say, who do thus, upon good Motives, shall be released from the Guilt of their former Sins, and accepted by God, and dealt with as just Persons, for this very believing sincerely in his Son Jesus Christ: and this, whether they live a short, or a long, Time after their first Belief and Profession; provided they shew the Reality of their Faith in that Time, and do not relapse into a Course of Infidelity, or Wickedness. Thus, we find, our Lord, in the Gospels, receiving to his Favour, all who embrace his Offers; and accepting them, upon their first Acceptance of his Religion, and his Terms. And we find, more evidently, the *Apostles* instructed by the Holy Ghost to preach the Doctrine of Acceptance, and Remission of all their former Sins, to all who should lay hold on the Opportunity offered them, and embrace the Faith of Jesus Christ, and enter themselves into his Service. Upon this *Faith*, and Profession of it, Proselytes were baptized; and they were baptized for the Remission of their Sins; and Justification before God was openly promised, and declared, to them, upon this their first sincere, and undissembled Faith.

NOW, supposing any of these Persons to be taken away immediately: their former Sins being once pardoned, the Force of this Pardon must remain; and they must be finally acquitted and justified before God. But supposing any of these Proselytes to live, and afterwards to relapse into their former Course of Sin: They not only, by the Tenour of the Gospel, lose all the Benefit of this first Justification; but can have no Ground for Hope of a final Justification, at the great Day, without the actual Amendment and Reformation of their Lives. On the other hand, if they go on, in living as becomes Christians; they are entitled to a final Acquittance, and to great Degrees of Happiness in the World to come.

THERE are, therefore, Two sorts of Persons, considered as acquitted in the Gospel. 1. Such as hear the Gospel; and sincerely receive, and heartily accept it; and openly profess it: who yet have no Time allowed them, by the Providence of God, to bring forth the Fruits of

363

364

365

a continued Course of Righteousness; though they certainly have such a Faith as would bring forth these Fruits. And, 2. Such Persons as sincerely receive it; and close in with the Terms of it; and, having Time allowed them, live, and act, in the general Course of their Lives, by the Rules of Righteousness, laid down in it. As there are, likewise, Two sorts of Persons condemned, in the same Gospel. 1. Such, as having Opportunity to hear it proposed to them, either revile and persecute it; or refuse to attend to it, and receive it. And, 2. Such as, having heard it, receive and profess it; and enter themselves into the Bonds of it: but afterwards relapse into a Habit of Sin, in which they continue till Death overtake them.

366

THERE being, therefore, Two sorts of Persons, to whom Acquittance, or Justification, is openly promised in the Gospel; we may be sure, no one shall be denied that Favour, who belongs to either of the Two. And that the Malefactor on the Cross, certainly belonged to the former sort; and consequently, was accepted by Christ, not by any arbitrary, or extraordinary Act of Favour, but upon the ordinary Terms of his Dispensation, is, I think, very evident. For it appears that He was a Person, who, when He had a fair Opportunity, did seriously consider the Character, and Pretensions of our Lord; who, upon that Consideration, believed in Him, and received him, as the Messiah; and who took the first Opportunity He had, to declare and profess this: though He had no Hopes of any Benefit from hence, unless in a future State; and was rather discouraged from it, than incited to it, by the Tempers, and Behaviour, of all about Him. We was called to the Knowledge of the Gospel: He obeyed that Call; and He did whatever was in his Power, during the short Time God afforded him, to demonstrate the Sincerity of his Faith. What should hinder, therefore, but that he should be received by our Lord, who came to offer Acquittance, and Justification, to all who should believe him to be the *Messiah*; and should act agreeably to the Faith, and Practice enjoyed by him, during the remainder of their Lives, whether long, or short?

367

I CANNOT, therefore, but think it plain from hence, that there is nothing extraordinary, or new, in this Instance of the Justification of the Thief on the Cross: that he was not declared to be accepted by God on the account of his Sorrow, or because he was dying, and at that time expressed a Sense of his Sins; but because he laid hold on the first fair Opportunity, which offered it self, of believing in Christ; of professing himself his Disciple, and of owning Him for his Master; and, consequently, that he was accepted to Favour, upon the ordinary Terms of the Gospel, declared in other Places of the New Testament, upon which any other sincere Believer, would likewise have been accepted and justified; and upon which, all Christians inherit the same Justification, and reap the Fruit of it, if they do not, by falling again into a Course of Sin, and continuing in it, forfeit their Title to so great a Blessing.

368

WHAT hath been said may likewise serve to give us some Account why the other Evangelists might not think it necessary to be minute, and particular, in the Relation of the Behaviour, and happy End, of the better of the Two Malefactors: *viz.* because nothing material could be learnt or drawn, from it, but what might be learnt from other plain Parts of

the Gospel; that whoever should believe in Jesus Christ, and make use of the Opportunities He enjoys to profess and shew himself to be sincerely his Disciple, should, upon that Belief, and Profession, be acquitted from the Guilt of all his past Sins; and be put into a State of Favour, and Acceptance, with God; whether He should live a long, or a short Time, after his embracing the Christian Faith. And now, what hath been already laid down will easily guide us to determine what I proposed in the *third* place: *viz.*

III. WHO those Persons are, that may safely argue, to their own Comfort, from this Example of the Thief on the Cross; and may be as secure of God's Favour, as He was. And it is plain, they must be such, as are in his Circumstances. I do not mean, such as are leaving this World: for that was but an accidental Matter; and had no Weight towards his Acceptance; which I have shewn, must have been the same, upon the Gospel Terms, whether He had then been dying, or not. But I mean, such Persons, as do not resist the Evidence of the Gospel of Christ; but receive it upon due Consideration; and take the Opportunity, offered them by the Providence of God, to profess their Faith in Jesus Christ, and to acknowledge themselves his Disciples. They must be Persons, who being come to Years of Discretion, have a fair Opportunity offered them of hearing the Evidence, and knowing the Nature of the Christian Religion. They must be Persons who, upon hearing and weighing this Evidence, do sincerely accept it as the Will of God; who openly and heartily, profess this; and who, during the rest of their Time, behave themselves agreeably to their Profession:

AND we cannot but observe from hence, of how small Concern, the Instance now before us is to Persons bred up in the Knowledge of the Christian Religion; called upon, day after day, to regard the Nature and Obligations of it; to Persons who have always professed themselves Christians, and yet live on, in an Habit of Sin condemned by their own Profession, in hopes that the Sorrow of their latest Moments shall atone for the Vices of their past Lives.

IF, therefore, any one would entertain himself with any just Hopes, drawn from God's Mercy to this crucified Malefactor; He must first, in all reason, consider, whether He himself be in the like Circumstances: for otherwise, what Comfort can any Man, in his Senses, draw from thence? And no one, I think, can, by any means, be said to be in the like Circumstances, who is come to Years of Judgment, and Discretion, in a Country of professed Christians; and hath, either in his Mind, or in his Manners, dishonoured, or neglected, the Christian Religion. But this will more naturally come under the next Head of my present Design: which I have not now Time to prosecute.

I SHALL only, therefore, add at present, that for us, who are called betimes to the Knowledge of Christianity; who have Opportunities of knowing our Duty and profess our selves, from the beginning of our Lives, the Disciples of Jesus Christ; for us, I say, to have recourse to any such Instance as this, in order to defer our Repentance and Amendment, is the Extremity of Folly, and Weakness. Whatever it is, that makes us easy in the habitual Practice of any of the Vices condemned in the Gospel, is certainly a Cheat and Imposition

369

370

371

upon our selves: a false and groundless Amusement. And, therefore, from whencesoever it is, that we may have drawn any such Notions; we may assure ourselves, (and it is our Eternal Interest to be assured of it,) that we are greatly mistaken in them. Almighty God doth, as certainly and as plainly, require of us the Practice of all Righteousness, as He promiseth us all Happiness. No Man ever was uneasy at the Review of such a Practice: but many a Man hath been rendered miserable on his Death-bed here; and will be eternally undone hereafter; by trusting, in the Time of his Health, to any other false and faithless Methods. And God grant that We may consider these Things, before they be hid from our Eyes! *Amen.*



*The Example of the Thief upon the Cross, considered.*

## SERMON XVII.

LUKE xxiii. 42, 43.

*And He said unto Jesus, Lord, Remember me when Thou comest into thy Kingdom.*

*And Jesus said unto Him, Verily, I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

IN my last Discourse, (which was upon the Account given us, in these Words, of the happy Ending of the Life of one of the *Malefactors* crucified with our blessed Lord,) I proposed *four* Heads: *three* of which I then went over; and shall now proceed to the *fourth*, after I have made way for it, by reminding you of what I then, as I hope, very evidently proved.

IN discoursing on the *first*, I shewed you, that this *Malefactor* was one who, as soon as He had a fair Opportunity of knowing the Truth concerning the Character of our blessed Lord, and of hearing the Evidence of his Pretensions, did sincerely lay hold on it; and profess himself his Disciple: and behave himself as such, amidst the Calumnies and Reproaches of all about him: and that for this Belief, and Profession; not merely, or chiefly, on account of his Sense of his past Sins; He was accepted, by our Lord, to Mercy.

UNDER the *second* Head, I went on to shew you, that it was one professed part of the Gospel, preached both by Christ and his Apostles, that whosoever should lay hold on the Opportunity offered by the Providence of God; and should accept of the Terms proposed in the Gospel; and believe in Jesus Christ with an honest and sincere Heart; and make open Profession of this Belief: that every such Person, I say, should be accepted to Favour; and effectually acquitted from the Guilt of his past Sins, whether He should live a short, or a long, Time after this Profession; supposing Him to behave himself, during that Time, agreeably to it. And, in consequence of this, I proved to you that this Thief on the Cross, having sincerely laid hold on the Opportunity offered to Him by Providence; having come to the Knowledge of our Lord's Character, and of the Evidence he gave of the Truth of his Divine Mission; and having, upon this, professed himself his Disciple, and shewn his Sincerity by behaving himself, in all respects, as became such an one, during that short Time which was allowed him, after He was called to the Knowledge and Faith of Christ; that this Malefactor, I say, having acted thus, was accepted upon the ordinary, known, *Terms* of the *Gospel*; not upon the secret and hidden Will of Almighty God deviating from, or going beyond, the common Rules of the *Christian Institution*, and that, therefore, this is no Instance of Almighty God's Acceptance of the Sorrow of a dying Man, instead of the Practice of Virtue during his Life; much less, an Instance of his Acceptance of those, on the Account of their Death-bed Sorrow, who have known and professed the Christian Religion through their whole Lives, and have wilfully and habitually lived in express Contradiction to its Design, and its Precepts, during the Time of that Profession.

374

375

376



UNDER the *third* Head, I shewed you that those Persons only are in the Case of this Malefactor, so as to argue to their own Satisfaction, from his Example, upon any reasonable Grounds, who, whether living, or dying; whether in perfect Health, or within the Prospect of Death; lay hold on the first fair Opportunity offered them; and seriously consider the Evidence them is for the Christian Religion; and sincerely receive it upon that Evidence; and openly profess themselves the Disciples of Jesus Christ; and behave themselves, as becomes his Disciples, through the remaining part of their Lives, whether long, or short. And such Persons as these, I need not observe to you, would have been entitled to the Justification, and Favour, promised in the Gospel, upon the plain and express Words of our Lord and his Apostles; whether there had been any such Instance, as this of the believing and penitent Malefactor, recorded in the Gospel, or not.

377

HAVING thus recalled to your Minds what I have already advanced, I may with the more Advantage proceed to the *fourth* thing which I proposed, *viz.*

IV. To shew plainly the Extreme Unreasonableness, and great Danger, of the common Mistakes about this Instance of God's Mercy; and the Vanity of those Pretences which some Men have built upon this Example. And here I shall mention particularly the Mistakes of Two sorts of Persons: *viz.* The Mistake of those who misapply this Instance to their own Ruin; and the Mistake of those who take occasion from it to implant in others very wrong, and very pernicious, Notions, concerning *Despair*, and *Presumption*.

I. FROM what hath been said, it manifestly appears how great, as well as fatal a Mistake that is, which some Persons have persuaded themselves to entertain, from this Instance of the crucified Thief: that God will accept them at last, for the sake of a Death-bed Sorrow and Concern for their past Sins; though they have been, all through their Lives, professed Christians, and have neglected to obey those Laws, which they knew to be imposed upon them by the Christian Religion, as the Rules of their Actions, The Weakness and extreme Folly of arguing at this rate, from this Instance, will appear plainly to any one, who will seriously consider the Case of such professed Christians; and compare it with what hath been before said concerning the Case of that Malefactor, and the Conditions of Acceptance laid down in the Gospel.

378

FOR it is evident, from the Account which I have given of both these, that His Case was such as comes within the professed Terms of the Gospel: upon which all who lay hold on the Opportunity given them; and hear, and receive, and profess, the Christian Religion sincerely; are accepted immediately to Favour, and released from the Guilt of their former Sins. Whereas the Case of such professed Christians as I have been now speaking of, is a condemned Case, upon the professed Terms of the same Gospel. For if the Gospel saith any thing at all, it plainly affirms this, that those Persons, who after they have received the Faith of Jesus Christ, and been made Partakers of this first Justification, do relapse into a Course, or Habit, of those Sins which are condemned in the Gospel; and continue in that Course

379

till Death overtake them: that those Persons, I say, who do this, shall be excluded the Kingdom of Heaven; and instead of God's Favour, shall feel his Wrath, and suffer the Vengeance of Eternal Fire. Now, as Almighty God did, in forgiving and accepting the believing Malefactor, keep exactly to the Terms, which our blessed Lord had, in his Name, promulgated: so, there is all the reason in the World to conclude that, in condemning and punishing that other sort of Persons, who have contradicted and scandalized his Gospel, by their Behaviour during their Christian Profession, He will likewise keep close to the Terms which He hath, in the Gospel, set before the Eyes of the World. And in this Gospel, there is another Law promulgated, as the Rule of Judgment in the Case of such Persons. They are called to the Knowledge of Christianity; they have time allowed them to live in the Practice of its Precepts, and by that means to secure, and encrease, their future Happiness: and yet they transgress its Commands; and, to all their repeated Affronts to God and his Laws, they add the Assurance of imagining, and expecting, that He will deal with them, as He deals with Men, who sincerely receive, and profess the Christian Religion; and do whatever they can, in that shorter Time which is allowed them, to demonstrate the Sincerity of their inward Belief, and outward Profession.

380

ALMIGHTY God doth all his Works with the most exact Proportion: nor can it easily be imagined that perfect Wisdom, and perfect Power, can do otherwise. And there is no doubt, therefore, but that He will dispense his Rewards and Punishments, with the greatest Equity, and Impartiality. Now can it be consistent with any Rules of Equity and Proportion, to make those equal in a State of Retribution, whose Cases, and Behaviour, have been vastly different, in a State of Tryal? But, besides this it is sufficiently declared to us, in the Name of Almighty God, that He will very much consider, what Light hath been afforded; what Powers Persons have enjoyed; what Time hath been allowed them; what Improvement they have made of this Light; what use they have made of these Powers; and how they have spent this Time; that they have had granted to them. And though He will very favourably deal with those who enjoy lesser Degrees of Light, and Power; and no happy Opportunities of Improvement; as Equity requires: yet this is far from Chewing that He will be equally favourable to those who have enjoyed greater Advantages, and happier Opportunities; and have made no other use of them, but to affront and dishonour both God, and Religion, the more, On the contrary, the only Ground of his Favour to the former sort, being their want of Light, and Opportunity; this rather implies in it, that where he hath afforded Light, and Opportunity, there He may justly, and will certainly, require a strict and severe Account of the Use and Improvement that have been made of them.

381

INDEED, in the *Parable* of the *Labourers* hired, at several Hours, into the Vineyard, *Matth. xx. 1.* some have been apt to think that the Method of Proceeding is such, as to encourage Christians to depend upon what they shall be able to do in their last Moments; and to hope, on the account of that, to be made equal, in the Favour of God, to those who have

382

served Him faithfully, through their whole Lives; and so, to conclude that it is no great Matter, how long soever they defer their Repentance. This *Parable* I shall, therefore, in my next Discourse, distinctly and fully consider. At present, I shall only observe, that it was chiefly intended to signify to the *Jews*, that Almighty God would make the *Gentiles* equal to them, in all Privileges, if they did, in the *last Age of the World* (as the *Gospel-Age* is called) accept the Invitation given them; and believe, and obey, the Doctrine of the Gospel: which Interpretation wholly takes away the Ground of the Objection. And, as far as it can be supposed to concern particular Persons, I must observe, that it can only signify that God will reward all such with his Favours, as do, whenever they are called to the Knowledge of the Gospel, heartily embrace it, and readily obey the Precepts of it, how little Time soever be allowed them for so doing.

383

BUT can any one, though never so willing to be imposed upon, in this Case, find out, I will not say in this *Parable*, but in the whole *New Testament*, any Reward for those who are called to the Knowledge of the Gospel in the beginning of their Lives, in the first Hours of their Day; and yet either refuse to come in, upon so gracious an Invitation; or else, professing to obey that Call, and entering themselves into his Religion, and pretending to accept the Terms offered by our blessed Lord, not only prove useless and negligent of their Lord's Honour and Service: but even spend that Time which is due, upon their own Contract, to the Service of their Master, in ruining his good Designs; in dishonouring his Name; in abusing their Fellow-Servants; or in some other sort of Practice, detrimental to their Master's true Interest, or inconsistent with the Office which they have taken upon themselves? Where do we read of any such Servants as these, rewarded and honoured, at last, by their Master? Whenever we meet with the mention of any such in the *Gospel*; it is with a very sad Conclusion, at the End of their Story: and this merely for not improving the *Talents* committed to them; for the neglecting to do God positive Service in their Stations; for not using the Opportunities, and Abilities, put into their Hands by Providence, for their own Eternal Interest, and the Honour of their great Master? How much more shall this heavy Sentence be pronounced upon such as not only have not improved the Time, and Abilities, and Advantages, put into their Hands; but have likewise used this Time, and these Abilities, and Advantages, which God in mercy hath afforded them, to the Disservice of Himself, and the Disgrace of his holy Religion; doing very great Mischief by their Example and Influence; affronting God, and making his Enemies to blaspheme? Where do we read, all through the Gospel, of any such Person, after a Continuance of Affronts and Indignities offered to Almighty God, during his Christian Profession, accepted at last to Mercy, on Account of the Sorrow of his dying Hour? That which hath, most of all, inclined Men to be deceived in this Case, is the Instance of the crucified Malefactor; and this Instance, we have now evidently seen, to be at the greatest distance from any Likeness to the *Case* of such as are professed Christians, and live on, in a Course of Sin, under the Influence of so groundless an Expectation. How

384

385

great, therefore, as well as fatal, must the Mistake of those be, who being Christians, and having many and continued Opportunities of living worthy of that Name, still continue wilfully in their Sins; and argue themselves into a fond Expectation of God's Mercy at last, from an *Instance* which bears no manner of relation to the Condition, and Circumstances, in which *They* are?

386

2. I SHALL now mention another Mistake, which is usually founded upon the Instance of the crucified Malefactor: and that is, the Mistake of those, who do not, indeed, make any ill use of it in the Conduct of their own Lives; but yet make use of it, to encourage the *Presumption*, and prevent the *Despair*, of dying Sinners, who have lived all their Lives long, in the Profession of Christianity, and in the Violation of its Laws; and this, to the great Prejudice of other Christians who survive them. This Mistake, I confess, as far as it is founded upon this Instance, is so much the same, with the former, in the Ground of it, that it can hardly be reckoned as distinct from it: and it hath been sufficiently confuted, under this View, by what I have said, upon the *former*, to shew that this *Instance* toucheth not the Case of such professed Christians. But, as it is applied to another Purpose; and as it is not only founded upon this Example of the *crucified Malefactor*, but upon very wrong, and groundless, Notions concerning *Presumption* and *Despair* it seems to deserve a particular, and distinct place, in the present Debate, as it will give occasion for the settling the true Nature of those Two Dispositions of Mind: the misunderstanding of which hath certainly been the reason of representing what is generally called *Despair*, as the greatest of Sins; and of making what is truly a *criminal Presumption*, to be a necessary Duty.

387

Now here I shall lay down one Proposition, which is sufficient to determine this Matter: *viz.* That these Two Dispositions of Mind must be judged of, by the professed Terms of the Gospel: and not by any supposed Possibilities. And, according to these, I think it is evident that for One who hath, against all the Calls of God's Spirit, and all the Checks of his own Conscience, continued to live in a constant Course of Sin; for such an one, I say, to hope, with any sort of Assurance, that God will bring him to the Happiness, promised in the Gospel only to Holiness and Righteousness, is not a virtuous Hope; because it is an Hope without any Ground, or solid Foundation: but is a vain, and groundless *Presumption*; and such a *Presumption*, as seems, in truth, to affront Almighty God, by supposing that He will depart, for this Man's Sake, from his own declared and professed Terms. And, on the contrary, for such an one to *Despair*; that is, to think that He, having continued through the Time of his Health, and Conversation in the World, an habitual Sinner; and being that wicked Man, whom the *Gospel* constantly, and in multitudes of Passages, condemns; that He, I say, being such an one, shall be condemned at the great Day, as the *Gospel* saith: This is indeed his Misery; but is so far from being his Sin, that I do not see, if He believeth the Gospel, how He can possibly avoid thinking so. But, as if it were of no Importance to be guided by the Declarations of the *Gospel* it self, in this great Affair; dying Christians have lived a Life of

388

habitual and wilful Wickedness; have been led into such Notions of these Two Things, that they have come to think this groundless *Presumption* their Duty: and, what is of worse consequence, many By-standers have been fatally corrupted into a Security in sinning, by the same Expectations from this unreasonable Confidence in God. Whereas there is nothing in this Confidence that can alter, or affect, the Nature of Things: nor is there any Passage in the whole *New Testament*, which recommends such a *Confidence*, in such Circumstances; or which implieth in it, that it is the Duty of such Persons, or any Advantage to them in the Eyes of God, to be confident of those Mercies, of which, in truth, He hath solemnly declared they shall never partake.

389

IT is true; that many of the best sort of Christians may, in a low and afflicted Condition, entertain an unreasonable and groundless Despondency, or Despair. They may imagine that they have not been those Christians, who shall be rewarded at last; and be filled with very melancholy Apprehensions concerning their future Condition. But this Imagination of theirs cannot affect their future State: which will be determined by that God who knows all things as they are; and will deal with them, according to what they really have been; not according to what they imagine themselves to have been. And this Imagination, proceeding from an Excess of Humility, or from bodily Disorder, is only their present Unhappiness; not their Sin: and is removed far from them, as soon as they themselves are removed out of this State. Whereas the *Despondency* of those professed Christians, who have resolutely continued wicked to the last, is truly well grounded upon the Gospel-Declarations; and, as it is so, is likewise part of their Punishment, begun in this World, in the inward Torment of their own Minds: which, if it might be removed from them, upon any Promise, or Declaration of God, I should most willingly do it. But who would dare to incite them to assure themselves of the Favour of that God, who hath so plainly declared, that, They shall not see his face; and that He will be to such Sinners *a consuming Fire*.

390

NAY, is it not to bring a lasting Disgrace upon the Cause of Virtue, to teach that the confident Assurance of the most profligate Sinner, when He comes to die, (perhaps, a more confident Assurance than the best of Christians commonly have,) shall set him as much out of the reach of God's Displeasure; and in as secure a Condition; as that of the most virtuous Persons, who have spent their whole Lives in the Contemplation, and Practice, of the Laws of Christianity. The *Gospel* is far from saying any such thing: and, therefore, the *Preachers* of the *Gospel* must likewise be far from entertaining the Consciences of Christians with any such Fancies; who, if they have any Sense themselves, will not easily swallow such unreasonable Doctrines.

391

I GRANT, indeed, that the best thing which the most wicked of Christians can do, when they come within View of Death; and what all about them ought to encourage them to do; is to make themselves as sensible, as they possibly can, of the Evil of their past Ways; to

move themselves, upon the best Considerations, to abhor and detest them: and solemnly to warn all about them from the Paths, in which themselves have walked. But, after all this, who could say that these Persons have come up, in any tolerable degree, to the Terms of the Gospel? Or, who could encourage any such notorious Sinners to assure themselves of the Mercy of God, unless a plain Text of Scripture, or Law of Reason, could be found, suitable to their Case, or promising them Happiness? They must still be left (as far as the Gospel hath concerned it self) in the State, in which That pronounceth wilful and habitual Sinners to be. The utmost that can be said is, that they must be left to the *uncovenanted Mercies* of God: and the highest degree of hope which they can have, must be founded upon this, that Almighty God may possibly depart from his settled Method; and recede from the Terms which He hath openly professed, for the sake of those, who have lived, Year after Year, in an open Violation of his Laws; against all the Checks of their Consciences, and all the Calls of his Gospel. Which let *them* believe, who can swallow, and embrace, any Absurdities, rather than forsake their Sins.

392

HAVING, as I hope; very evidently shewn that there is nothing, in this Instance of the believing and penitent Malefactor, which can, with the least Colour of Reason, encourage any, who have been, through many Years, professed Christians, and habitual Sinners, to depend upon the Sorrow of their Death-beds, for Acceptance with God; and having thus finished what I proposed to discourse of from this Example: I shall now take occasion to enquire whether, in the nature of the thing it self; there be any greater Ground for Hope, than We have seen, there is in the Instance We have been considering. And this, I think, will be very proper, not only because the Subject naturally enough leads us to it; but because it is very observable, that one great Support of such unhappy Persons, as go on in a Course of Sin, and yet retain some Sense of Religion, and make Profession of Christianity, is the Hope which they have placed in the Sorrow of their Death-beds, as if there were some peculiar Charm, and Efficacy, in *that*, above any other Sorrow, (which they falsly call Repentance,) conceived, or expressed, in any other Part of their Lives.

393

Now, in what is it that this last Sorrow hath the Advantage over any other? in what it agrees with the Sorrow, and Regret, which a Man hath felt in the Time of his Health, it cannot be preferred before it: because it differs not from it. And in what it really differs from it, I fear, it will be found to have the Disadvantage on its side. For, it seems to me that it is much less likely to be sincere, or such as would, upon Trial, prove effectual, than the other: it being probably rather extorted by the Prospect and Fear of Death, than by the Persuasion of Reason; and frequently accompanied with such Terrors, as make it rather a Distraction, than a rational Grief; or a conscientious Sorrow. Whereas, a Regret and Concern for past Sins, in Time of Health, and whilst a Man hath not so near a Prospect of a State of Retribution,

394

may be supposed more sincere, and more likely to influence Him: because it may justly be thought to be more the Result of Reason, and Judgment; and rather proceeding from a well-grounded Persuasion of the Man's own Mind, and the just Consideration of the Nature of Things, than from the terrible Dread of immediate Punishment.

395

AND yet how is this last Sorrow usually preferred; and accounted of a more excellent Nature than any of the former? One would think, merely because it is the last. Whereas *that* can make no difference in the Eyes of God: who always judgeth truly from the nature of the Thing; and not from the *Time*, or any of those inconsiderable Circumstances, which often hide the true nature of things from mortal, Eyes, and finite Understandings. Nay, we our selves cannot judge whether our own present Sorrow, and Compunction, be of that nature as that they would work in us true Repentance and Amendment; were we entrusted with more Opportunities of making the Trial. And this is another Reason why we should build nothing upon it, either in our own Case, or that of others; because, even supposing that it would be sincere, and effectual in its Influences, were more Time allowed; yet this is a Matter wholly out of the reach of our Knowledge, and wholly impossible for us to judge of.

396

BUT, indeed, it is a very material Observation, that wicked Men have much less reason to think this last Sorrow thoroughly and undoubtedly sincere, than they have heretofore had to think any of their former Sorrows so; which yet, they know, have ended in nothing considerable. There are few professed Christians, even amongst the wickedest of them, who have not, one time or other, had some just and concerning Thoughts about that Course of Sin, and those wilful Vices, in which they have indulged themselves; who have not, one time or other, detested and resolved to forsake them, in the Days of their Health and Prosperity; when they had nothing to move them but the Nature of the thing, and the great Reasonableness of receiving, and obeying the Gospel. If, therefore, they have found that Regret, and Concern, which they have had, in the best Season, and which had so good Ground for it, to come to nothing; to vanish into Air; and leave no good Influence, nor shew any Power, upon their Lives and Actions: upon what Accounts can they think, That Sorrow would have any better, or more lasting Effect, were the Trial made, which for aught they know, is wholly owing to the present Fear of Death, and the near Prospect of a future Punishment; and consequently will most probably vanish, when that Fear, and that Prospect, are removed from them?

397

THEY will, I dare say, acknowledge no such Sorrow of a sick Bed, to be of any Effect, if they recover, and relapse to their former Sins. And how many such Instances have they seen in others? And how often have they themselves relapsed, after a better, and more reasonable, Sorrow, than this can be esteemed? And how then can they so flatter themselves, as to imagine that this last and unproved, Sorrow; is truly sincere; and would be truly effec-

tual, were Opportunity given it to shew its Power, and display its Influences: when they have not one probable Argument on their side, to give Ground for such an Imagination; but great Presumptions, and much Experience, against it. So that there is no Foundation for such a Supposition: and yet, without it, there is not the least Shadow of Hope, to support them. How miserably deluded, therefore, must they be, who thus rely upon a Reed; who thus build all their Hopes, and all their Expectations of Happiness, upon that which is of a weaker nature, than what, they have experienced, to have deceived them already; who would fain escape Misery, and attain to Happiness, and yet will take none but a desperate Method, and such an one, as will too certainly disappoint and cheat them at last!

AND that they, who indulge themselves in the Habit of any sort of Sin, may be the more effectually sensible of this, I would ask them, whether They believe that Almighty God will punish any sort of Persons in another State; or whether there are any Men in this World now, who shall be condemned, at the great Day, to that miserable State which is threatned in the Gospel. If they pretend not to believe any such thing as this; why are they in such Fears, and in so great Concern, about it? Why do the Terrors of the Lord oppress them? And why do they betray so much Uneasiness, at the Thoughts of appearing before Him? But if they do believe that thus it shall be with some sort of Persons, (as they appear to do by their Presages, and Apprehensions;) I would then ask, Who, they think, *they* are, that than inherit most of the Anger of God in that future State. Surely, *They*, who, upon the account of their whole Lives, do most deserve it. And who are they that most deserve it? It must be either the *Wilful Sinners* of the unbelieving World; or the *Wilful Sinners*, who are professed Christians, and enjoy the Light, and Assistance, of Christ's Gospel. And which of these Two do most deserve it, is too evident to need many Words. For who can be so unreasonable as to think that They who sin not against so clear Light, and so evident a Divine Authority to the contrary, are in a more desperate Condition, than those who are, or may be, fully acquainted with God's Will; who agree to the Reasonableness of it; who profess to fulfil it; and yet live, through their whole Lives, in express Contradiction to it? No, certainly, if our Saviour speak Truth; or if the Rule of Equity be consulted; *They shall be beaten with most Stripes, who have known their Master's Will, and have not done it*; They, who have had all fair Opportunities for Reformation, and the Practice of Virtue; and have abused them all to the Purposes of Vice.

IF, therefore, *They* shall be most miserable in another State, who have most deserved it, as without doubt they shall: tell me, I beseech you, who can deserve it more than the Christian, who hath the greatest Favours, and Obligations, bestowed upon Him; the holiest Law to govern Him; the brightest Light to direct Him; the most powerful Assistance to strengthen Him; and yet goes on to sin, against all the Obligations, and all the Engagements,

398

399

400



and all the Motives, to the contrary, which are contained in his Profession. And consequently, unless you will suppose, and maintain, that there shall be no such thing as Punishment in another World; but that all shall equally, either sink into nothing, or be made happy; you must be persuaded of this, as of a certain Truth, that the wicked Christian, who continues a wilful Sinner, under the Cloke of his holy Profession, is the Person, who, because He most of all deserves this Punishment, shall therefore most undoubtedly inherit it. Nor can his Grief, when He comes within View of it, alter the Case: for *Grief* is not Holiness, nor Virtue; nor probably would it end in the Practice of them: and *these* are the Things required of Christians, in the Time of their Health, and during their Conversation in this World. But I need not, I hope, add any more Words in order to represent to you the Vanity and Weakness of that fatal Mistake of some wilful Sinners, that the Sorrows which they reserve to be expressed upon their Death-beds, will atone for the profligate, and unchristian, conduct of their whole past Lives.

AND now, Christians, what shall we say to these Things? Shall not all that hath been urged to shew the Unreasonableness of those Hopes which are built upon any such Pretence, as I have now been examining, separated from a Life of Righteousness, and true Goodness: shall it not, I say, move us all to lay hold on the present Opportunity; and to *work out our Salvation, whilst the Day lasts; because the Night cometh,* (the *Night* of Sickness, and of Death,) *when no Man can work?* How happy would it be for us, would we be induced to live as becomes Christians; and worthy of that holy Name by which we are called; and of that Divine Master, to whom We have given up our selves? This is the Thing required of *Us*, who have Time allowed us to shew the Sincerity of our *Faith* and *Profession*: and this alone it is, that can entitle us to the Favour of God, and the Rewards of Heaven. If we be in earnest seeking after Happiness; let us not take the Road which leads to certain Misery: but that good Path which our Lord himself hath marked out to us, both by his Example, and his Precepts; which, will infallibly bring us to his Heavenly Kingdom. *Amen!*

401

402

403

404  
405

*The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, considered.*

## SERMON XVIII.

MATTHEW xx. 1, & c.

*For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Man that is an Housholder, which went out early in the Morning to hire Labourers into his Vineyard, & c.*

IN my last Discourse, I observed to you, that some Persons had mistaken and perverted the *Parable* in this Chapter; vainly arguing, from one Part of it, that the *last Hour*, or even the last Minute, of Life, may be sufficient for the Work of Repentance, and turning to God. In that, I only proposed one or two Considerations in general: but I now design to handle this Matter more particularly that it may the more clearly be seen, not only that this *Parable* gives not the least Encouragement to any such Thought; but that it really proves to all, who profess Christianity, the absolute Necessity of Holiness and Virtue, before the last Sickness, and Death, approach. In order to this, it will be necessary,

I. TO lay before you an Account of the *Parable* it self.

II. To shew you, what was intended to be signified by it.

III. To prove that there is no Foundation in it, for any such Imagination, as that before-mentioned: but an actual Declaration of the contrary.

I. As for the *Parable* it self; it sets forth to us an *Housholder going forth into the Market-place, to hire Men* to come and work for Him, in his *Vineyard*; that He met with some sooner than He did with others; that those whom He hired latest, came as soon as He called and invited them; and laboured heartily for the Time that they were in his *Vineyard*; and, at the End of their Day, were by his Favour rewarded, for that sincere and hearty, though short, Labour, with the same Reward which He had agreed to bestow upon those whom, He hired much sooner. This is the Sum of the *Parable*; as far as it concerns my present Design: for it is not of Importance to relate every particular Circumstance of it. The main Matter here to be considered, is the Reward bestowed upon Those who came so late into the *Vineyard*.

II. I MUST therefore, now shew you what was intended by this *Parable*. And it is plain that it was designed to represent the Method of God in dispensing his Favours and Rewards to the World. *The Kingdom of Heaven*, or the Method of God's dealing with Mankind in the Revelation of his Will, and the calling of them to himself, was to be set forth in it. But, to be more particular.

I. IT is most probable, and, I believe, certain, that the main, if not the whole, Design of it, was to account for that Stumbling-block, as it was indeed, to the ill-natured. *Jews; viz.* God's calling in the *Gentiles* to Himself, after the *Jews*; and making them equal to These, in Privileges and Favours, upon their sincere Acceptance of his Invitation. In the *last Verse* of

406

407

408

the preceeding *Chapter*; our Lord declareth that *many that are first shall be last, and the last first*: that is, that in those first called to the Knowledge of God, *viz*, the *Jews*, and those to be called after them, *viz*, the *Gentiles*, God would make no difference; provided He found a sincere Disposition to obey his Call, and serve Him truly. Then immediately, at the *first Verse of the xxth Chapter*, our Lord goes on to illustrate what He had there said; and to discover the Equity of it.

IN this Sense, then, of the *Parable*, Almighty God is represented as calling Mankind at several Ages of the World: the *Jews*, and their Forefathers, in the first Ages; and, in the *last Age*, *viz*. that of the Gospel, as calling the *Gentile* World to the Knowledge of himself; and admitting them to equal Privileges with the *Jews*, who thought themselves his peculiar People; and rewarding them after the same manner, upon their sincere Compliance with his Terms, and Acceptance of his Invitation. The *Gentile* World are represented as coming into his Gospel, upon his Call; and living worthy of it after their coming into it: and our Lord is represented, at the End of the Day of this Life, as rewarding Them, as much as the *Jews* themselves, who were called to the Knowledge of God, in a so much earlier Age.

THAT which makes it not probable that this was the true Intent of our Lord, in this *Parable*, is, that this calling of the *Gentiles* to equal Privileges with the *Jews*, was certainly a Matter which was to be opened by due Degrees, even to the best-temper'd amongst them; who were averse enough to all Thoughts of it: and likewise, that there is express mention made in it, of the murmuring of those *who were hired first*, against the Master of the House, for rewarding the *last* equally with them. For this agrees very well with the unconquered Prejudices of the *Jewish* Nation; and that Selfishness of Mind, by which they had set themselves apart from the rest of the World, and could not bear to think of any who might be equal Sharers with themselves in the Favour of God, whose People they had so long been. But it doth not seem so well to agree with a good Christian's Temper; to repine, and murmur, that any other sincere Persons are made as happy, by the Favour of Almighty God, as Himself is. It rather adds to such an one's Happiness, to see others happy, than sows and spoils it. But,

2. LET us suppose that the *Parable* was intended to signify to us the Method of God's dealing with particular Persons, in the great Affair of their Happiness, and Salvation. And then, what is set forth in it, is this, that Almighty God, doth, in his Providence, call and invite some Persons to the Christian Religion sooner than others; and that those who come latest to the Knowledge of his Will, if they readily lay hold on his Invitation; if they accept his Offer; (nor doth the *Parable* go any farther than the *first* Offer;) and comply with his Terms; and enter in his Church; and labour in it; working out their own Salvation, and producing all manner of good Fruits, during that Season of Life which is allowed them after this Call, and Invitation: that those, I say, who are thus called, and do thus behave themselves upon such Call, shall, for that hearty Sincerity, be equalled in reward, by Almighty God, to those

409

410

411

whom they would have certainly equalled in their Labours, if they had been as soon called and invited into his Church.

III. HAVING thus laid down what was certainly, or might possibly be, intended by this *Parable*: it will be the easier to shew that there is no Foundation in it for any such Imagination, as that the late Sorrow, falsely called Repentance, of any Christian who hath been a wilful habitual Sinner through the whole Course of his Life and Health, will atone at last, for his Sins; and make him the Object of God's Favour: For,

I. IF we take the first Account now given of the meaning of this *Parable*, which is certainly the true one; then there is nothing contained in it, but that the: *Gentile* World, though called to the Knowledge of God much latter than the *Jews*, yet, upon their acceptance of that Call, and their hearty application of themselves to Christian good Works, shall be accepted to equal Privileges, with the *Jews*, who had so long before them, been the peculiar People of God. This, therefore, cannot possibly bear any relation to the Case of such particular Christians, as have been long called to the Knowledge of God, and have wilfully neglected to do the Works of him that called them. No two Matters can be more distant from one another, than these two are: And, therefore, there can be no imaginable Argument drawn, from one to the other. But,

2. SUPPOSING that the *Second* interpretation be pitch'd upon: yet even upon this Supposition, the *Parable* sets forth all of them that are hired, as *Labourers*. The *Housholder* went out to hire *Labourers* into his Vineyard: not such as professed only to labour; but such as would actually do it. So that it is to none but such, that he agrees to give any Reward. And when the Persons hired are spoken of, they are all described as truly setting themselves to labour, as soon as they are invited, and called in. All the difference, is, that some met with earlier; and some later; but as soon as they are spoken to, they all immediately leave their former Station; and apply themselves to work. There is mention, indeed, of some *standing idle*: but it was in the *Market-place*; and it was only because they had met with *no body to hire them*, to work. But as soon as they are hired, there is no mention of their Idleness in the Vineyard: but there they work'd immediately, as soon as they enter'd; and continued to do so, as long as the Day lasted.

WHAT is there then for a Christian to learn from hence? Why, If this *Parable* touch his particular Case; what He must learn, is this, *viz.* that the Supreme Housholder, when He calls him into his Vineyard, the Church, hires him as a *Labourer*; and, under that Notion only, agrees with Him for a Reward; that, as soon as He is called to the Knowledge of the Gospel, his time is come for beginning to work; that, as long as He lives a Professor of the Gospel, so long doth the *Day* last in which He is to work; that, if He entred into this Religion in his young and early Days, He must in his young and early Days labour in the Works of it; that, if He were old before He came to the Knowledge of it, and had Christianity proposed to him, He must immediately lay hold on the Proposal; He must heartily profess himself a

412

413

414

Disciple of the Master who invites him; He must immediately set himself to his Work, and continue to approve himself a faithful Servant to Him, as long as his State of Probation lasts. This is what this *Parable* plainly sets forth. For there is not one of those mention'd, who did not come into the Vineyard, and work in it, as soon as He was called; not one, who was idle, unless out of necessity before He was hired; not one who continued idle afterwards, or did not heartily work in the Vineyard; not one who delayed his coming in, or used any pretence to avoid working, while the time for Working lasted: And therefore, we find that, their Sincerity being, equal, which is the Ground of all, their Lord made their Rewards equal.

415

IF, therefore We will apply this to the State of particular Persons in Christ's Vineyard, the Church; there can be no hopes of Reward, according to this *Parable*, but to such carefully and conscientious set themselves to work in their State of Trial; to such as come in, when God calls them; and make use of all their Time afterwards, to promote his Honour, and work out their own Salvation. The Person, who is called last, and yet hath a Reward, is one who hath not heard of the Gospel till Age is come upon him; but, as soon as He doth hear of it, embraces it; enters into the Service of it, and shews himself, in the time He hath to live after this, a true and sincere Disciple of it, by the amendment and reformation of his Life.

HAD it been so indeed, that our Lord had represented the *Housholder*, as calling Men into his Vineyard; and, after they had enter'd into it, and professed to work, and yet spent their time in it idly, or mischievously; either in doing nothing, or in ruining his Interest; as rewarding such Persons equally with those who had labour'd hard; and this merely for their expressing a Sorrow at Night, for the wilful Faults of the whole Day: something then might have been urged; and there might be some colour from hence, for hoping that Almighty God will at last reward Christians, who profess his Service, and enter his Vineyard as Labourers, and live useless, wicked, and profligate Lives; merely for their sorrowful Concern for their Sins, at the end of their Day of Trial. But, as the Case is; and as the *Parable* is expressed: what is there, I beseech you, in it, that can possibly encourage any such Hope? Nay, what is there in it, but what forcibly shews the necessity of Christian good Works, for the Justification of all who are called into Christ's Vineyard; whether early or late; whether at the beginning, or towards the end, of their Days?

416

WE, for our parts, generally speaking, are called into God's Vineyard, at the very first Hour of the Day, at the dawning of our Lives; educated in the Christian Religion; called upon, day after day, to live worthy of that Holy Vocation wherewith we are called, and of that Profession which we make. We are not, therefore, of the Number of those who stood *Idle in the Market-place*, .merely because no one would hire them; and so were but late called into the Vineyard. But we have been long ago *hired* by God himself; and invited into his Service by the promise of the most immense: and unspeakable Rewards. If, therefore, we *stand Idle*; it is in his Vineyard, in which we undertook to do him Service. And if it be asked, *why stand you here all the day Idle?* We cannot have that to urge, *because no Body hath hired*

417

us: for God Almighty is our Master; and we are his professed Servants. And we can have nothing to expect but the Punishment due to such Servants, as hypocritically pretend to serve, while they dishonour and disobey, their Master. Little will it avail us to take Refuge at last in Sorrow; when, at the Evening, or at Night, our Work is to be examined; and the Enquiry to be made, what we have done in that Service which we have undertaken. If we appeal to this *Parable*; that shews forth no Reward, but for such as have actually worked in the Service of their Master, from the time of their admission into the Vineyard, to the time of their being removed out of it; and this will administer but little Comfort to any, who have spent the time due to their Master, in the Service of his greatest Enemy. And the mere pretending to be his Disciple, or Servant, will be so far from lessening, that it must increase, the Guilt.

IN the *Chapter* following This which I am now considering, at the [28th Verse](#), our Lord proposeth the following Case to the *Jews*. *A certain Man had two Sons, and He came to the first and said, Son, go work to day in my Vineyard. He answered and said, I will not. But afterward He repented, and went. And He came to the second, and said likewise. And He answered and said, I go, Sir, and went not. Whether of them twain did the Will of his Father? They say unto Him, the First.* He proposeth this, to let them know that it was not the Profession of being his Children, and his People; not the *calling Him, Lord, Lord*, that would satisfy Almighty God; but the doing his Will; and that the professing to do it, did but aggravate the Fault of not sincerely answering that Profession. He goes on to tell them, that those very *Harlots* and *Publicans*, who, though before at a distance from all pretences to serve God, yet repented, and were converted by the Preaching of *John the Baptist*, would go into the Kingdom of God, and be accepted to his Favour, long before such as *They* were; who, making great Professions of belonging to God, and being his People, yet, were scandalously deficient in performing his Will, and constantly employed in provoking Him by their Disobedience. This is the meaning of those Words; and what follow. *Verily, I say unto you, that the Publicans, and the Harlots, go into the Kingdom of God before you.* Not that any, continuing such Sinners, could ever arrive at Happiness: but, as it follows, that such Sinners, repenting at the Preaching of *John the Baptist*, and reforming their Lives; even the vile *Publicans*, so much detested by the *Jews*, should be vastly preferred before them, with all their Professions, and all their Protestations.

THE *Vineyard*, therefore, is not a place of Ostentation; but of Work: not framed to feed and support the Idle; but to employ the Diligent: not made to adorn, and defend, all those that enter it; but to be adorned, and defended; by those who pretend to come into it. The very Notion of it is, that it wants their Help, and Cultivation. This is what the great Master of it expects. This is what he hires his Labourers for. If, therefore, the Reward be so great, and so certain, for all, who enter as soon as they are invited; and sincerely labour as soon as they are entered: how great, and how certain, must be the Punishment of those who act the

418

419

420

Reverse of this; who enter indeed, with Profession of working, but basely desert the Cause, and prostitute the Honour, and disregard the Commands of that great Master who called and invited them to his Service.

So that from this *Parable* it is impossible to collect any thing to sooth professed Christians in their hopes of being accepted without a Life of Holiness and Virtue: nay, it is impossible, one would think, not to see that the very design and intent of it, supposing it to respect particular Persons, must be to shew that it is indispensably required of all, at what time soever they are called to the Knowledge of God and his Gospel, to obey that Call; and conscientiously to employ the time allowed them, after this, in the good Works which God hath marked out to them in his Law. Far be it, therefore, from any Christian, who hath long ago entered into God's Vineyard, to argue himself, from this part of the Gospel, into any shadow of Hope, whilst He is in a state of supine Neglect of his Duty, or wilful Disobedience to God.

AND if we look into any other of those *Parables*, by which our Lord represents the Proceedings of Almighty God with his Servants; we shall find the plainest Discouragement to all such Hopes. When He represents Him as a Master, intrusting several sorts of Talents to several Servants, *Matth. xxv. 14.* we find that He certainly expects an actual Improvement of those *Talents*; not only, that they should not be made use of against his Honour and Interest, but that they should not be buried, and rendred useless: And accordingly, that, when one of those Servants appears to his Lord to have buried what was intrusted to Him, that He Might be sure to restore it whole at his return; the Sentence is, *Cast ye the unprofitable Servant into outer Darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* See from hence what Almighty God certainly expects from those who are called to his Knowledge, and his Service. Nor could all the Sorrow of that Servant, at his *Master's* return, atone, or compensate, for past ill Conduct.

IN the *xxix Chapter* God is represented as *letting out his Vineyard to Husbandmen*, who abused his Mercy; and, at last *destroying them, and letting out his Vineyard to others who should render him the Fruits in their Seasons.* In another *Parable, chap. xviii.* at the end, He is represented, as *delivering over to the Tormenters*, a Servant, only for being unmerciful, and implacable, towards his Fellow-Servant. Doth all this look, as if he would accept of any thing; at last, at the Hands of those who are called into his Service, instead of an hearty and sincere Obedience; or, as if He did not lay a Duty, an indispensable Duty, upon them: the Duty of reforming whatever is amiss in themselves: and of flourishing in all those good Fruits, and good Works, which are well pleasing in his Eyes?

AND thus have I done what I designed: And, as I hope, have, in this, and several other Discourses, effectually shewn the great Weakness, and Folly, of a Christian's relying upon any thing for Salvation, but the actual Reformation, and Amendment, of what he knows to be sinful in himself.

421

422

423

I CAN at present think but of one thing more that remains to be touched upon, before we leave this Subject. There are some Christians, I am sensible, who are truly convinced that this is a just Account of the Matter; that their only Hopes must be in the actual amendment of their Lives, and practice of Virtue, whilst God gives them opportunity; and that all other Hopes are vain and deluding; and are therefore resolved to reform what is bad in themselves. But then, they deferr this great Work; they are unwilling to do it immediately: but hope that what they Design may be as well performed some time hereafter. They place not their Hopes in any thing but Amendment: but they put off this Amendment till another Season. A few Considerations, will shew us the extreme Hazard, and Folly, of such a Proceeding. For,

424

1. SUPPOSING that, they are taken away before they have put this Resolution into effect; they are, by their own Confession, in a most deplorable, inexcusable, Condition: being removed from hence, in a State, which they themselves account to be a State condemned by God in his Gospel. It is the Amendment of their Lives which, they know, He requires; and the resolution of Amendment, is not Amendment. Nay, indeed, it will be so far from helping them, upon this Supposition; that it will aggravate their Guilt and their Punishment, that they have not actually done what they knew to be their indispensable Duty to do. And who knows when his last Hour may come? Is this State a State of Certainty, and Duration? *In the midst of Life, are we not in Death?* Do we not see, every day, Persons as likely, nay, more likely, than ourselves, to continue here, called to give account of their Lives? What is it then we can hope for? or how can we think it consistent with the lowest Degree of Prudence, to delay that which we know not whether we can ever have an opportunity too perform, unless we lay hold on the present? But,

425

2. WHAT is it that can induce Men to delay this great, and necessary Work? Is it the Difficulty of it at present? Alas! *that* will be so far from being diminished, that it will be increased, by time. Every Step we take, in most of the Vices, renders the attempt of Reformation so much the more difficult. As we grow old, evil Habits grow old upon us. Custom becomes like Nature it self; not to be put off, or broken through, but with a difficulty which we become willing at last to think insuperable. This made the *Prophet* cry out, *Can the Ethiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots? then shall ye also, that are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well.* He thought it such a difficulty, as, in the figurative Style, might be represented by Matters utterly impossible. Certainly, to delay an important Matter; a Business necessary to be performed, because it is difficult; when every Moment that it is delayed, will add to the difficulty of it; is to put it more out of our Power than it is at present: It is to render our Work more difficult, because it is difficult already; which is the most inexcusable Weakness.

426

OR, Is it that Men hope that Time, and Years, will naturally wear out their Inclinations to Sin; and that then they shall find it a much more easy Matter to live as they ought? Alas!



Time, and Years, bring an Inclination to some Vices along with them, against which we shall find enough to do to guard our selves; and present us with Evils, under which alone we shall have enough to do to support our selves: and to some former Vices they add a Strength, and Force, which they had not before. Nay, What one ill Temper, or bad Inclination or Passion, is ever known to be removed, or totally cured, by Years; after an Indulgence hath been given to it through the former Course of Life? It is the Mind, that is the Seat of Vice: and if *that* remain corrupt and vitiated, the Man is still corrupt and vicious in the Eyes of God; how much soever his outward Appearance may be altered in other respects.

427

BUT could it be so, that Age and Years would certainly remove all that Viciousness, which Custom had been breeding: yet how little likelihood, as I observed before, is there of arriving at such a Term of Years? And how much more likelihood is there of the contrary? And if we should; and that should be the Case: yet how would all the Beauty and Reward of Virtue be gone; What a Return would it be to Almighty God, for all his Long-suffering, to present him at last with a Heart dead to all the Purposes of Life; rendered useless, and insignificant by old Age? What an Affront to Him, to have spent all the best part of Life in the Service of his Enemy; and then to come and offer Him a Service that hath nothing in it: or, to profess to serve Him, when we are past the time in which it can be acceptable to Him? Is it Virtue, for Creatures in a State of Probation, to leave off Vices, which they cannot retain? to forsake Customs, which they cannot follow? To pretend to relinquish Habits, which have relinquished them? For, in truth, this is the Case, upon the present Supposition. They design to serve God with the Dregs of Life; They leave not their Vices, but their Vices leave them; They abandon not their Sins, but their Sins have abandoned them.

428

TRY, therefore, how such an Offer, and such, a Dedication of your selves to God, after a multitude of Years spent in the hearty Service of his Adversary, will sound, Suppose your selves in his Presence, addressing to Him in this manner. “ Lord! We have indeed spent the Vigour of our whole Life, in the Service of Sin; in dishonouring Thee; and in neglecting thy Religion. The time is now come when we can sin no longer, when our Vices have abandoned us; and Human Society hath as it were excluded us. Behold! now, that we cannot well do any thing else we offer to Thee our Services, which are without Vigour or Force; and present to Thee the Dregs of Life, and the Refute of all our Years.”<sup>1</sup> This is what every Man must in effect say, that puts off his Amendment till Old-age; upon supposition that He shall arrive at it; and that then He shall be able, and willing, to sin no longer. And if there cannot be a greater Affront imagined, than such an Offer; and if it be the greatest Shame even to think of such a Return to God as this: let not any Consideration in the World move any of us to defer so indispensable a Duty to a time so improper, and so utterly unfit for it

429

---

<sup>1</sup> See Archbishop Tillotson's *Sermon concerning the Advantages of Early Piety*.

LET us consider what hath been said; that our Days are uncertain; and, therefore, that 'tis Madness to put off, even for one Day, that Work which is certainly necessary; that if we should have more time allowed us, yet our Business of Amendment would grow more and more difficult every Day; that the present time is that in which it is most easy, and most likely, to be effected; and that if we could suppose any such time to be coming to us in this State, in which our Vices will forsake us whether we will or no, we must not expect that this shall be accounted our Virtue, and reckoned to us for Reward, any more than our ceasing to sin, when we are laid in our Graves: or that God will accept the Present of our Service, when all our past Health and Life have been wilfully spent in the Prosecution of our Lusts; and we now offer it to Him, because we know not what else to do with it.



WHAT remains, therefore, but that we immediately set about that Work, which cannot be too soon begun; nor too soon finished? A Work so necessary, that it is impossible to be happy without it? That nothing delude us into a Delay, in a Case in which the least Delay may be our Ruine? That no Pretence, of what sort soever, divert us from the entering into the Paths of that Holiness, *without which no Man shall see the Lord*? Nothing but this can give us Peace of Conscience here: nothing but this can assure us of the least Degree of Happiness hereafter. And God grant that this may be the Effect of what hath been said; for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord! *To whom, with the Father, and Holy Spirit, be all Glory now, and for evermore. Amen!*



**FINIS**

---

# **Indexes**

## **Index of Scripture References**

### **Proverbs**

24:16

### **Jeremiah**

13:13

### **Matthew**

6:7 6:12 6:12 6:14 6:14-15 7:21 7:21 7:22 7:22-23 7:26 7:47 12:31-32 13:30  
18:3 18:21 18:22 18:23 18:23-35 18:35 18:41-42 19:24 19:30 20:1 20:1 20:1 21:28  
21:33-40 22:13 25:14 25:30

### **Mark**

11:25-26

### **Luke**

6:7 6:38 10:25 10:25 10:25 10:25 10:25 11:4 11:27 11:28 12:47 17:4 23:42-43  
23:42-43

### **Acts**

2:38 3:19 14:15 23:3

### **Romans**

2:7 6:1 6:1-23 8:1 8:12 8:13 10:4 10:5 10:11 10:13 12:9 12:9 12:19 12:21 13:8

### **1 Corinthians**

4:4 4:4 5:11 6:9 6:10 6:20 10:24

### **2 Corinthians**

2:7 3:5 3:5 6:1 7:1 7:1 7:10 7:10

### **Galatians**

3:6 3:11 5:6 5:19 5:20 5:21 5:24 6:7-8 6:15

### **Ephesians**

1:9 1:10 2:1 2:1-8 2:5 2:8 2:9 4:28 4:28 4:32 5:5 5:5 5:5-6 5:6 5:8 5:9 5:11

### **Philippians**

2:12 2:13

### **Colossians**

3:5 3:6 3:12-13

### **1 Thessalonians**

5:22

### **1 Timothy**

1:13 1:15 1:15

### **2 Timothy**

2:19 2:19 3:5 3:5 3:8

### **Titus**

2:12 2:12-13 2:13 2:14 2:14

**Hebrews**

6:4-7 10:26 10:26-27 10:26-27 10:29 12:14

**James**

1:22 2:10 2:10 2:10 2:14 2:15 2:26 5:12

**1 Peter**

1:15 1:17 1:18 1:19 2:11 4:8

**1 John**

2:1-2

## **Index of Pages of the Print Edition**

i 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33  
34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64  
65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95  
96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119  
120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142  
143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165  
166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188  
189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211  
212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234  
235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257  
258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280  
281 282 283 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304  
305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327  
328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350  
351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373  
374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396  
397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419  
420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431